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Child abuse is the maltreatment and neglect that happens to children under the age of eighteen.

Types of child abuse:

- * Physical abuse: This involves all forms of physical violence;
- * Emotional or psychological abuse: this involves regularly berating a child or acting in a dismissive and hostile manner towards the child and also intentionally scaring the child.
- * Physical neglect: the child does not receive the care and nurturing that it needs.
- * Emotional or psychological neglect: continuous lack of positive attention for the child. Ignoring the child's need for love, warmth, and security. This category also covers cases in which children are witnesses to violence between their parents or caregivers.
- * Sexual abuse: sexual contact which an adult forces upon a child.

All of these results in harm to the child's health, esteem, survival, dignity, and development.

Child abuse is a global issue with consequences that have shaped a lot of broken adults. Studies reveal that three out of four children within the ages of two to four years old suffer physical punishment or psychological violence at the hands of parents or caregivers. One in 5 women and 1 in 13 men report having been sexually abused as a child aged 0-17 years.

A lot of children are abused because their abusers have a desire to feel powerful, they experienced abuse while they were children and have the urge to pass it on, they don't understand that children are supposed to feel safe and quite commonly, they think it's okay to abuse children because it would mold them to the image they have drawn up in their heads.

Effects of child abuse

Children who have been abused often time suffer from:

- * Shame/self-blaming
- * Anger towards the abuser
- * Fear of getting close to and trusting people
- * Sadness, confusion and low self-esteem
- * Flashbacks, nightmares and reliving the abuse
- * Denial that it ever happened
- * Trouble at school with learning new things and socializing with others
- * Frequent absences from school
- * Reluctance to leave school activities, as if he or she doesn't want to go home
- * Attempts at running away
- * Rebellious or defiant behavior
- * Self-harm or attempts at suicide.

Signs and symptoms of physical abuse

- * Unexplained injuries, such as bruises, fractures or burns
- * Injuries that don't match the given explanation

Signs and symptoms of sexual abuse

- * Sexual behavior or knowledge that's inappropriate for the child's age
- * Pregnancy or a sexually transmitted infection
- * Blood in the child's underwear
- * Statements that he or she was sexually abused
- * Inappropriate sexual contact with other children

Signs and symptoms of emotional abuse

- * Delayed or inappropriate emotional development
- * Loss of self-confidence or self-esteem
- * Social withdrawal or a loss of interest or enthusiasm
- * Depression
- * Avoidance of certain situations, such as refusing to go to school or ride the bus
- * Desperately seeks affection
- * A decrease in school performance or loss of interest in school
- * Loss of previously acquired developmental skills

Signs and symptoms of neglect

- * Poor growth or weight gain or being overweight
- * Poor hygiene
- * Lack of clothing or supplies to meet physical needs
- * Taking food or money without permission
- * Hiding food for later
- * Poor record of school attendance
- * Lack of appropriate attention for medical, dental, or psychological problems or lack of necessary follow-up care.

Parental behavior

Sometimes a parent's demeanor or behavior sends red flags about child abuse. Warning signs include a parent who:

- * Shows little concern for the child
- * Appears unable to recognize physical or emotional distress in the child
- * Blames the child for the problems
- * Consistently belittles or berates the child, and describes the child with negative terms, such as "worthless" or "evil"
- * Expects the child to provide him or her with attention and care and seems jealous of other family members getting attention from the child
- * Uses harsh physical discipline
- * Demands an inappropriate level of physical or academic performance
- * Severely limits the child's contact with others
- * Offers conflicting or unconvincing explanations for a child's injuries or no explanation at all.

Child health experts condemn the use of violence in any form, but some people still use corporal punishment, such as spanking, as a way to discipline their children. Any corporal punishment may leave emotional scars. Parental behaviors that cause pain, physical injury, or emotional trauma even when done in the name of discipline could be child abuse.

Complications

Some children overcome the physical and psychological effects of child abuse, particularly those with strong social support and resiliency skills who can adapt and cope with bad experiences. For many others, however, child abuse may result in physical, behavioral, emotional, or mental health issues even years later. Below are some examples.

Physical issues

- * Premature death
- * Physical disabilities
- * Learning disabilities
- * Substance abuse
- * Health problems, such as heart disease, immune disorders, chronic lung disease, and cancer

Behavioral issues

- * Delinquent or violent behavior
- * Abuse of others
- * Withdrawal
- * Suicide attempts or self-injury
- * High-risk sexual behaviors or teen pregnancy
- * Problems in school or not finishing high school
- * Limited social and relationship skills
- * Problems with work or staying employed

Emotional issues

- * Low self-esteem
- * Difficulty establishing or maintaining relationships
- * Challenges with intimacy and trust
- * An unhealthy view of parenthood
- * Inability to cope with stress and frustrations
- * An acceptance that violence is a normal part of relationships

Mental health disorders

- * Eating disorders
- * Personality disorders
- * Behavior disorders
- * Depression
- * Anxiety disorders
- * Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- * Sleep disturbances
- * Attachment disorders

Prevention

You can take important steps to protect your child from exploitation and child abuse, as well as prevent child abuse in your neighborhood or community. The goal is to provide safe, stable, nurturing relationships for children. For example:

- * Offer your child love and attention. Nurture your child, listen, and be involved in his or her life to develop trust and good communication. Encourage your child to tell you if there's a problem. A supportive family environment and social networks can foster your child's self-esteem and sense of self-worth.
- * Don't respond in anger. If you feel overwhelmed or out of control, take a break. Don't take out your anger on your child. Talk with your doctor or therapist about ways you can learn to cope with stress and better interact with your child.
- * Think supervision. Don't leave a young child home alone. In public, keep a close eye on your child. Volunteer at school and for activities to get to know the adults who spend time with your child. When old enough to go out without supervision, encourage your child to stay away from strangers and to hang out with friends rather than be alone and to tell you where he or she is at all times. Find out who's supervising your child for example, at a sleepover.
- * Know your child's caregivers. Check references for babysitters and other caregivers. Make irregular, but frequent, unannounced visits to observe what's happening. Don't allow substitutes for your usual child care provider if you don't know the substitute.
- * Emphasize when to say no. Make sure your child understands that he or she doesn't have to do anything that seems scary or uncomfortable. Encourage your child to leave a threatening or frightening situation immediately and seek help from a trusted adult. If something happens, encourage your child to talk to you or another trusted adult about the episode. Assure your child

that it's OK to talk and that he or she won't get in trouble.

* Teach your child how to stay safe online. Put the computer in a common area of your home, not the child's bedroom. Use the parental controls to restrict the types of websites your child can visit, and check your child's privacy settings on social networking sites. Consider it a red flag if your child is secretive about online activities. Cover ground rules, such as not sharing personal information; not responding to inappropriate, hurtful or frightening messages; and not arranging to meet an online contact in person without your permission. Tell your child to let you know if an unknown person makes contact through a social networking site. Report online harassment or inappropriate senders to your service provider and local authorities, if necessary.