



# What to do if a child reveals abuse

February 2021

## Why children reveal abuse

There are lots of reasons why a child or young person might tell someone they're being abused, including:

- realising the abuse is wrong
- not being able to cope any more
- the abuse getting worse
- wanting to protect other children
- wanting the abuser to be punished
- trusting someone enough to tell them
- someone asks them directly.

It can be very hard for them to open up about what's happened to them. They might be worried about the consequences or that nobody will believe them. They might've told someone before and nothing was done to help them. Sometimes they might not know what's happening to them is abuse and struggle to share what they're feeling. Some children don't reveal they're being abused for a long time, some never tell anyone.

If a child is in immediate danger, call the police on [999](tel:999) straight away.

## What to say to a child and how to respond

- 1. Listen carefully to what they're saying**  
Be patient and focus on what you're being told. Try not to express your own views and feelings. If you appear shocked or as if you don't believe them it could make them stop talking and take back what they've said.
- 2. Give them the tools to talk**  
If they're struggling to talk to you, show them [Childline's letter builder tool](#).\* It uses simple prompts to help them share what's happening and how they're feeling.
- 3. Let them know they've done the right thing by telling you**  
Reassurance can make a big impact. If they've kept the abuse a secret it can have a big impact knowing they've shared what's happened.
- 4. Tell them it's not their fault**  
Abuse is never a child's fault. It's important they hear, and know, this.



5. **Say you'll take them seriously**  
They may have kept the abuse secret because they were scared they wouldn't be believed. Make sure they know they can trust you and you'll listen and support them.
6. **Don't confront the alleged abuser**  
Confronting the alleged abuser could make the situation worse for the child.
7. **Explain what you'll do next**  
For younger children, explain you're going to speak to someone who will be able to help. For older children, explain you'll need to report the abuse to someone who can help.
8. **Report what the child has told you as soon as possible**  
Report\*\* as soon after you've been told about the abuse so the details are fresh in your mind and action can be taken quickly. It can be helpful to take notes as soon after you've spoken to the child. Try to keep these as accurate as possible.

## How to report child abuse

If a child reveals abuse to you, it's important to take it seriously, listen and report. And it's vital you take the next steps to help keep them safe.

You can contact the NSPCC helpline online 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Telephone lines are open Monday to Friday 8am – 10pm and 9am – 6pm at the weekends.

Call - 0808 800 5000

Report Online - <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/reporting-abuse/report/>

Email – [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)

It's normal to feel anxious, nervous or unsure about getting in touch with us. We're here to help and take that worry from you. Letting us know you're worried about a child could be the first step to helping protect them from a lifetime of abuse and neglect.

**If a child is in immediate danger, call the police on 999 straight away.**

## What happens when you report abuse

If you want to report the abuse to us, you can contact us or children's services where the child is living.

If you contact us, a helpline counsellor will speak to you about what the child or young person has said and advise you on what needs to happen next. If the child is at risk of harm we'll:

- ask you to share their name, age and address and any information you have about the alleged abuser



- take detailed notes on what you tell us
- share this information with children's services and, if necessary, the police
- give you advice on any other support available.

Our helpline team is here to make your contact as stress-free and comfortable as possible. Finding out what happens when you get in touch can help put your mind at ease about the process.

\*<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/getting-help/asking-adult-help/#Writesomeonealetter>

\*\* <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/reporting-abuse/report/>



# What to do if you suspect child abuse

Steps you can take to help keep a child safe and what to do if you suspect a child's being abused.

## If you're worried a child is being abused or neglected

It's not always easy to know if a child or young person is being abused or neglect. You might've noticed bruises but aren't sure if they're from playing or from being physically abused. A child might start wetting the bed but you don't know if it's a minor setback in their development or if they're being abused. Or you might be worried a child is being neglected because you often hear them crying in distress.

Knowing the signs of abuse\* can help. But it's important to remember that every child is different. Our support and advice can help you decide what to do if you're worried about a child.

If a child is in immediate danger, call the police on 999 straight away.

## What you can do if you're not sure

If you think a child might be being abused but they haven't said anything to you, there are things you can do which can help.

- **Talk to the child**  
Most children who're being abused find it very difficult to talk about. Or might not have somebody in their life they trust. Keep talking to them to help build a positive, trusting relationship. They may come to you when they're ready to talk.
- **Keep a diary**  
Keeping note of your concerns and how the child is behaving can help you spot patterns of behaviour and keep a track of what's been happening.
- **Talk to their teacher or health visitor**  
They may have spotted signs or noticed they're acting differently.
- **Speak to other people**  
Talking about your worries with someone you trust will help you get someone else's perspective. Sharing your concerns may help you feel more confident about taking the next steps.
- **Talk to the NSPCC**  
NSPCC Helpline counsellors - are here to listen to your concerns and offer support and advice. You can contact them anonymously if it makes you feel more comfortable.

If you're worried about a child, even if you're unsure, contact the NSPCC helpline to speak to one of the counsellors.



Call on 0808 800 5000, email [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk) or fill in their online form\*\*.

## Why it's important to report child abuse and neglect

There are lots of reasons why you might not want to report your concerns. You might be worried you're wrong. Or you don't want to get a friend or family member in trouble. You might be scared or worried you won't be believed.

But if you don't share your concerns, you risk a child being in danger and continuing being abused. By reporting it, you're taking the first step to helping keep them safe and getting the support they need. Every child and young person deserves to be safe.

You don't have to be certain, you don't have to know for sure. Speak to the NSPCC helpline counsellors and share your concerns – they'll offer advice, take the next steps if they need to and help put your mind at ease.

Sometimes a child might already be known to services, like children's services, and have an allocated social worker. If you're worried a situation isn't getting better or the social worker isn't aware of everything going on, you can contact the local authority children's services or speak to the NSPCC helpline. Any additional information could make all the difference in protecting a child.

## Why children might not tell someone they're being abused

There are lots of reasons why children and young people might keep abuse a secret.

They might not understand what's happening to them is wrong or remember a time when the abuse wasn't happening. The abuse might be "normalised" by their abuser or they may not have the words to describe it. If a child doesn't have the language skills – because they're too young, have a disability or English isn't their first language – they need someone else to speak up for them.

Sometimes they might know what's happening to them is wrong but not tell someone. They might be afraid their abuser will find out, worried the abuse will get worse or may feel ashamed. They might feel there's no-one they can tell or they won't be believed.

They may also have told someone and no action was taken to protect them.

That's why it's everyone's responsibility to speak up for children. Whether you're the child's parent, relative, family friend, neighbour or a professional, don't let anything stop you from protecting a child.



## Contact

If you're worried about a child, even if you're unsure, you can speak to the NSPCC about your concerns.

You can contact the NSPCC helpline online 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Telephone lines are open Monday to Friday 8am – 10pm and 9am – 6pm at the weekends.

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\*<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/spotting-signs-child-abuse/>

\*\*<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/reporting-abuse/report/report-abuse-online/>