

Appendix 1 DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE

While it is recognised that local and/or national definitions of child abuse may vary, and there are racial, cultural, religious, and ethnic differences in child rearing and relating to children and understandings of what constitutes child abuse, we need to remember that all children have basic human rights. Therefore, it is important that organisations agree to use common basic definitions of abuse which have been built on international standards in order to best serve adults of differing cultures in working together to prevent child abuse. Organisations can then contextualise these in their own policies and procedures.

The following five categories of abuse are universally found. These can be used as a starting point in developing policies and procedures and guidance in exploring the nature that these different forms of abuse take in a local setting. The full text and definitions below come from the World Health Organisation¹.

A child is defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as “Every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable the child majority is attained earlier”.

Preamble to the Definition

Child Abuse has serious physical and psychosocial consequences which adversely affect health. It refers to any act or failure to act that violates the rights of the child, and that endangers his or her optimum health, survival and development.

Awareness of cultural factors must remain high as they influence all aspects from the occurrence and definition through its treatment and successful prevention. Any intervention, to be successful whether for data gather, prevention or even increasing public awareness, must take into consideration the cultural environment in which it is to occur. Background or baseline conditions beyond the control of families or caretakers, such as poverty, inaccessible healthcare, inadequate nutrition, unavailability of education can be contributing factors to child abuse. Social upheaval and instability, conflict and war may also contribute to increases in child abuse and neglect.

General Definition Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.

- **Physical abuse** Physical abuse of a child is that which results in actual or potential physical harm from an interaction or lack of an interaction, which is reasonably within the control of a parent or person in a position of responsibility, power or trust. There may be a single or repeated incidents.
- **Emotional abuse** Emotional abuse includes the failure to provide a developmentally appropriate, supportive environment, including the availability of a primary attachment figure, so that the child can develop a stable and full range of emotional and social competencies commensurate with her or his personal potentials and in the context of the society in which the child dwells. There may also be acts towards the child that cause or have a high probability of causing harm to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. These acts must be reasonably within the control of the parent or person in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. Acts include restriction of movement, patterns of belittling, denigrating, scapegoating, threatening, scaring, discriminating, ridiculing or other non-physical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment.
- **Neglect and negligent treatment** Neglect is the failure to provide for the development of the child in all spheres: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter, and safe living conditions, in the context of resources reasonably available to the family or caretakers and causes or has a high probability of causing harm to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. This includes the failure to properly supervise and protect children from harm as much as is feasible.

- **Sexual Abuse** Child sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violate the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person. This may include but is not limited to:
 - The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity.
 - The exploitative use of child in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices.
 - The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.
 - **Exploitation** Commercial or other exploitation of a child refers to use of the child in work or other activities for the benefit of others. This includes, but is not limited to, child labour and child prostitution. These activities are to the detriment of the child's physical or mental health, education, or spiritual, moral or social-emotional development.

¹ These definitions follow the World Health Organisation definitions of abuse and can be found at <http://www.yesican.org/definitions/WHO.html>.

Additional definitions of Abuse (note: *not* from WHO):

- **Spiritual Abuse**² Linked with emotional abuse, spiritual abuse could be defined as an abuse of power, often done in the name of God or religion, which involves manipulating or coercing someone into thinking, saying or doing things without respecting their right to choose for themselves. Some indicators of spiritual abuse might be a leader who is intimidating and imposes his/her will on other people, perhaps threatening dire consequences or the wrath of God if disobeyed. He or she may say that God has revealed certain things to them and so they know what is right. Those under their leadership are fearful to challenge or disagree, believing they will lose the leader's (or more seriously God's) acceptance and approval.

² Taken from *Safe and Secure – the Manual*, Standard 8, produced by Thirtyone:eight - <https://thirtyoneeight.org>