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## Abuse: What You Need to Know

### What Is Abuse?

Abuse is when someone hurts or causes emotional stress to someone else. Abuse can affect anyone. It can happen in any kind of relationship, like a friendship, romantic relationship, or among family members. Abuse can happen in many ways. Hate crimes directed at people because of their race, religion, abilities, gender, or sexual orientation are also abuse.

### What Are the Types of Abuse?

Physical, sexual, and emotional abuse are some of the most known types of abuse:

- **Physical abuse** is when someone hurts another person's body. It includes hitting, shaking, burning, pinching, biting, choking, throwing, beating, and other actions that cause physical injury, leave marks, or cause pain.
- **Sexual abuse** includes any type of sexual contact between an adult and anyone younger than 18, or between a significantly older child and a younger child. It's also sexual abuse at any age if one person overpowers another.
- **Emotional abuse** happens when yelling and anger go too far or when important adults constantly criticize, threaten, or talk down to kids or teens until their self-esteem is damaged and they feel really bad about themselves. Emotional abuse can hurt and cause damage just as physical and sexual abuse do.

Another form of abuse is **online abuse**, which is emotional or sexual abuse that happens in the virtual world:

- **Online emotional abuse** is any type of online message sent to bully or hurt another person (like an intimidating or threatening message).
- **Online sexual abuse** is when someone is asked to share inappropriate pictures of themselves, take part in sexual activities via webcam or smartphone, and/or have sexual conversations by text or online chat. Sometimes, the people who do this give or promise to give things to get someone to go along with these activities. The lasting effects of this abuse include images and videos that can be shared long after the abuse stops.

Other types of abuse include:

- **Neglect** is when a child or teen doesn't have enough food, housing, clothes, medical care, access to school, or supervision. Emotional neglect happens when a parent doesn't provide enough emotional support or rarely pays attention to their child. This isn't when parents don't give their kids something they want, like a new computer or a smartphone. It refers to more basic needs, like food, shelter, and love.
- **Domestic violence** is when two adults physically abuse each other or when one adult hurts another. Domestic violence can be hard for a child or teen to watch and can get a young person hurt, especially if adults throw or damage items when fighting.
- **Bullying** someone through scaring, threats, or teasing can be just as abusive as beating someone up. People who bully others may have been abused themselves.

### Recognizing Abuse

Recognizing abuse can be hard for someone who has lived with it for many years, or is being abused by someone they know or trust. People might mistakenly think that it's their fault for not doing what their parents tell them, breaking rules, or not living up to someone's expectations.

Growing up in a family where there is violence or abuse can make someone think that is the right way or the only way for family members to treat each other. Somebody who has only known an abusive relationship might think that hitting, beating, pushing, shoving, or angry name-calling are normal ways to treat someone when you're mad.

Seeing parents treat each other in abusive ways might lead their kids to think that's OK in relationships. But **abuse is not a typical or healthy way to treat people**. If you're not sure you are being abused, or if you suspect a friend is, it's always OK to ask a trusted adult or friend.

### What Are the Effects of Abuse?

Yelling and anger can happen in lots of parent–teen relationships and in friendships. But if punishments, arguments, or yelling go too far or last too long it can lead to stress and other serious problems.

Abuse may affect a person's self-esteem, mood, focus, quality of sleep, or interest in activities they once enjoyed. The effects of abuse can affect every aspect of a person's life and the effects often last after the abuse stops. The impact of abuse can be different for everyone because a person's response to abuse is based on many things, like their age at the time of the abuse or how much support they have in their life. So it's important to get help as soon as possible.

### **What Can Stop Someone From Reporting Abuse?**

People who have been abused often feel afraid, numb, or confused about what happened to them. They may feel guilty, ashamed, and embarrassed and blame themselves. But **abuse is never the fault of the person who is being abused**, no matter how much the abuser tries to blame others.

People who are abused might have trouble getting help because it means reporting someone they love — someone who may be wonderful much of the time and awful to them only some of the time. It's normal to be worried or afraid of what could happen by reporting abuse, either because they fear what the abuser may do or how the family will feel if the abuser has to leave the home.

For reasons like these, it can be hard to reach out for help, even though it's important to do so.

### **How Can Someone Who Is Being Abused Get Help?**

**People who are being abused need to get help.** Keeping the abuse a secret doesn't protect anyone from being abused — it only makes it more likely that the abuse will continue and possibly affect more people.

**If you need help right away and are in danger, call 911.** Tell them your name and where you are so they can get you help.

If you or someone you know is being abused, talk to an adult you or your friend can trust — a family member, a trusted teacher, a doctor, or a school or religious youth counselor. Many teachers and counselors have training in how to recognize and report abuse. If the first adult you tell does not seem to listen, **keep telling adults until someone responds.**

Getting help and support is an important first step. Working with a therapist can help people sort through the complicated feelings and reactions that being abused creates. The process can help someone rebuild feelings of safety and confidence. Most teens who get the help they need report feeling much better about themselves.

It takes a lot of courage to talk about this kind of thing, and sometimes it takes a while to feel strong enough to talk about it. That's OK. In the end, telling a safe person is the bravest thing you can do. It can feel really good to take steps to stay safe and stop abuse from happening.

If you can't tell a trusted adult, contact a crisis support group. If you live in the United States:

- Childhelp USA, or call or text (800) 422-4453
- National Domestic Violence/Abuse Hotline, (800) 799-7233

Outside the U.S., visit Child Helpline International to find help in your area.

Sometimes people who are being abused by someone at home need to find a safe place to live for a while. It is never easy to have to leave home. But it's important to be protected from more abuse. If you call a helpline, they can also help you find a safe place to stay, if needed.

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