



It is hoped this handbook can offer ideas and information in finding your way through what can be a maze of issues and advice. It will offer contacts and further information you can follow up in your decision making about how to manage any worries and difficulties.

This handbook can be made available in other formats/languages if requested.

This booklet was given to you by

who can be contacted on



^{the} Safe Parenting handbook



Introduction

Welcome to the Northern Ireland Safe Parenting Handbook.

Your job as a parent is one of the most difficult there is - it can be rewarding but sometimes challenging. It is a job where very little training is given to prepare parents for what lies ahead. Hopefully this handbook will add to your skills and knowledge.

The 'Troubles' have had a significant impact on the lives of children and young people living in Northern Ireland. Parents who have suffered a trauma or bereavement as a result of the 'Troubles' may find it even more difficult to cope.

Every family experiences difficulty from time to time and this can test the best of parents. When additional pressures come along, these can make a hard job nearly impossible. At these times it may be hard to think about what help or information you might need.

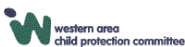
It is how you deal with difficulties that makes a difference to how your children react, both now and in the future. There are some ways that can help make parenting a less stressful and more rewarding experience.

What is the handbook about?








This handbook offers some ideas and information to help you find your way through what can at times seem a maze of issues and advice. You will find some sections are cross-referenced for your convenience. There are also contacts and further information you can follow up when you are deciding how to deal with your worries and difficulties. This handbook also lists some of the warning signs of particular difficulties and offers helpful tips.

Who has produced this guide?

This handbook has been produced by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in partnership with the four Health and Social Services Boards' Area Child Protection Committees.



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Babysitting

“Leaving Natalie with anyone is difficult, but I really need to have a break sometimes. I would worry all the time if I could not rely on and trust the person looking after my child. I'm really glad I spent the time I did finding the right babysitter.”



WARNING SIGNS

Children will not always be able to tell you if something is wrong, so note changes in their mood, behaviour and physical appearance. Agree with the babysitter to discuss, from the beginning, all accidents and incidents.



ACTION

Use people you trust to care for your child or ask them to recommend someone. Speak to other families who have used the babysitter you are considering.



WHAT TO SAY

Tell the babysitter all about your child's routine and their likes and dislikes. Tell the babysitter about your rules, such as not smacking. Always leave a contact number in case of emergencies.



PREVENTION

Make sure you feel completely comfortable about your babysitter before you leave your child in their care.



CONTACTS

- Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) 028 9050 1160
- NSPCC 0800 800 5000

- **Children rely on their parents for their safety**
- **Your child has the right to care which is free from harm**
- **Make sure your child gets the best quality care**
- **Select your babysitter carefully**
- **Avoid leaving your child with someone aged under 16**
- **Ensure your babysitter can contact you in an emergency**

who can I leave my child with?

As parents you have responsibility for the safety and well being of your children. As a result it is important that you think very carefully about the suitability of any person you are going to leave them with, whether this is a stranger, close relative or a friend.

When you leave your child in the care of someone else you are relying on that person to ensure your child's safety and welfare. When considering a temporary carer for your child it is important that you choose someone with the abilities and high standards that you would expect of yourself. This includes someone who will make sure your children are fed, changed, kept safe, given room to play and made feel secure and someone who will be able to deal with difficulties which may occur.

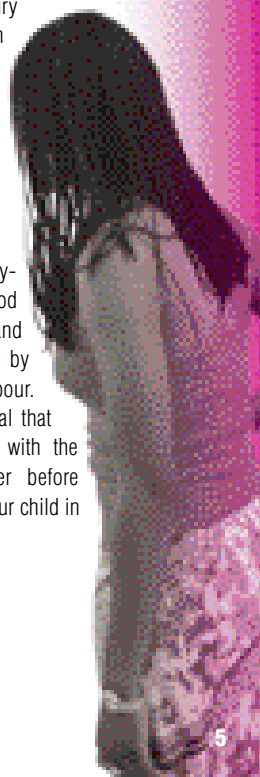
Generally, a babysitter will come to your home to take care of your child. Make sure you talk to your babysitter before you leave. Let them know when to expect you back and make sure they have contact details in case of emergencies.

Babysitters do not need qualifications or a certificate to look after children. As a result, anyone can advertise his or her services as a babysitter. The NSPCC recommend that the

minimum age of a babysitter should be 16 years of age. This is based on the idea that, at 16 and above, an individual is much more aware of potential dangers and risks and could seek help quickly if necessary.

This age recommendation is also linked with the possible action which could be taken by the police if anything were to go wrong and an injury resulted. In certain circumstances, you, as a parent, would be held responsible if anything goes wrong if your babysitter is under 16 years of age.

Often a reliable babysitter will have a good reputation locally and can be recommended by a friend or neighbour. However it is essential that you meet personally with the prospective babysitter before you decide to leave your child in their care.



Bedwetting & sleeping difficulties

“

I felt myself getting panicky every time I put him to bed. Maybe it was a lack of proper routine, but at the time I felt so tired and had so little patience. I never praised him for going all night without wetting his bed. I just got cross when I had to change the sheets again, which didn't really help at all.

”



WARNING SIGNS

There may be a physical reason for your child to bed wet but you should also check to see if there are any recent changes in him/her. Does your child seem to be unhappy? Has something happened in the family or in your child's life such as a traumatic event that is causing him or her to worry?



ACTION

Stay calm if your child is wetting the bed. Try to check whether there is a particular time when your child wets. Make sure your child goes to the toilet immediately before going to bed. If you are worried, discuss your concerns with your health visitor or GP. Seek support for yourself.



WHAT TO SAY

Praise your child when they sleep all night. Do not scold your child if they do not sleep through the night, or if they bed wet. Give your child the chance to talk about their feelings with you, try to keep calm and relaxed without showing signs of anxiety or strain. Try to develop an understanding for how they feel and whether they are worried about wetting etc.



PREVENTION

Make sure your child is aware that they can share any worries with you. If you want advice about things you can do to try to prevent wetting, discuss your concerns with your health visitor or GP.



CONTACTS

- Your health visitor
- Your GP
- Education and Resources for Improving Childhood Continence (ERIC) 0845 370 8008 www.eric.org.uk

- **Children rarely wet deliberately**
- **It is estimated that 1 in 4 three year olds and 1 in 6 five year olds repeatedly wet the bed**
- **Bedwetting may be a sign of a physical problem, but more often your child will learn bladder control at their own pace**
- **Each child's sleep pattern is different**
- **Take time to establish a bedtime routine, including a time for your child to relax and unwind before going to bed**
- **If your child often wakes in the night try to find out why he or she has woken, for example, a bad dream or hunger**

how can I help my child?

Bedwetting

Your child is more likely to learn to control their bladder if you are relaxed and calm about it. Remember your child will learn at their own pace and praise rather than punishment will help. Between the ages of three and four years your child is likely to be dry during the day, with the occasional accident. Remember, this is often not an instant change but a gradual process where more and more days will be dry days.

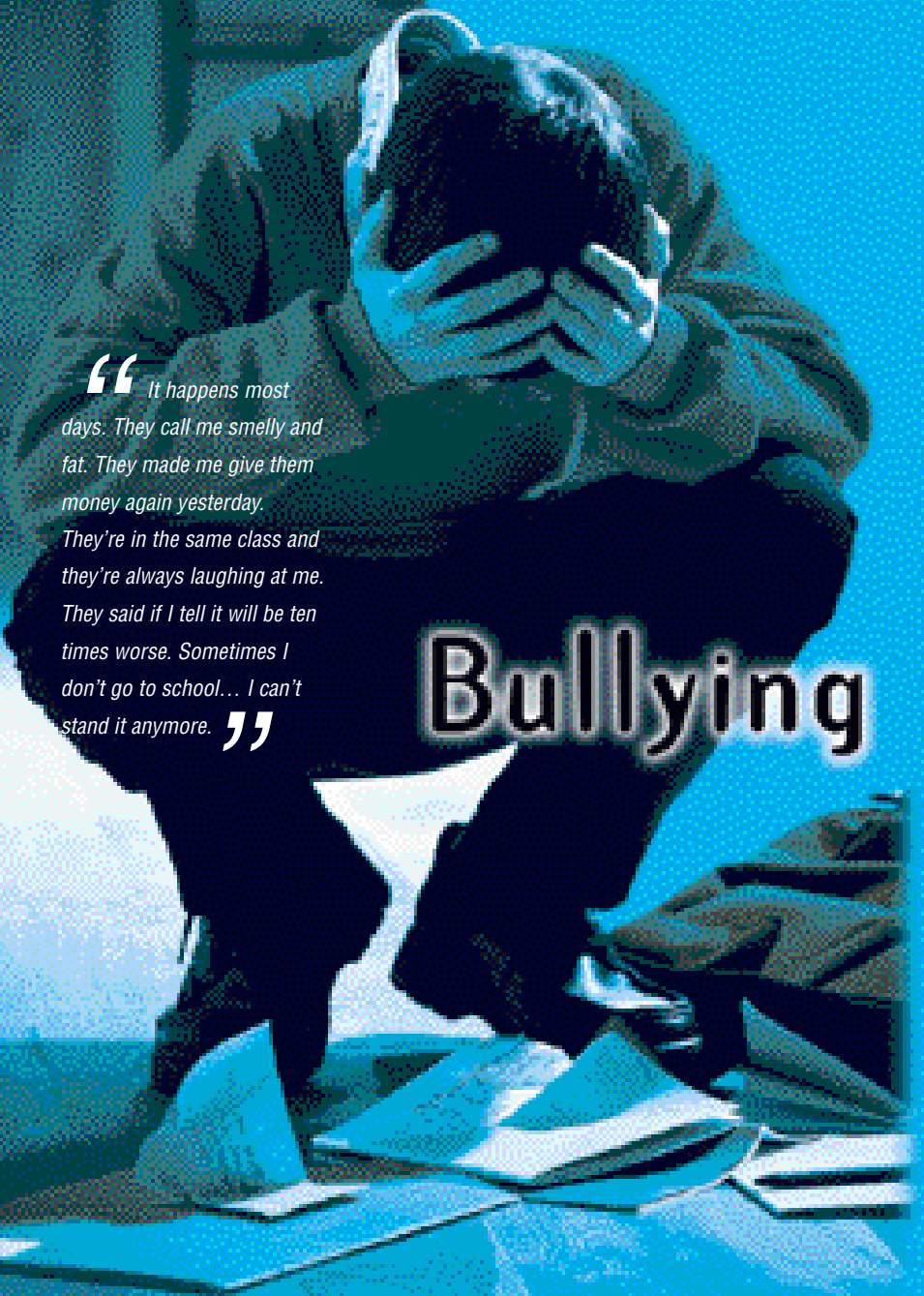
It is not easy to know why some children take longer to be dry at night than others. However, bedwetting is not due to laziness or lack of will power. One in six seven year olds bed wet on occasions. Although this may be stressful for both you and your child, try to be patient. It is rare for a child to wet or soil deliberately. If, after the age of seven, your child continually wets his bed, the problem may be caused by a number of factors or a traumatic event. Talk to your child about the bedwetting and reassure them that other older children experience this too. Discuss any concerns about your child with your GP or health visitor.

Sleeping difficulties

- There are many different reasons why babies and young children do not sleep through the night.
- Try to establish a sleep routine as early as six weeks if possible.
- Feel confident in yourself to know whether your child is really distressed or just restless.
- If your sleep is frequently disrupted by your child's restlessness, arrange for a trusted relative or friend to care for your baby or child so that you can get some sleep.

Establishing a routine

Many babies and children experience sleeping difficulties at some time. It is important to try to establish a regular night time sleep routine for your child by putting them to bed at a regular time each night. Prepare a warm, comfortable environment for them to relax in. Reading to your child at bedtime helps your child to unwind and relax. If your child is scared of the dark, try keeping a night light on. One or two favourite toys in the bed may also be a comfort if your child wakes up during the night. If you are concerned that your child has serious difficulty getting to sleep, or does not regularly sleep through the night, discuss your concerns with your GP or health visitor.



“ It happens most days. They call me smelly and fat. They made me give them money again yesterday. They're in the same class and they're always laughing at me. They said if I tell it will be ten times worse. Sometimes I don't go to school... I can't stand it anymore. **”**

Bullying



WARNING SIGNS

Children may run away or not attend school. They may not always be able to tell you if something is wrong. Note changes in their moods, behaviour and physical appearances for no obvious reason. Also your child may have injuries with no reasonable explanation for them.



ACTION

See the headteacher at your child's school to get his/her support and to ensure appropriate action is taken. If bullying is happening outside school, consider contacting the family of the child who is bullying and try to find a way to work together to sort it out.



WHAT TO SAY

Refuse to put up with bullying. Walk away, tell an adult or friend and avoid fighting. Parents - listen to your child, reassure and be there for them.



PREVENTION

Talk to your child about their school day. Teach your child to respect others from a young age. Teach your child that prejudice and bullying are unacceptable behaviours.



CONTACTS

- Your child's teacher/headteacher
- The Education and Library Board for your area (see page 44)
- PSNI 028 9065 0222
- Parents Advice Centre (helpline) 080 8801 0722
- Kidscape (parents' helpline) 08451 205 204

- **Children have the right not to be hurt**
- **Bullying behaviour is unacceptable**
- **Bullying can happen to any child at any age**
- **Act immediately if you think your child is being bullied**
- **Children need ways to protect themselves and seek help**
- **Advise your child to run, yell and tell**

the real story

Bullying is a frightening experience. It can isolate and damage a child or young person's self-confidence. Some ongoing bullying can have negative long-term effects on children, leading to depression and even suicidal thoughts and actions.

School days are a time when the influence of other children is very important and fitting in is seen as essential. If children are viewed as different for any reason, they can be picked on and bullied. Sadly, we still live in a society in which to be different in any way can mean ridicule and bullying (often copied from parents/adults) and this ensures that prejudices will continue into the next generation. It is crucial to be alert to the possibility of bullying and to make sure that you know the tell-tale signs.

You may think that your child is unlikely to be bullied but the reality is that bullying can happen at any time and to any child.

Bullies who continually harm other children need support and help as well. They may have experienced difficulties of their own at home, which may have led to their actions. Reporting concerns may help them to get help as well.

- **Bullying is the repeated abuse of a child by one or several people**
- **Bullying can happen anywhere but most commonly it happens in school**
- **Bullying can take many forms, from verbal/emotional abuse to harassment and physical attack**
- **Bullies are not always older than the child they harm**

If your child tells you about a friend or any other child who is being bullied – listen carefully and take this seriously. That child may not be able to say for themselves what is happening. Do not be afraid to seek advice (see Action point)

All schools in Northern Ireland are required to include, within their discipline policy, measures to prevent all forms of bullying. However, school action alone cannot guarantee success and so it is important that parents and schools work together.

If you are not satisfied with the way your child's school is dealing with the matter, you can get support from the Education and Library Board for your area.



Child protection

“ Child abuse can take many forms such as physical injury, neglect, sexual or emotional abuse. Abuse takes place in a variety of places and can be perpetrated by adults or other children. Abuse can be perpetrated by those known to children or by strangers. Social workers work in partnership with families where there are concerns to make sure they get support before things reach a crisis. **”**

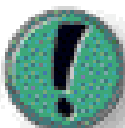


WARNING SIGNS

Children suffering abuse may display physical or behavioural signs such as:

- acting out in an inappropriate sexual way, perhaps with toys or objects;
- becoming withdrawn or excessively clinging;
- personality changes; becoming insecure; regressing to younger behaviour such as bedwetting or thumb sucking.

Make sure you know what child abuse is - contact the helplines in the Contacts column for more information.



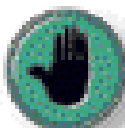
ACTION

A social worker (and/or sometimes a police officer) will meet with the family when abuse is reported. They will also talk with other professionals in order to make decisions about how to help you and your child.



WHAT TO SAY

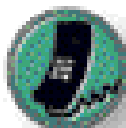
If you are worried about your own or someone else's treatment of a child, seek advice about what practical and emotional support is available.



PREVENTION

It is important that children know:

- what to do when they feel unsafe;
- how to say NO to adult requests which make them feel uncomfortable;
- that you will listen carefully to them when they are telling you about things which cause them concern;
- who to talk to and how to get to a safe place or person when they feel uneasy or frightened.



CONTACTS

- Your local HSS Trust (see page 44)
- Your social worker
- Your health visitor
- PSNI 028 9065 0222
- NSPCC 0800 800 5000 (24 hr free helpline)
- Parents Advice Centre 080 8801 0722

- **Parents are responsible for their children's safety**
- **Social services become involved once concern is shared**
- **Decisions about abuse need careful assessment**
- **Professionals want to work in partnership with families**
- **Very few children are removed from home following allegations or investigations of abuse**
- **Children are best cared for by their own families**

realities and myths

Some adults abuse children deliberately and most often, when abuse does happen, families need support, not punishment or the removal of their children.

Social workers and other professionals get involved when parents may be unable to protect their child from harm and need additional help and support. A specialist PSNI team will investigate allegations of abuse with social workers to help protect children and decide whether an offence has been committed against a child.

Many **myths** exist about protecting children. The realities are:

1. Reporting child abuse rarely results in the child being removed from home.

Removing children from their carers is not the main aim of child protection investigations and rarely happens. Social workers can only remove children from home with a court order, having demonstrated that there is a serious and immediate risk to their wellbeing. The police also have powers in emergency situations to protect children when they consider it necessary.

2. Children may not tell anyone of their abuse even those trusted by them.

Children may not be able to tell that they have been abused or understand what has occurred. They may however show signs which alert parents and carers to what has happened to them.

3. Child abuse is not always easy to recognise.

Often an assessment of the child and family is needed in order to find out what has happened and to determine what support and protection will best help. As a result, it can at times be difficult to avoid some intrusion into family life. A social worker will ask questions about the family circumstances, consider the frequency and the seriousness of the incident and the effect on the child. All of these factors will help to decide what should happen next to support and protect the child and family.

Social workers and the police have a responsibility in law to investigate child abuse. The NSPCC also has a power, under current legislation, to investigate and bring care proceedings in its own right.

4. Professionals are not solely responsible for protecting children.

It is not just the responsibility of social workers to make sure that children are safe. They rely on information from parents, family, other professionals and the local community who all play an important part in identifying concerns about children with whom they are in contact. This helps to ensure that families are offered support before the situation becomes more difficult.



Childminding & daycare

- All childminders and day care providers (this includes playgroups, crèches, nurseries and after-school clubs) in Northern Ireland are registered¹ and inspected by local Health and Social Services (HSS) Trusts
- You should always ask to see the certificate of registration
- Make a list of questions and take it with you when you visit each childcare centre
- Talk to other parents; personal recommendations are helpful, but you should take up at least two references
- Make sure the childcare provider knows how to contact you in an emergency and who is authorised by you to collect your child
- If you are considering a private foster carer, you must notify the HSS Trust before placing your child so that it can make checks to ensure arrangements are appropriate for your child



WARNING SIGNS

Children may not want to go to the child minder or day care provider. Sometimes, children are not always able to tell you if something is wrong so note changes in their moods, behaviour and physical appearances and try to establish why these changes have occurred.



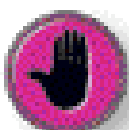
ACTION

Speak promptly to the person in charge about any concerns you have about your child. If you have serious concerns about your child's safety, remove your child immediately and contact the Early Years Team at your local HSS Trust. See page 45 for contact numbers.



WHAT TO SAY

Tell your child who will be looking after them, where they are going, how long for and whom they need to ask for their daily needs. Find out about what a typical day or session consists of and let your child know what to expect. Be prepared and ask plenty of questions.



PREVENTION

Take up references or make enquiries from others who have used a particular childcare service. Look for trained and experienced staff. Visit the facilities and look for confident, happy, busy and relaxed children. Check how you will be informed about your child's progress and in case of emergency how you will be contacted.



CONTACTS

- Your local Education and Library Board (see page 44)
- NICMA - Northern Ireland Childminding Association 028 9181 1015
- NIPPA - The early years organisation 028 9066 2825
- Employers for Childcare 0800 028 3008

“ John is 7, and I was very careful to visit and discuss his needs with the staff at the after-school club. It now means I can work a full day knowing his needs are being met and he is in a safe environment. He has made lots of new friends; not just other kids but members of staff too. I can relax and get on with what I need to do... life is so much easier. **”**

how do I make the right choice?

As a parent you are often the best judge of whether a childcare service will meet your child's needs.

When you leave your child in the care of others, you might want to check that:

- Their needs are being met and respected.
- Their cultural background is recognised.
- They will be happy there.
- The atmosphere feels right.
- There is a settling-in arrangement.
- A stable group of children attends so your child can make friends.
- Mealtimes are relaxed and fun.
- The outside area is well planned and spacious.
- Activities are varied and carefully planned and facilitate learning through play.

Ensure that your child is left in secure premises and that well trained and experienced staff are caring for your child. You will also want the opportunity to get involved and know what your child is doing day to day.

The main types of childcare available are:

Registered Childminders - A registered childminder is a person who looks after one or more children aged under 12 for reward on domestic premises. Parents and child minders negotiate the terms and conditions.

Day nurseries - for the under fives for the length of the working day. Voluntary organisations, private companies, individuals, business or community groups run these facilities. They are registered and inspected by HSS Trusts.

Playgroups - are normally for children aged between three and five. Exceptionally, some playgroups may take children aged under three. Sessions usually last no longer than four hours. Most of them are run by groups of parents or community groups with one or two paid staff. They are registered and inspected by HSS Trusts

Out-of-school clubs, - or kids clubs, provide sessional play and care for school-aged children from three upwards. These include breakfast clubs, after-school clubs and holiday playschemes. They are registered and inspected by HSS Trusts.

Free pre-school education places - If your child is in their immediate pre-school year they are entitled, if you so wish, to a year's free pre-school education. Places are provided at a range of settings including statutory nursery schools and classes and voluntary/private playgroups. Funded places are usually provided on a part-time basis although some statutory nursery schools and classes offer free full-time provision. All funded pre-school places are only available during school term time. Contact the Pre-School Education Advisory Group of your local Education and Library Board for more information.

Private fostering - is very different from the care provided by Trusts through approved foster carers. It occurs when a child under 16 is looked after for more than 28 days by an adult, who is not a relative. It is a private arrangement between the parent and the carer. If you are thinking about placing your child with a private foster carer, or becoming a private foster carer, the first thing you must do is contact your local HSS Trust. Social services are required by law to assess and monitor such arrangements. The prospective private foster carer will need as much information as possible about your child (including medical history) and the HSS Trust will provide you with information to guide your decision making. As the birth parents, you retain full parental responsibility for your child. You must remain in touch with the private foster carer and participate in all decisions concerning your child's life.

¹ Those looking after children in the child's home are not required to be registered. Registration is not required when a child is being looked after by a close relative or if service is provided for less than two hours in domestic premises or when service is provided for no payment or reward.

Children left alone

“ When mummy goes out, I lock the door from the inside... she calls in the letterbox to say goodbye, I leave the lights on in case anyone tries to get in. Mummy usually comes home in the night when I am asleep. **”**



WARNING SIGNS

Parents who have limited support.
A child who is frequently observed outside and alone for extended periods of time.
Childcare arrangements that keep going wrong.



ACTION

If there is immediate risk of harm to a child, call the police.



WHAT TO SAY

If you are worried about a child being left alone, talk to the parent, a health visitor, teacher or a social worker.



PREVENTION

Think about shared babysitting and discuss this with neighbours, friends or other parents you have contact with. Find out about after-school clubs and holiday play schemes.



CONTACTS

- Your local HSS Trust (see page 44)
- NSPCC
0800 800 5000
- PSNI
028 9065 0222

- **Never leave a young child alone**
- **Young children are not ready for this amount of responsibility**
- **Leaving a child alone places them at risk of harm**
- **It can be a lonely and frightening experience**
- **Plan for who you might contact for care in an emergency**

common sense and the law

If a child is not ready to be left alone it can be a sad, lonely, frightening and dangerous experience. There are many possible risks, both physical and emotional, which could affect your child in a negative way.

Children may say that they do not mind being left alone and may find it exciting initially, but they cannot fully know the possible risks and how to handle them.

Even the relatively ordinary things that happen in life, such as hunger, a storm, the phone ringing or someone coming to the front door can cause problems. An accident, feeling ill or a power cut may occur and these are not issues that a child could deal with.

It is rarely, if ever, possible to leave your children and assume that someone will look out for them, if necessary.

If they are alerted, the police and/or social services may take action if they think that a child has been neglected by being left alone.

Neglect happens when a parent or carer fails to meet children's basic needs of food, shelter, security, attention or protection from exposure to danger.

The NSPCC have issued guidelines advising that children under the age of 13 should not be left alone. While this recommendation does not have the force of law, it is suggested as good practice. Children under this age usually do not have the maturity to manage the responsibility of being left alone. Parents should exercise their judgement cautiously in this area.

As a young person reaches adolescence, leaving them alone after school, for an evening or during the day is less concerning as long as they are prepared and aware of what to do if they are worried or need anything. So preparation for this is necessary. If your child is a teenager and you feel he or she has the maturity and ability to deal with this, it is important that they know where you are and who to contact in an emergency.

Children with disabilities

“ When I found out that Mary was disabled I didn't know how I was going to cope. I just didn't think I'd be able to do it alone. Pretty soon I realised I didn't have to. **”**



WARNING SIGNS

If you have concerns about your child's development you should seek professional help or advice from your GP or health visitor.



ACTION

Don't think you have to go it alone. Get as much information as you can about your child's condition. Find out what services, support, benefits and advice is available and make contact.



WHAT TO SAY

There are many organisations specially set up to give support and advice to parents of disabled children. Contact them and tell your story. There will be others out there just like you.



PREVENTION

Prevention is not always possible with disability but by ensuring you get the best support available you can minimise its effect and get help for you and your child.



CONTACTS

- Your local HSS Trust (see page 44)
- Your local Education & Library Board (see page 44)
- Mencap 0845 7636227
- Disability Action 028 9029 7880
- Contact a Family (freephone helpline) 0808 808 3555

- **In Northern Ireland there are an estimated 201,000 disabled adults and 14,600 disabled children**
- **Your child is protected by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995**
- **Under Article 18 of the Children Order you may be eligible for social services assistance for your child and family given your child's needs**
- **You may be able to receive financial help to assist with caring for your child**
- **There are many forms of extra services and support available to you and your child**
- **Support groups, parent groups and other organisations are out there to help you cope**

you're not alone

If your child has a disability² you may be concerned or worried about the future. The word 'disabled' covers a very wide range of different conditions and it is estimated that some 20% of people in Northern Ireland experience some form of disability at some time in their lives. Remember, you and your child are not alone.

The government, health and social services, education and voluntary services provide a wide range of benefits, facilities, support and advice for disabled children and their carers.

Legal protection

Your child is especially protected by law. The Disability Discrimination Act makes certain provisions for children. It makes it unlawful for any service provider to treat a child with a disability less favourably than other people because of their disability. It also requires them to make reasonable adjustments to make their services accessible to disabled people.

Health

From the start, your GP and local HSS Trust are there for you. They'll provide the help and advice you need to discover and assess your child's disability. They'll help you plan the treatment, therapy, equipment and ongoing medical care that your child may need.

Benefits

There are several specific benefits that you could receive to help you with the costs of caring for a disabled child. These include Disability Living Allowance, Carer's Allowance, help with extra housing costs and with a disabled parking

badge. The Carers and Direct Payments Act (Northern Ireland) 2002 gives parents rights to an assessment of their needs as well as direct payments to enable them to purchase services directly. And don't forget free dental treatment and prescriptions, help with the cost of glasses, and, in some circumstances, travel to hospital, school meals, and even road tax exemption.

Education

Depending on their individual special educational needs, your child may benefit most by attending a special school - an environment specifically designed to meet their educational needs. Alternatively, your child may receive the extra support required through the special needs provisions available in a mainstream school or attached special unit. Your Education and Library Board will assess your child's special educational needs and recommend the most appropriate way forward for their education.

Extra support

Your HSS Trust can provide extra support for you and your child. This can include special leisure facilities, holidays, short breaks and many additional services for particular needs. Also there are many local, national and international organisations and charities specially set up to provide further help, advice and support to people just like you.

Make contact

On the left you'll find a list of contacts that you may find useful. You're not alone, so make contact today and get the support you need.

² Children's disabilities may take a number of forms. They may be physical or developmental.

“ There are so many activities to choose from in local communities and parents and carers want to encourage children and young people to take part. But how do you know if they're safe? **”**

Choosing children's activities

- **Children have a right to have fun and be safe**
- **Organisations should be open and welcoming and should share information about themselves and their activities**
- **You have the right to the same standards of care from all organisations, whether their workers are paid or are volunteers**
- **Listen to your child and ask questions about the activities they take part in**



WARNING SIGNS

Activities where parents are discouraged from staying to watch or becoming involved. Children who drop out or stop going to activity for no apparent reason. Behavioural changes.



ACTION

Find out as much information as you can about the organisation-ask other parents. Don't be afraid to ask questions.



WHAT TO SAY

Are the staff/volunteers suitable? What are their policies on child protection?



PREVENTION

Find out as much as you can before letting your child join an organisation or activity.



CONTACTS

- Volunteer Development Agency (VDA) 028 9023 6100
- Playboard 028 9080 3380
- NSPCC 0800 800 5000
- PSNI 028 9065 0222

have fun and be safe

Check it out

A good organisation will welcome questions about their activities and the safety of their surroundings. All organisations should have a child protection policy, including a statement on, and guidelines about, keeping children safe. In addition these are questions you may want to ask:

- **Are the staff and volunteers suitable to work with children?**

All staff and volunteers should go through a proper recruitment process, which includes interviews and references and, where appropriate, police checks.

- **Is there a written code of behaviour?**

All organisations should have a written code of behaviour, which outlines good practice when working with children. An environment that allows behaviour such as bullying, shouting, racism and sexism is not acceptable.

- **How does the organisation manage staff and volunteers?**

There should be someone in charge who supervises staff and volunteers.

- **How does the organisation provide for personal care needs?**

In the case of very young children, or those with a disability, you should ask about routines for toileting, feeding and administering medication.

- **Does the organisation have a health and safety policy?**

Find out if there is a leader qualified in first aid, that there is a first aid box and that the premises have passed fire regulations.

- **What are the arrangements when children go on outings?**

You should be told about all the necessary arrangements - including transport to and from - for every outing, no matter how long or short, and you should be asked for your agreement.

Be wary of:

- Behaviour that encourages rough play, sexual innuendo or embarrassing punishments.
- Staff who take charge and operate independently of organisational guidelines.

- Staff who show favouritism or personally reward specific children.
- Encouragement of inappropriate physical contact.
- Poor communication and lack of parental involvement, leaving you feeling uneasy.
- Invitations for children to spend time alone with staff or volunteers (even to visit their home).

Remember, listen to your children and ask questions about the activities they take part in.

Safe at all times

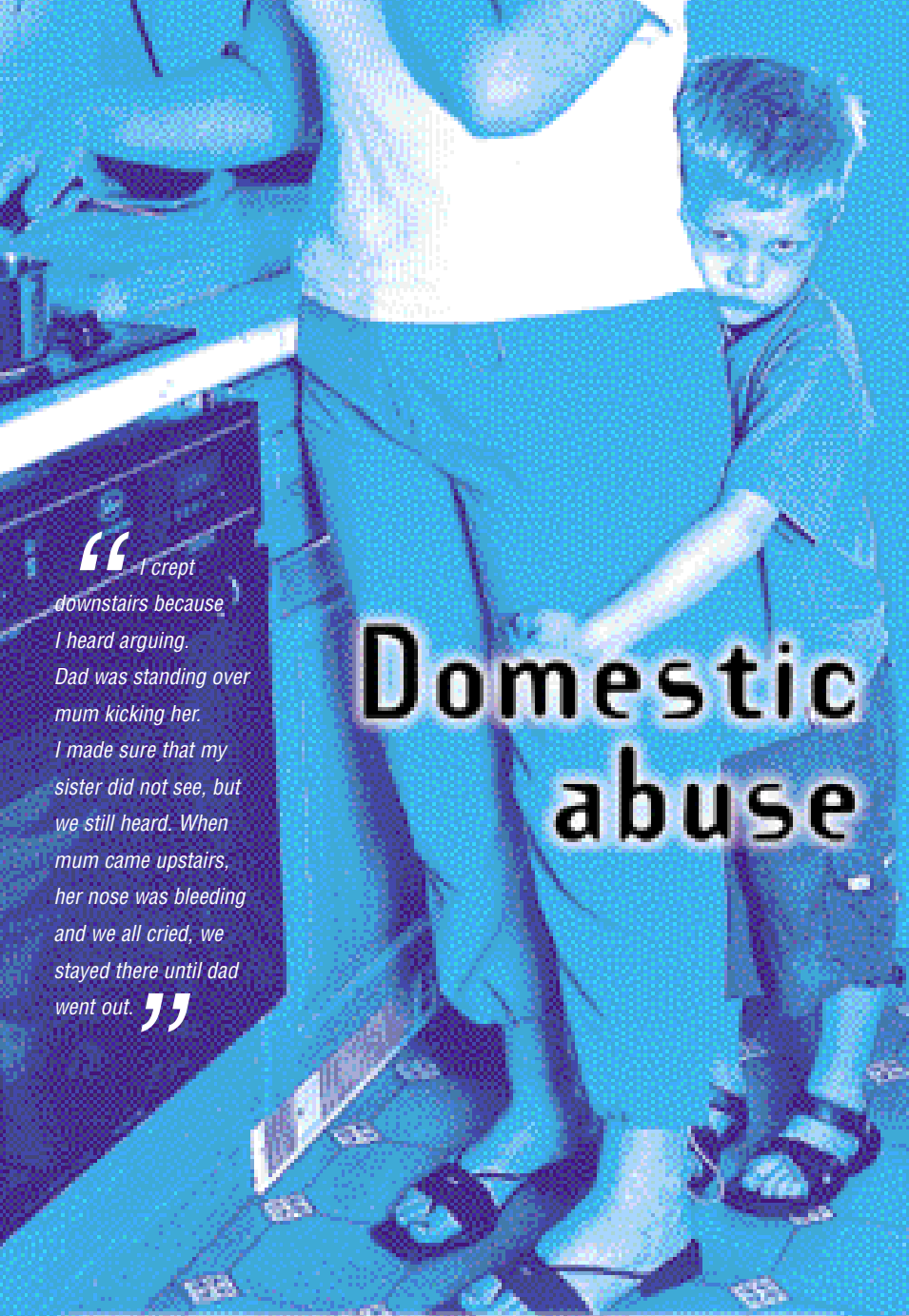
Parents and carers have a right and a responsibility to ensure that children are safe at all times. Organisations have a responsibility to be open and welcoming and to share information about themselves and their activities. Daycare activities, such as pre-school playgroups and crèches, are required to register with the local Health and Social Services Trust. But not all organisations providing supervised activities - such as uniformed organisations, sports clubs and youth clubs - have to register; yet they still have a responsibility to provide a safe environment for your child.

Many activities are supported by volunteers who generously give their time to provide regular activities for your child. However, whether or not workers are paid, you have the right to expect the same standards from all organisations.

Voicing concerns

Organisations should tell you where to go and what to do if you or your child has any worries. You may feel reluctant to voice your concerns in case you are wrong or worried about the impact on your child, but if you are concerned you must take action:

- Speak to other parents.
- Speak to the leader in charge.
- If you are not confident that they are the right person, talk to someone more senior.
- If you are unhappy about the response you receive, remove your child and contact any of the organisations listed in the Contacts column (left).



“I crept downstairs because I heard arguing. Dad was standing over mum kicking her. I made sure that my sister did not see, but we still heard. When mum came upstairs, her nose was bleeding and we all cried, we stayed there until dad went out.”

Domestic abuse



WARNING SIGNS

Any violence or abuse between adults will negatively affect children.

Seek support and help as soon as possible. The longer it lasts, the more damaging living with domestic abuse becomes.



ACTION

Report your concerns about yourself or someone else to the police or Women's Aid. If you are worried that your child might be affected, talk to them about what is happening. If necessary, Women's Aid will visit you in your own home.



WHAT TO SAY

Children need time to discuss the feelings they have about violence or abuse. Children need to know that it is not their fault and that this is not the way relationships should be.



PREVENTION

A violent partner can take responsibility for violence by seeking help to stop. Make sure that you offer a positive role model for children so that they learn other ways of behaving.



CONTACTS

- PSNI 028 9065 0222
- Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation (24 hour helpline) 028 9033 1818
- Men's Advisory Project (MAP) 028 9024 1929
- Relate 028 9032 3454

- Domestic abuse can teach children to use violence or abuse
- Domestic abuse can affect children in serious and long-lasting ways
- Where there is domestic abuse there is often child abuse
- Children will often blame themselves for domestic abuse
- Alcohol misuse is very common when domestic abuse occurs, as a contributing factor and as a survival mechanism
- 1 in 4 women may experience domestic violence at some time
- Pregnant women are more vulnerable to domestic abuse

how does it affect children?

Domestic abuse is a crime and a major social problem affecting many families. In 90% of reported domestic violence incidents, children have either been present in the same or a nearby room. It is overwhelmingly women and children who are affected by domestic abuse and men who are the perpetrators, although there are reported cases where men are victims.

Children who witness, intervene or hear incidents are affected in many ways. What can be guaranteed is that children do hear, they do see and they are aware of violence in the family.

Children learn how to behave in part from examples parents set for them. Domestic abuse teaches children negative things about relationships, and how to deal with people.

For instance:

- It can teach them that violence is a way to resolve conflict.
- They learn how to keep secrets.
- They learn to mistrust those close to them and that children are responsible and to blame for abuse, especially if it erupts after an argument about the children.

Many people find it difficult to understand why people remain in, or return to, abusive situations. A combination of fear, love, the risk of homelessness and financial issues can make it very difficult for them to leave and some may want to stay put, and get their abuser to leave.

Short term effects

Children are affected in many ways by domestic abuse, even after a short time. These effects

include: feeling frightened, becoming withdrawn, bedwetting, running away, aggressiveness, behavioural difficulties, problems with school, poor concentration and emotional turmoil.

Long term effects

The longer children are exposed to violence, the more severe the effects on them are.

These can include:

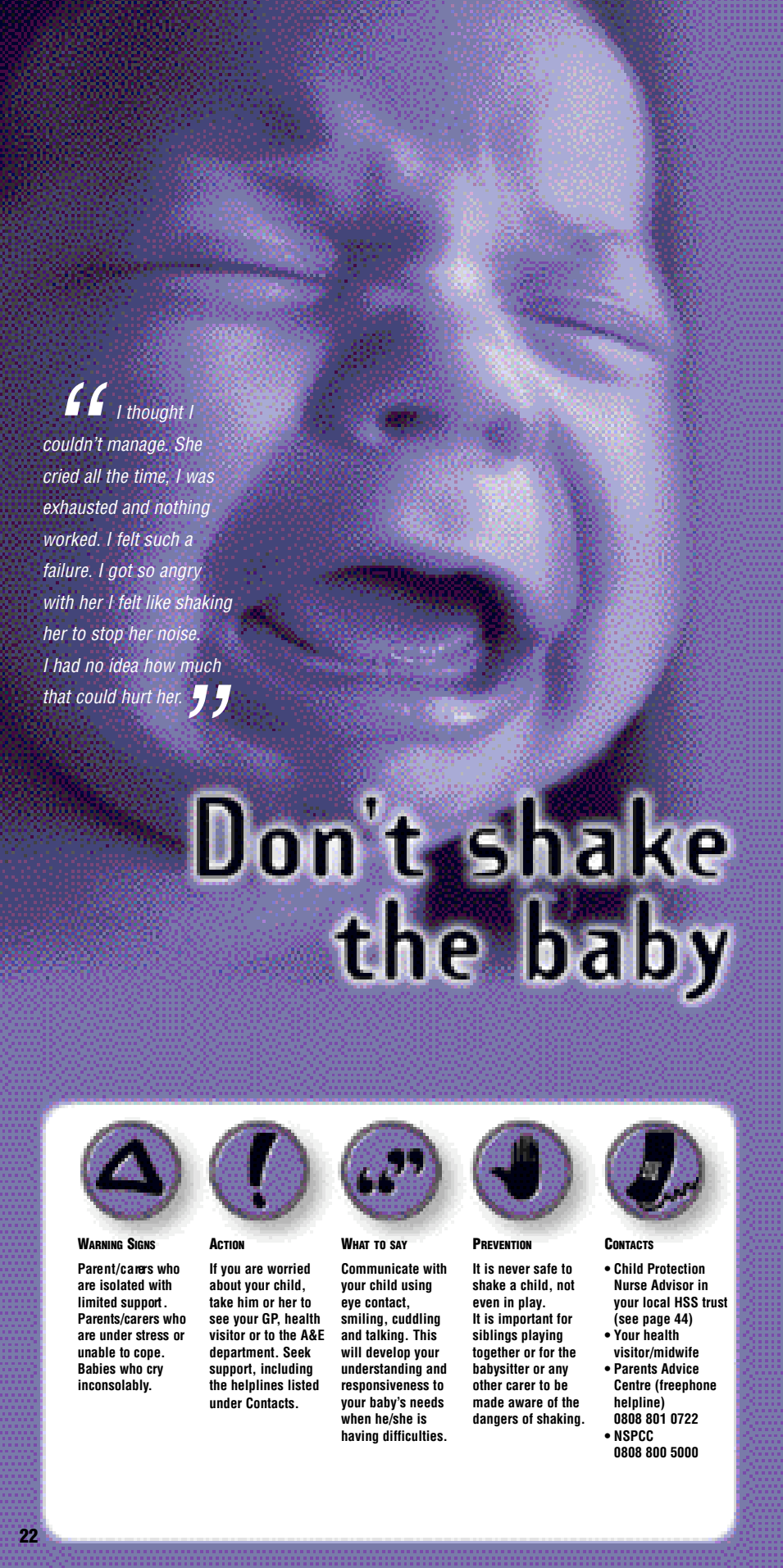
- A lack of respect for the non-violent parent.
- Over-identification with abusing parent and copying that behaviour.
- Loss of self-confidence, which will affect their ability to form relationships in the future.
- Being over-protective of parent.
- Loss of childhood.
- Problems at school.
- Running away.

If you are worried about domestic abuse, discuss it with someone else.

If you are violent or abusive, you can also seek help and support to stop what is happening.

If you are affected by domestic abuse you are not alone - you can seek help from a range of specialist services across Northern Ireland. You can also report incidents to the police - this will provide valuable evidence for any charges against your abuser in the future.

Apart from any criminal proceedings, you can apply for a court injunction to protect yourself. Contact a solicitor in your area who deals with family law.



“ I thought I couldn't manage. She cried all the time, I was exhausted and nothing worked. I felt such a failure. I got so angry with her I felt like shaking her to stop her noise. I had no idea how much that could hurt her. **”**

Don't shake the baby



WARNING SIGNS

Parent/carers who are isolated with limited support. Parents/carers who are under stress or unable to cope. Babies who cry inconsolably.



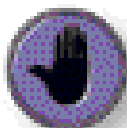
ACTION

If you are worried about your child, take him or her to see your GP, health visitor or to the A&E department. Seek support, including the helplines listed under Contacts.



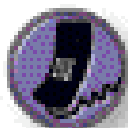
WHAT TO SAY

Communicate with your child using eye contact, smiling, cuddling and talking. This will develop your understanding and responsiveness to your baby's needs when he/she is having difficulties.



PREVENTION

It is never safe to shake a child, not even in play. It is important for siblings playing together or for the babysitter or any other carer to be made aware of the dangers of shaking.



CONTACTS

- Child Protection Nurse Advisor in your local HSS trust (see page 44)
- Your health visitor/midwife
- Parents Advice Centre (freephone helpline) 0800 801 0722
- NSPCC 0800 800 5000

- **Never shake a child for any reason**
- **Shaking a young child in rough play can cause injuries - never shake a young child**
- **Shaking can cause serious long lasting injury or death**
- **Shaking is often a response to extreme frustration**
- **There are different ways to cope with a crying baby**
- **Do not suffer alone, seek support from others**

different ways to cope

Why do people shake babies?

Often, although not always, babies and young children are shaken when a parent or carer becomes very frustrated when they will not stop crying due to colic, illness or feeding difficulties. On average, a baby will cry for at least two hours every day. If a baby has additional difficulties, they will cry more and this can be very stressful. One in ten babies cry much more than this average and many parents experience a great deal of difficulty managing this.

Many parents may not realise the extent of the damage that a shake can do to a young child. Parents/carers who have a low tolerance level may become angry and are more likely to shake the child. However there are many alternatives and people to talk to.

What damage can shaking cause?

Shaking a baby can cause death or serious and long-lasting brain and/or eye damage. Shaken Baby Syndrome is an injury that results when a baby is shaken so that his or her head wobbles rapidly back and forth. The force of this can tear the blood vessels that connect the brain and skull. This happens because a young child's neck muscles are not strong enough to hold their head firmly. The action of shaking can cause serious damage, even though the parent does not perceive it as fierce. **Never ever shake a baby for any reason.**

Ways to cope with a crying baby

Crying is the way all babies make sure that their basic needs are met - they may be hungry, thirsty, need a change of nappy or even some company. Crying is neither your fault nor the fault of your baby.

Some of the ways to cope include:

- Count to ten before doing anything and allow yourself to calm down.
- Gently hug and cuddle your child - perhaps with the use of a baby-carrier so that they are close to your body in order to help soothe them.
- Use eye contact, smiling and talking to communicate with your child.
- Take the child for a walk or a drive to help them sleep.
- If necessary, make sure baby is safe and walk out of the room for a short time, ensuring that you are nearby.
- Ask someone else you trust to take over for a while.
- It is important to contact your community midwife or health visitor for advice.

Drug & alcohol misuse

“ At first I thought it was just a teenage thing. Paul started to come home late, a row always started and he'd storm off to his room. He was losing weight, looked terrible and I felt he was lying to us. He just wanted to be out all the time. ”



WARNING SIGNS

In general terms if your child's appearance, behaviour or financial situation changes dramatically you should include drug and alcohol use in your list of "I wonder if..." questions.



ACTION

Observe and talk to your child if you are worried. In an emergency contact an ambulance immediately. If your child is not in immediate danger talk with them about their drug use at another time when they are not using.



WHAT TO SAY

Use every opportunity to discuss drug use, for example, when drugs are mentioned in a television programme. You can give accurate information regarding the risks of drug use at an early age.



PREVENTION

Ensure that you are informed about drug use and the effects of different types of drugs. There are many helpful guides available - See Contacts.



CONTACTS

- Education Welfare Service in your Education & Library Board (see page 44)
- Your GP
- Your local HSS Trust (see page 44)
- Specialist drug / alcohol services in your area
- National Drugs Helpline
24 hr free advice
0800 77 66 00

- Many parents worry that their child may use drugs
- Prevention is better than cure
- Drug and alcohol misuse is increasing among young people
- Make sure you know about drugs and their possible effects
- Talk to your children about drugs from a young age
- Northern Ireland schools teach drug prevention in the curriculum

how would I know?

Drugs can take many forms, from alcohol and binge drinking, to hard drugs, solvents and misuse of prescription drugs.

Children need to be aware of the risks of using drugs, alcohol and volatile substances (e.g. solvents). More young people experience problems caused by too much drinking than through drug use.

If you find out that your child has or may have taken drugs or alcohol, it can be frightening because of the potential effects. This can be due to your lack of knowledge about drugs and not feeling confident about talking about them. Most young people who experiment with drugs do not go on to use them on a permanent basis. Make yourself familiar with the drug's education policy and teaching programme in your child's school and, if possible, attend information evenings with your child.

Drug and alcohol misuse among young people - how widespread is it?

Drug and alcohol misuse is more widespread among children and young people than ever before.

Research carried out amongst 6000 secondary school children in Northern Ireland found that around 13% of 12 year olds, 26% of 14 year olds and 40% of 16 year olds admitted to having tried drugs³.

It is important to discuss drug and alcohol use early.

Some parents/carers worry that doing this encourages their child to use drugs and

alcohol. Avoiding talking about this will not protect your child. Children will be aware of drugs and alcohol in some way before they leave primary school. It is likely that at this early stage, children will be more responsive to being told about the risks of drug and alcohol misuse. Make sure you tell your children about the risks and explain how they become more vulnerable if they do not stay with people they trust. Accurate information and support will help them decide what to do. It does not guarantee non-use but will increase the chance of an informed choice.

Why do young people use drugs and alcohol?

They are curious about them, they want to break the rules, to escape reality, to cope with difficult situations or feelings, because they enjoy them, because their friends do it.

How would I know?

There may be a change in relationships with family and friends, or a change in performance at school. Other signs can involve changes in a financial situation and personal possessions 'disappearing' and being sold. Try to ensure that you know where your children are.

Drug and alcohol misuse by parents

Drug and alcohol misuse by the adults in a household can seriously affect the care and well being of children and it may encourage them to behave the same way.

³ 'Drug & Alcohol Use amongst Young People in Northern Ireland' a report produced by the Drug & Alcohol Information & Research Unit, DHSSPS, October 2002

“ Before Sean was born I never thought about where I left things. Nowadays, everything in the house seems dangerous. I feel I have to follow him everywhere. Yesterday he found my painkillers in the bedroom and nearly swallowed some. It happened so quickly.”

Health & safety



WARNING SIGNS

Spend some time exploring your house as if you were a young child. This will show you the many potential dangers which, if not removed, could harm your child.



ACTION

Make a list of these potential dangers and remove them to safety or protect your child from them by using safety devices. Talk to the contacts listed if you are unsure about this.



WHAT TO SAY

With very young children the tone of your voice and facial expressions alongside explanations are extremely important. Children will begin to sense the warning tone in your voice over time.



PREVENTION

Remove dangerous objects like drugs, syringes, medicines and household chemicals out of the reach of children and lock them away safely. Do this before your child is exposed to any hazard.



CONTACTS

- Talk to your health visitor or midwife
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) 028 9050 1160
- Child Accident Prevention Trust 020 7608 3828
- Health & Safety Executive for Northern Ireland www.hsenigov.uk/kids.cfm

- **Children learn by exploring their surroundings**
- **Children do not automatically know what is dangerous**
- **Children need guidance to stay safe at home**
- **Remove all potential dangers in your home from the reach of your child**
- **Keep matches and lighters out of sight and reach of children**
- **Watch your child and remove him or her from danger both inside and outside the home**
- **Explain about safety to your child from an early age**
- **In the event of an accident in the home seek immediate medical attention**

Keeping your child safe

Babies and young children learn about their world by exploring it. This means that, as soon as they are able to, they will crawl, touch and grab at whatever they see. They are curious by nature and need careful and gentle guidance from a young age about what danger is and what to stay away from.

Most accidents happen in the home or just outside and this is why it is important to ensure that your home is safe for all your family, especially for young children. There are many situations each year in which children have overdosed on their parents' drugs and medicines.

Keeping safe within the home

- Make sure that all medicines and drugs are locked away well out of reach and your use of them is private to avoid your child copying you.
- Certain rooms are necessarily full of danger, such as the kitchen, and should remain out of bounds or made safe by the use of safety devices. Consider using cupboard locks, stair safety gates, fire and cooker guards to make your home safer.
- Can your children get out of the house? Is the safety chain high enough on the front door even for a very active toddler?
- Crawling and exploring are an essential part of their development - keep an eye on your young children, especially near wires and sockets.
- Never leave young children alone in the bath.
- Small children should never be left alone with pets. Even trained and good natured animals can turn on them.

- Make sure that irons, saucepans, kettles (including cables) and hot drinks are kept out of the reach of children. Scalding and burns are common and avoidable accidents.
- Inhaling cigarette smoke is bad for children's health. Children will be affected by passive smoking and your smoking may encourage them to smoke when they are older.
- Check toys for safety marks. Ensure that your child does not play with toys that are not suitable for his or her age, especially if the pieces are small enough to choke on. Unsafe toys can be very dangerous.

Keeping safe outside the home

- Keep children away from building sites and derelict buildings - they are not adventure playgrounds and can kill.
- Children should always wear safety helmets when cycling and other recommended protective wear for outdoor activities such as skate boarding.
- Always ensure children are properly restrained in the car.
- Keep children away from unattended farming machinery or gardening equipment. These can kill. Stress the dangers of this machinery to children from a young age.
- Never leave young children unsupervised near rivers, garden ponds or paddling pools.
- Teach children how to safely cross the road and be a good example to them when you are crossing the road.



Healthy eating

“ Every parent wants the best start in life for their children. One of the most important things you can do for your child is to ensure that he or she eats a wide variety of foods in the right amounts. ”



WARNING SIGNS

If your child is either overweight or underweight this will have implications for your child's health in the short and longer term. Contact your GP or health visitor for advice.



ACTION

Encouraging your child to develop good eating habits when they are young will also mean they are more likely to eat healthily as they grow up.



WHAT TO SAY

It's not just what you say - it's what you do - set a good example to your children



PREVENTION

Avoid your child becoming dependant on things like fizzy drinks, crisps and processed foods.



CONTACTS

- Central health promotion resource services in your local HSS Board area for leaflets - see page 44
- Your health visitor
- Your GP

- **Breast milk offers the most natural and healthy start for your baby**
- **Six months is the recommended age for the introduction of solid foods for both breast and formula fed infants**
- **Don't give up if your child does not like certain foods at first - keep trying. It can take several attempts before your child accepts a new food**
- **Making your own baby food is cheaper and gets your baby used to home-cooked meals**
- **True food allergies are relatively uncommon. If you have concerns seek advice from your GP**

building a good foundation for health

Good nutrition is essential during childhood, as it is a time of rapid growth, development and activity. Your child's nutritional needs change throughout their childhood.

From birth

Solid foods should not be started too early as babies digestive systems and kidneys are not fully developed. Weaning too soon may cause problems such as food allergies in the future. The recommended age to start weaning your baby onto solid foods is six months. This applies to children who are breastfed or given infant formula. Suitable first weaning foods include unflavoured baby rice, cooked fruit and vegetables. However it is important to progress to a wider range of tastes and textures. More detailed advice can be found in the 'Weaning made easy' guide available from your local health promotion resource service (see Contacts)

From 1-5

Children under the age of five need to eat small amounts of food regularly. This is best provided in three small meals every day (breakfast, lunch and tea/dinner) along with two or three nutritious snacks in between. Between the ages of two and five, children can begin to **gradually** eat more foods that are higher in fibre and lower in fat. By the age of five years, your child will be able to follow the

healthy eating guidelines, just like the rest of the family. For good health, children need to eat a wide range of foods from the four main food groups:

- Bread, potatoes, rice, pasta and breakfast cereals.
- Fruit and vegetables.
- Meat, fish, chicken, pulses and eggs.
- Milk, cheese and yoghurt.

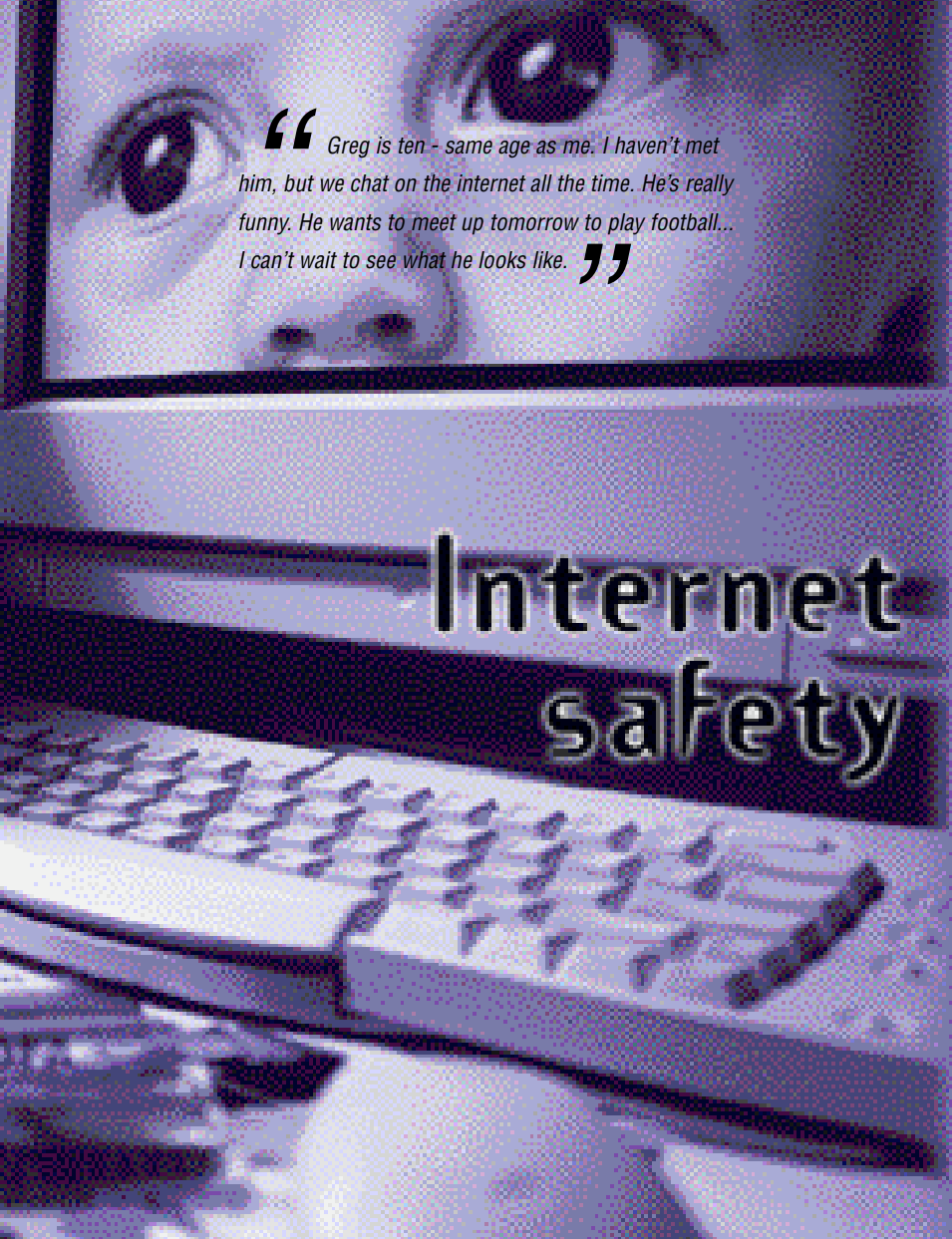
Do not encourage processed foods, fizzy drinks or crisps. For more detailed advice refer to 'Getting a good start' which is available from your local health promotion resource service (see Contacts).

From 6-11

Active children have good appetites. Encourage exercise as this will develop good appetites and discourage weight problems. Encourage children to choose the healthier options from the school meals menu. If they take packed lunches ensure variety and include fruit and raw vegetables.

From 12 to adulthood

Bones are still growing at this stage - aim for 1 pint of milk per day, or the equivalent from yoghurts and cheese. Good sources of iron eg from red meat, breakfast cereals, pulses and eggs, are also important, especially for teenage girls. All children will enjoy a healthy diet if they are given it.



“ Greg is ten - same age as me. I haven't met him, but we chat on the internet all the time. He's really funny. He wants to meet up tomorrow to play football... I can't wait to see what he looks like. **”**

Internet safety



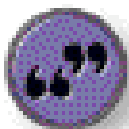
WARNING SIGNS

Prolonged, secretive periods on the Internet, changes in behaviour or mood, inappropriate sexual behaviour, asking questions about sexual experiences or terminology, leaving pornographic material, diaries or letters where they can be found. (see also section on Sexual exploitation).



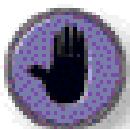
ACTION

If you think your child has been exposed to any form of exploitation encourage them to confide in you, assuring them that they've done nothing wrong and that you will support them. Contact child protection, youth services, child abuse or other appropriate organisations for further advice and support.



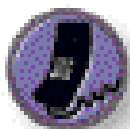
WHAT TO SAY

Assure your child that you believe what they are telling you; create a positive sense of confidence between you. Explain in your own way why these things happen and avoid making them feel ashamed or foolish about what they have experienced. Let them know that you will protect them from further harm.



PREVENTION

Know where your child is; be familiar with their friends and daily activities. Teach your child to trust their own feelings and assure them that they have a right to say NO to what they sense is wrong. Listen carefully to your child's fears and be supportive.



CONTACTS

- PSNI 028 9065 0222
- Your local HSS Trust (see page 44)
- NSPCC 0800 800 5000
- National Children's Charity (NCH) www.nch.org.uk/itok
- Internet Watch Foundation www.iwf.org.uk

- **Child exploitation has devastating effects on children, both physical and mental**
- **Exploitative adults have been quick to use the Internet as a tool; they are very sophisticated and well practised in how they approach children**
- **Children are fascinated by the 'adult' world, but there are measures you can take to protect your child from online risks and help them make the most of the Internet safely**
- **Be sensitive to changes in your child's behaviour. It is up to attentive adults to recognise the signs of sexual exploitation. (see warning signs listed in section on Sexual exploitation)**
- **Recent research from the NSPCC revealed that one in five 9 to 16 year-olds use Internet chat rooms**

new technology, old problem

Risks from the Internet

The Internet has proved a useful tool for people wishing to exploit children. Recent high profile cases in the news have revealed that Internet chat rooms can be used by paedophiles to establish deceptive relationships with children. They then 'groom' children to become victims, either psychologically on the Internet itself, or by arranging to actually meet with them. Often victims believe that they are chatting to other children online.

Internet pornography can cause psychological damage to children who are exposed to it. But worse still, the Internet is a major method by which pornographic images of children are obtained and exchanged by exploitative adults. Sadly such images are in high demand, so pornographers will go to extreme lengths to entice and coerce children into getting involved against their will.

Making it safe to surf

There are ways in which you can help to protect your child online and ensure that the Internet is a safe way to learn and have fun.

Ask your Internet Service Provider or local computer specialist about installing parental controls, which can prevent your child accessing websites with sexual content. These methods cannot provide a total safeguard but do offer some degree of protection.

Learn all you can about the Internet. In the same way that you would teach your child about the dangers from strangers, warn your child about dangers on the Internet and lay down some ground rules regarding the time they spend online. If possible, avoid your child going online in private, or at least ensure you have access to their computer. Make sure that they know they should never arrange to meet a new friend made on the Internet unaccompanied.

Watch out for possible signs of exploitation or abuse. Some of these signs are often completely innocent, but look out for changes in your child's mood or behaviour, sleep disturbances or bedwetting, unexplained marks, problems at school, going missing or self-harm, asking about sexual experiences and terminology or evidence of pornographic material. Be especially aware of any new friendships between your child and older people, whether male or female.

If your child does experience some form of exploitation, whether mild or severe, it is crucial to be 100% supportive, make it clear that it is not their fault and that you are there to help and protect them no matter what.

Missing

“I was shocked when she ran away although, looking back, she was more of a loner than her brother. I now know that she had been missing school quite a bit.”



WARNING SIGNS

There may be none but does your child seem to be unhappy? Are you sure that they are not skipping school? Has anything happened in the family that you haven't talked to your child about?



ACTION

If you think your child might be skipping school, talk to the school or an Education Welfare Officer. Contact the police if your child goes missing.



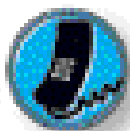
WHAT TO SAY

Make sure that your child knows how important they are to you. When you have to tell your child off, tell them that it's their behaviour that's the problem - not them. If something has gone wrong in the family, don't let your child think that it's their fault.



PREVENTION

Be alert to any unexplained changes in your child's behaviour. Spend time with them and be interested in their lives and worries. Do you know who your child's friends are? Be very careful about their access to the Internet and 'chat rooms'.



CONTACTS

- PSNI 028 9065 0222
- Your child's school
- Missing Persons Helpline (24hrs) 0500 700 700
- Message Home (for young people to get a message to their parents) 0800 700 740

- **Make time for your child to talk to you about their worries**
- **You know how important a good education is - let your child know this**
- **Only keep your child off school if they are too ill to attend - not for days out or shopping trips**
- **Be honest about things that might be happening in the family**
- **Look for early signs that your child might not be happy and talk to their school about these**
- **Help is available - please don't be too embarrassed or afraid to ask**

From home and school

Children from all sorts of backgrounds run away from home for a variety of reasons. Many of us will remember planning to run away when we were younger because we felt unable to cope with our problems, that nobody cared about us or because we had been treated unfairly. Usually, if a child does go missing from home, it will be for a very short period - usually until the child thinks that the parents have noticed. Often, they will turn up at the home of a friend or relative.

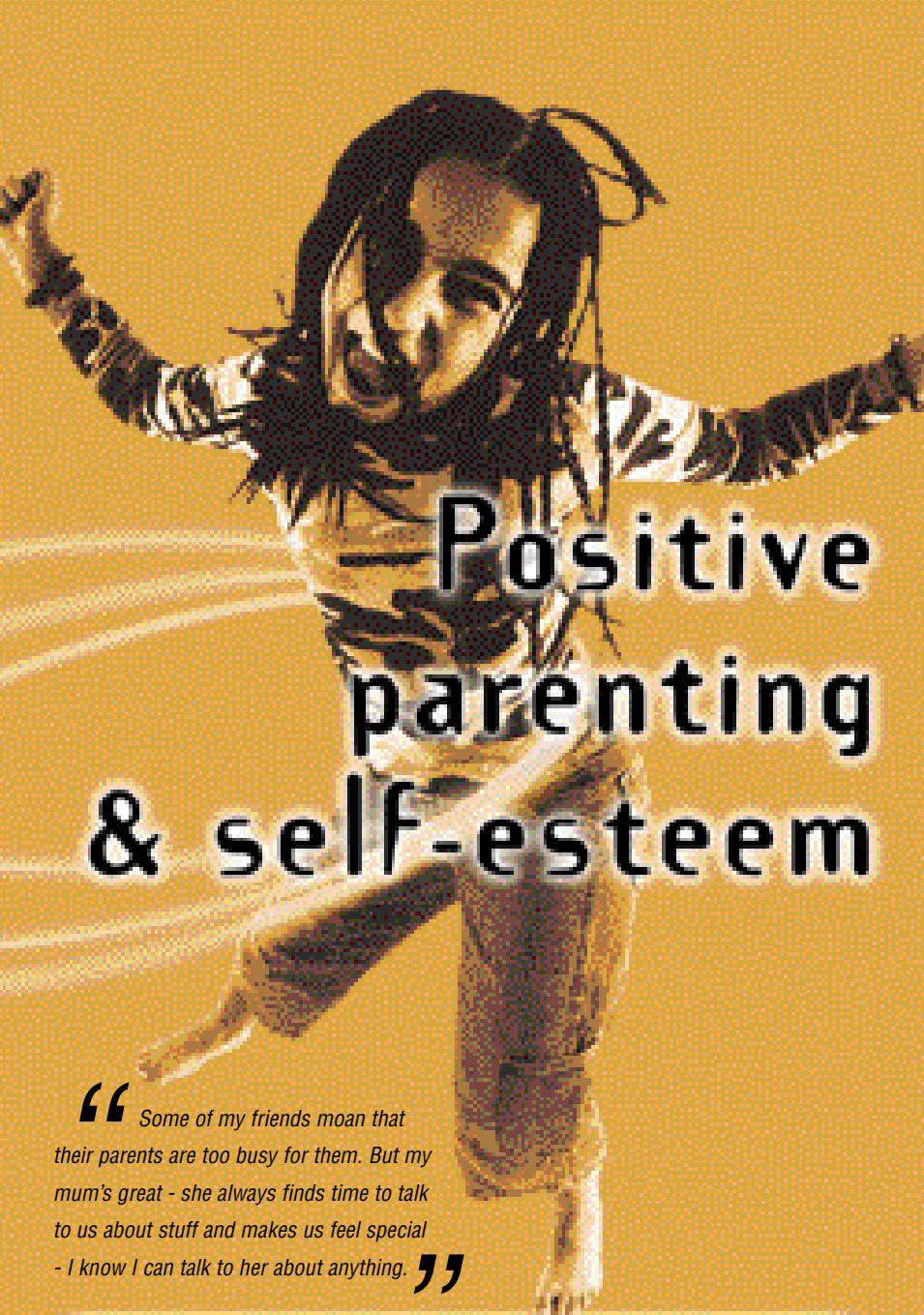
When children run away, they are not being naughty - they are trying to tell us that they are unhappy or trying to find out just how much we do care about them.

However, if a child goes missing from home repeatedly, receives unexplained gifts, and possibly has an older 'friend', there is a possibility they could be being sexually exploited (see page 36).

The law says that parents must ensure that their children receive suitable, full time education

and they can be prosecuted if their child does not attend school regularly. Children who miss school are much more likely to have problems with their learning and getting the job or college place that they would like. They will often find it harder to make and keep friends and they are at much greater risk of getting into trouble in and out of school. If they are skipping school or lessons, they are more likely to come across adults or other young people who might want to cause them harm.

When children miss school without their parents' knowing, this is called truancy. Children who truant regularly often do this because they are worried about something. There might be something happening on the way to or from school that is causing them concern. They might be being bullied. They might be finding some lessons or subjects too hard (or too easy) or they might be having problems in completing their homework. Sometimes, children will be reluctant to leave home because they are worried that their parent might come to some harm whilst they are at school.



Positive parenting & self-esteem

“ Some of my friends moan that their parents are too busy for them. But my mum's great - she always finds time to talk to us about stuff and makes us feel special - I know I can talk to her about anything. **”**



WARNING SIGNS

There may be none. Is your relationship with your child difficult at times? Does your child get enough exercise? Are there any changes in their behaviour? Is your child trying to tell you something?



ACTION

Be involved and develop a good relationship with your child before they reach their teens. If you are concerned about your parenting methods get support from the organisations listed under Contacts.



WHAT TO SAY

With younger children, set boundaries. With teenagers, try to agree boundaries. With teenagers, even if you only get a grunt, don't give up on communication.



PREVENTION

Have fun with your child. Encourage friendships and outside interests. Listen carefully to your child's point of view. Help them think through choices. Be better informed about child issues - consider their point of view.



CONTACTS

- Parents Advice Centre - freephone helpline 080 8801 0722
- Barnardo's Parenting Matters Programme 028 9049 1081

- Children need to feel secure, loved and valued - this is the basis of self-esteem and confidence
- Noticing and acknowledging good behaviour is the best way of influencing your child's behaviour
- Be consistent with your discipline, using positive approaches to influence your child's behaviour
- Parents and carers need to work together and be consistent
- Listen to and talk to your child - it's good to talk!
- Do things together with your child that you both enjoy - have fun!

make them feel great!

Positive Parenting

Parenting can be difficult and parenting in Northern Ireland can be especially difficult. Often parents have no control over outside environments and influences.

In September 2006, the law on physical punishment was changed and the defence of reasonable chastisement will now only be available to a parent if his or her child has experienced minor harm, as a result of being physically chastised.

Everyone accepts that children must learn right from wrong and develop the ability to get on with others. However, it is important to remember that you do not have a right to physically chastise your child and you should, therefore, consider other techniques, such as positive parenting, which are well recognised and successful and which will help to channel your child in the right direction.

Being a parent is never easy, but, hopefully, the information in this section will show you how you can use those techniques to guide, nurture and encourage your child.

Positive parenting is about bringing out the best in your child, by listening and understanding, praising and encouraging their efforts, noticing and rewarding good behaviour and doing things together that you both enjoy.

This starts from the earliest days of your relationship with your child. In trying to be helpful, it is often easy to point out where a child is going wrong and forget to notice the things that go right. By doing this you are unwittingly giving your child lots of attention for negative unwanted behaviour, rather than for the good behaviour you would prefer them to develop. It can also undermine your relationship with your child. Parental attention and praise is one of the biggest motivators for children so you need to use it in the right direction! Not only will this influence your child's behaviour in a positive way, it will also make your child feel happy,

loved, wanted and secure and this is the basis of life-long confidence and self-esteem.

Managing Behaviour

Teaching children from a young age by setting limits and explaining the reasons for these limits helps to instill self-discipline. Firm and consistent guidance is essential to positive parenting and can successfully change bad behaviour. Yelling at or over-disciplining children can lead to physical and emotional harm. There are many positive ways to promote good behaviour such as encouragement, being a good role model and making your children feel secure of your love for them - even when they misbehave.

Teenagers

Teenagers have to learn to make their own decisions and establish their independence from their parents. Unfortunately their decisions might not always agree with yours and this can lead to tension. Be supportive and encourage them to talk. The main concern for adolescents is whether what they are going through is normal. Remember to give them the practical information they need about the physical changes and reassure them that their physical development is perfectly normal.

Your Child's Health

Promoting the health of your child is a task that most parents do without thinking. Whether it involves encouraging your child to brush their teeth, keep fit by sport and regular physical exercise or reminding them to pay attention to personal hygiene, you are an important source of information and advice and an influential role model for your child.

Self-Esteem

A sense of self-esteem is your child's best protection from peer pressure. You can help to foster this in many ways, for example, by being a positive role model, giving positive, accurate feedback, identifying and redirecting your child's inaccurate beliefs and by being spontaneous and affectionate. Make them feel great!

“ I used to blame myself. How could I be so stupid to get into this! Now I know better. I was thirteen; he was twenty. He said he loved me, but all along he knew exactly what he was doing. **”**

Sexual exploitation



WARNING SIGNS

Absence from home or truancy from school; unexplained money, clothes, jewellery or other gifts; new relationships with older men; evidence of drug or alcohol abuse; changes in mood or behaviour; loss of contact with former friends and new relationships with an older age group; lack of self-esteem; self-harming; leaving home in unusual clothing for your child.



ACTION

Try to encourage your child to confide in you about their situation; avoid alienating your child or making them feel that they are to blame; get in touch with information and support agencies that can help you and your child.



WHAT TO SAY

Make sure that your child knows that you are there to help them, no matter what they have experienced. Assure them that they shouldn't feel ashamed, that they are victims of abuse and that you understand how difficult it must be for them.



PREVENTION

Offer a positive and supportive home environment. Warn your child of the risks and know who your child's friends are. Watch out for low self-esteem and other warning signs. Get information and support from local agencies if you feel your child may be at risk.



CONTACTS

- PSNI 028 9065 0222
- Your local HSS Trust (see page 44)
- Barnardo's 028 9067 2366

- **The prostitution of children is a form of sexual exploitation and abuse**
- **Children can be abused and exploited through prostitution by manipulative adults who wish to make money**
- **Adults who abuse and exploit children are responsible, not the children**
- **Children abused through prostitution face severe physical, emotional and psychological risks**
- **It's never too early or too late to get help**

abused through prostitution

How can it happen?

It may be hard to imagine how any child could be abused through prostitution. The sad fact is that those who benefit from abusing children in this way use sophisticated methods to lure their victims in, and keep them there. It can begin with an 'exciting' new relationship with an older boyfriend who may in fact be, or become, a pimp (adult abuser). The child may receive expensive gifts and be introduced to alcohol and/or drugs. Before long the adult abuser creates a loyal and dependent relationship with the victim and can then persuade or force them to make money for him by providing sexual services to others. But this is not a business relationship - it is an illegal form of sexual abuse, which puts the child involved at risk from severe physical, emotional and psychological damage.

The damage

Children abused through prostitution can become victims of serious physical and sexual attacks, which can sometimes be fatal. They can easily become addicted to drugs and alcohol and face a high risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. The emotional and psychological damage can be devastating and can lead to self-harm, severe depression and suicide.

How to spot it

There are some warning signs detailed on the opposite page that could indicate that your child

is at risk from, or is being abused through prostitution. If all, or even some, of them apply to your child, you should consider that they might be at risk. Boys and girls of any age can be victims of sexual exploitation. The abuser may be a stranger but can be a family member or a friend.

How to stop it

Preventing children from being abused in this way or helping them exit it can require specialist help. A close and positive relationship with your child can reduce their vulnerability. Ensuring that they have high self-esteem and feel good about themselves can prevent them falling prey to abusive relationships. However, even with the best parents in the world, some children will find themselves vulnerable to this form of abuse. Parents can often feel powerless to intervene in what can be a complex and threatening situation.

A number of organisations (see Contacts) work with families to combat abuse through prostitution. If you feel your child is at risk they can provide information and support for you and your child to help avoid dangerous relationships. If your child is abused, or at risk of being abused, through prostitution they will work with you and your child to form an individual plan and package of support to ensure that they are no longer left vulnerable to those who wish to exploit them. It is never too early or too late to get help.

“ Sometimes it feels like you are in a goldfish bowl and everybody is watching you, waiting for you to make a mistake. ”

Teenage pregnancy & sexual activity



WARNING SIGNS

Young people will not always tell you if there is something that is worrying them. Good communication with your children is very important. You need to be attentive to their needs and let them know that you are there and be prepared to listen.



ACTION

It is important that your child knows where to get reliable information on birth control and prevention of sexually transmitted infections. If you think your daughter may be pregnant, ensure she sees her GP.



WHAT TO SAY

Talk to your children about relationships and sexuality. If you think your child is sexually active it is important to talk to them about practising safer sex.



PREVENTION

It is important that your child has the knowledge and skills that will help them build self-esteem and strong relationships while postponing sexual activity.



CONTACTS

- PSNI 028 9065 0222
- Barnardo's Young Parents' Network 028 9047 3856
- Brook Advisory Clinic 028 9032 8866
- Family Planning Association 028 9032 5488
- Your GP
- School Age Mums Project www.youngmums.org.uk
- Parents Advice Centre 0808 801 0722

- **Northern Ireland's rate of teenage pregnancy is among the highest in Europe**
- **Take the initiative in raising the issues about relationships and sexuality with your son or daughter**
- **Most young people aged under 17 are not having sex**
- **Stress the importance of making responsible decisions in a relationship and not being forced into having sex because "everybody is doing it"**
- **Try not to be judgmental, but don't be afraid to say if you think an activity may be unhealthy or could put them at risk**
- **Your child will learn by example - they will learn your family's way of doing things based on your values, culture, faith and belief**

talking to teenagers

Children will learn about sex whether you want them to or not. Sex is everywhere around us - in magazines and newspapers, in advertisements and soap operas. Children and young people also learn about sex from each other - and what gets passed on in the playground may not be accurate or what parents want them to hear!

All these confusing messages may lead young people into situations they don't know how to deal with. Adolescence is often seen as a time of heightened conflict between parents and children. This is a particularly important time to maintain communication with your children even though this may not always be easy. Good communication with your children helps reduce risk taking behaviour.

You might feel concerned that by discussing sex and relationships, particularly at an early age, you will encourage your children to start having sex when they're very young. But research has proved that the opposite is true. Teenagers from families who talk frankly about sex wait until they are older before they start having sex and they are more likely to use contraceptives.

Most young people aged under 17 are not sexually active but the numbers rise sharply after that age. All young people need information about sex, sexually transmitted infections, HIV/Aids, pregnancy and contraception to help them make informed choices.

If you feel uncomfortable or unsure about talking about sex with your children don't let this put you off. Sex education shouldn't be a one-off talk but a gradual process of communication. If your children grow up knowing it's okay to discuss sex and the feelings they have with you, then they're much more likely to come to you for support when they need it.

The Northern Ireland rate of teenage pregnancy is among the highest in Europe. Since 1998 there has been a considerable reduction in the number of births to teenage mothers in Northern Ireland but there were still over 1500 births in 2002 and sexually transmitted infections are also increasing among young people. Giving your children support, information and help to feel good about themselves can lessen the chances of both.

Temper tantrums

“Not only has he learned to walk and talk, but now he’s learned to stamp his foot, argue, scream until he’s bright red and embarrass me in public on a regular basis. What’s happened to my baby?”



WARNING SIGNS

It could happen anywhere, but watch out for a tired or hungry child in any situation when he or she wants something that you have said “No” to, especially when out shopping, or during a social event or a day out.



ACTION

Keep calm, consider whether your child needs food or rest. Give your child attention and if possible, find a quiet place or some way of distracting his or her attention. Don’t give in, but do try to understand your child’s feelings. If necessary, be prepared to cut short your trip out. (see also section on Positive parenting)



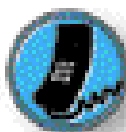
WHAT TO SAY

Try to offer your child a choice or a positive way out. Be calm and understanding. Keep it simple and clear. Praise your child for calming down afterwards.



PREVENTION

Avoid long shopping trips or tiring days out. It often helps to give your child extra attention and affection. Try to foresee possible causes for tantrums in the day ahead and find ways to avoid them.



CONTACTS

- Health visitor or GP
- Parents Advice Centre
0808 801 0722

- **1 in 5 two-year-olds has a tantrum at least twice a day**
- **The 'Terrible Twos' are a normal part of your child's development**
- **Getting angry is a natural reaction but it just makes the situation worse**
- **Be firm and find a positive way to deal with the problem**
- **Plan to avoid the causes of tantrums**
- **Remember, tantrums won't last forever!**

When every day is a difficult day

Why temper tantrums happen

Tantrums may start around 18 months, are common around two years old and become much less common at four. Very young children are often not able to express themselves as much as they want to and their frustration may come out as a tantrum.

Tantrums also often happen in busy, public places, which can be highly embarrassing and add to the parents' stress.

If you are worried about your child's behaviour discuss your concerns with your health visitor or GP.

Dealing with temper tantrums

- Keep calm. Getting angry and shouting at your child will only make things worse.
- Your child might be tired or hungry so rest or food might help. Or they might just need some attention or comfort.
- Try to find a distraction. Finding something else interesting to do or look at can help. If you're in a busy or noisy place try to go somewhere quieter.
- If none of the above works, try to see things from your child's point of view and understand what they actually want. Try offering them a choice, as this gives your child a sense of control and can be more effective than simply saying "no". Always try to offer a positive way out.
- If you do say "no" don't be tempted to give in later to calm them down. If you give in your

child will repeat the tantrums as a means of getting their own way.

- If you're at home you can try ignoring the tantrum, perhaps walking away into another room if it's safe to do so. Encourage your child to cool down on their own and talk more calmly about what they want.
- After the tantrum, praise your child for settling down. Even though they may no longer be angry they may still be upset, so give them a cuddle and make it clear that you still love them no matter what.

Avoiding temper tantrums

You can reduce the likelihood of a tantrum by planning ahead:

- Try to avoid your child becoming hungry or overtired.
- Make sure your child is getting enough personal attention and affection.
- Make sure your time together is quality time together especially if you work for most of the day.
- Keep shopping trips and outings as short as possible.
- Try to plan a regular method that you'll use to deal with tantrums when they do happen.

Remember, temper tantrums are normal and do not usually lead to serious problems. As your child gets older they will learn to deal more calmly with the stresses of everyday life. (See also sections on Positive parenting and Don't shake the baby).

“Everyday I hear the young child next door crying, her parents constantly shout at her. Yesterday, in the street, I saw her mother hit her hard across the side of the head. This is probably none of my business but I am worried and not sure what to do.”

Worried about a child?



WARNING SIGNS

There are many possible signs of abuse, ranging from physical injury to changes in behaviour. Alternatively, you may witness an incident or a child may tell you that he/she is being harmed.



ACTION

If you think that a child has been harmed, contact the social services or the police. If you are not sure, you can speak to a confidential helpline, namely the NSPCC.



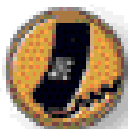
WHAT TO SAY

Explain exactly what you have seen or been told. If you can, keep a note of dates, injuries and the exact words used. These will help you to explain.



PREVENTION

Make sure your child knows who they can share worries with if and when they need to. Listen carefully to children and be alert to changes in them.



CONTACTS

- Your local HSS Trust (see page 44)
- PSNI
028 9065 0222
- NSPCC
0800 800 5000
- Parents Advice Centre
0800 8801 0722

- **Protecting children is everybody's business**
- **Adults have a responsibility to report abuse**
- **Consider offering some support if you are worried**
- **If in doubt, share your concerns about children**
- **Reporting concerns rarely leads to a child being removed from the care of parents**
- **Act now - long-term abuse is damaging for children**

should you mind your own business?

All parents experience difficulties at various times that can be helped by other family members or close friends. The legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland means parents may experience additional difficulties.

If someone you know is having difficulties, you could offer the following:

- A listening ear.
- Ideas to cope with problems.
- Encouragement to get some help.
- Practical support (childcare/shopping).

However, there may be times when a child may be at risk of abuse and professional support needs to be provided.

How would you want other people to act if your child was being harmed?

- Would you want them to mind their own business?
- To report their worry to a professional who could help?

When we suspect, witness or are told of a child that is being hurt we can react in many

different ways. We may feel guilt, anger, disbelief or denial. Some of these reactions can prevent help getting to a family who need it.

Many people do not tell because they fear the following:

- Children will be at further risk of harm.
- They believe that nothing will be done.
- They believe that the child would be taken away.
- They worry that the family may find out who reported them.
- Telling may ruin family relationships.

In reality, it is best that action is taken early to protect the child and stop things getting worse. Long-term abuse is much more likely to cause problems for a child as they get older. Even if you think an incident is just a one-off, other professional agencies may already have concerns about the child. So your information could be very important. All agencies will treat any information received on a confidential basis.

Helpful Organisations

Organisations listed here are key organisations who will be able to signpost you to the appropriate organisation if they cannot help.

Barnardo's
028 9067 2366 www.barnardos.org

Barnardo's Young Parents Network
028 9047 3856
<http://services.barnardos.org/youngparentsbelfast/>

Brook Advisory Clinic
028 9032 8866 www.brook.org.uk

Child Accident Prevention Trust
020 7608 3828 www.capt.org.uk

Children in Northern Ireland
028 9065 2713 www.ci-ni.org.uk

Children's Law Centre
028 9024 5704
www.childrenslawcentre.org

Contact a Family
0808 808 3555 freephone helpline
www.cafamily.org

Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety (DHSSPS)
028 9052 0500 www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

Disability Action
028 9029 7880 www.disabilityaction.org

EDUCATION & LIBRARY BOARDS

- **Belfast ELB**
028 9056 4006 www.belb.org.uk

- **North Eastern ELB**
028 2566 2296 www.neelb.org.uk

- **South Eastern ELB**
028 9056 6200 www.seelb.org.uk

- **Southern ELB**
028 3751 2200 www.selb.org

- **Western ELB**
028 8241 1411 www.welbni.org

Employers for Childcare
0800 028 3008
www.employersforchildcare.org

Education and Resources for Improving Childhood Continence (ERIC)
0845 370 8008
www.eric.org.uk

Family Planning Association
028 9032 5488 www.fpa.org.uk

Gingerbread
028 9023 1417
e: enquiries@gingerbreadni.org

Health Promotion Agency
028 9031 1611
www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk

Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI)
www.hseni.gov.uk/kids.cfm

HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES BOARDS

- **Eastern HSS Board**
028 90321313 www.ehssb.n-i.nhs.uk

- **Northern HSS Board**
028 2565 3333 www.nhssb.n-i.nhs.uk

- **Southern HSS Board**
028 3741 0041 www.shssb.org

- **Western HSS Board**
028 7186 0086 www.whssb.org

HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES TRUSTS

- **Altnagelvin Hospitals HSS Trust**
028 7134 5171

- **Armagh & Dungannon HSS Trust**
028 3752 2381

- **Belfast City Hospital HSS Trust**
028 9032 9241

- **Causeway HSS Trust**
028 2766 6600

- **Craigavon & Banbridge Community HSS Trust**
028 3883 1983

- **Craigavon Area Hospital Group HSS Trust**
028 3833 4444

- **Down Lisburn HSS Trust**
028 9266 5181

- **Foyle HSS Trust**
028 7126 6111

- **Green Park HSS Trust**
028 9066 9501

- **Homefirst Community HSS Trust**
028 2563 3700

- **Mater Infirmorum Hospital HSS Trust**
028 9074 1211
- **Newry & Mourne HSS Trust**
028 3026 0505
- **North & West Belfast HSS Trust**
028 9032 7156
- **Royal Group of Hospitals and Dental Hospital HSS Trust**
028 9024 0503
- **South & East Belfast HSS Trust**
028 9056 5556
- **Sperrin Lakeland HSS Trust**
028 8283 5285
- **Ulster Community & Hospitals Trust**
028 9181 6666
- **United Hospitals HSS Trust**
028 9442 4673

Homestart N.I.
028 9046 0772 www.home-start.org.uk

Kidscape
08451 205 204 www.kidscape.org.uk

Lifestart Foundation Ltd.
028 7136 5363

Mencap
Understanding learning disability
0845 7636227 www.mencap.org.uk

Message Home (for young people to get a message to their parents)
0808 800 7070
www.missingpersons.org

Missing Persons Helpline
0500 700 700 (24hrs)
www.missingpersons.org

National Drugs Helpline
0800 77 66 00
24 hour free advice

NCH - National Children's Charity
www.nch.org.uk

NICEM - N.I. Council for Ethnic Minorities
028 9023 8645

NIPPA - The early years organisation
028 9066 2825 www.nippa.org

Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA)
028 9181 1015 www.nicma.org

Northern Ireland Online
www.onlineni.net

Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation
028 9033 1818 www.niwaaf.org

NSPCC
0808 800 5000 www.nspcc.org.uk

Parents Advice Centre
0808 801 0722 - Freephone helpline
www.pachelp.org
e: parents@pachelp.org

Playboard
028 9080 3380
e: ceoffice@playboard.co.uk

PSNI
028 9065 0222

Raising Kids
0208 444 4852
www.raisingkids.co.uk

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)
028 9050 1160 www.rospace.co.uk

School Age Mums Project
www.youngmums.org.uk

The Family Trauma Centre
1 Wellington Park Belfast
028 9020 4700

VDA Volunteer Development Agency
028 9023 6100 www.volunteering-ni.org

Useful Publications

Bullying

A toolkit for parents
Produced by Parents Advice Centre

Childcare Advice Leaflets

Available from Employers for Childcare

Department of Education

Leaflets available from www.deni.gov.uk

Encouraging Better Behaviour

NSPCC leaflet

First Steps to Safety

RoSPA leaflet

Handle with Care - a guide to positive parenting

Available from Parents Advice Centre

Health Promotion Agency

Leaflets available from the Central Health Promotion Unit of your local HSS Board:

Weaning made easy

Getting a good start

Nutrition matters for the early years

Home Alone

NSPCC leaflet

Opportunities for Safety Education

RoSPA leaflet

Reduce the Risk of Cot Death

Available from the Central Health Promotion Unit of your local HSS Board

The Incredible Years: A Guide for Parents of Children 3-8 years old

Available from the following website www.incredibleyears.com

Toddler Taming

Produced by Dr Christopher Green



Department of
Health, Social Services
and Public Safety

**Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Child Care Policy Directorate**

Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SQ



**Eastern Area Child Protection Committee
Eastern Health and Social Services Board**

Champion House
12-22 Linenhall Street
Belfast
BT2 8BS



**Northern Area Child Protection Committee
Northern Health and Social Services Board**

182 Galgorm Road
Ballymena
BT42 1QB



**Southern Area Child Protection Committee
Southern Health and Social Services Board**

Tower Hill
Armagh
BT61 9DR



**Western Area Child Protection Committee
Western Health and Social Services Board**

15 Gransha Park
Clooney Road
Londonderry
BT47 6TG