

7 Minute Briefing- **Emotional Neglect**

Emotional abuse is any type of abuse that involves the continual emotional mistreatment of a child. It's sometimes called psychological abuse. Emotional abuse can involve deliberately trying to scare, humiliate, isolate, or ignore a child.

Emotional abuse is often a part of other kinds of abuse, which means it can be difficult to spot the signs or tell the difference, though it can also happen on its own.

Types of Emotional Neglect include:

- humiliating or constantly criticising a child
- threatening, shouting at a child or calling them names
- making the child the subject of jokes, or using sarcasm to hurt a child
- blaming and scapegoating
- making a child perform degrading acts
- not recognising a child's own individuality or trying to control their lives
- pushing a child too hard or not recognising their limitations
- exposing a child to upsetting events or situations, like domestic abuse or drug taking
- failing to promote a child's social development
- not allowing them to have friends
- persistently ignoring them
- being absent
- manipulating a child
- never saying anything kind, expressing positive feelings or congratulating a child on successes
- never showing any emotions in interactions with a child, also known as emotional neglect.

Signs of emotional neglect

As children grow up, their emotions change. This means it can be difficult to tell if they're being emotionally abused. But children who are being emotionally abused might:

- seem unconfident or lack self-assurance
- struggle to control their emotions
- have difficulty making or maintaining relationships
- act in a way that's inappropriate for their age.
- The signs of emotional abuse can also be different for children at different ages.



Signs in babies and toddlers

Babies and pre-school children who are being emotionally abused or neglected might:

- be overly affectionate to strangers or people they don't know well
- seem unconfident, wary or anxious
- not have a close relationship or bond with their parent
- be aggressive or cruel towards other children or animals.

Research shows that conception to age two is a crucial phase of human development.

Signs in older children

Older children might:

- use language you wouldn't expect them to know for their age
- act in a way or know about things you wouldn't expect them to know for their age
- struggle to control their emotions
- have extreme outbursts
- seem isolated from their parents
- lack social skills
- have few or no friends.

Emotional neglect is traumatic for a child in that over time it becomes overwhelming to a child's developing emotional system leading to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's).

Effects of neglect

Neglect changes childhood. Children who've been neglected might experience short-term and long-term effects. These can include:

- problems with brain development
- taking risks, like running away from home, using drugs and alcohol or breaking the law
- getting into dangerous relationships
- difficulty with relationships later in life, including with their own children
- a higher chance of having mental health problems, including depression.

Children with disabilities

Children with disabilities are more vulnerable to neglect. Sullivan and Knutson (2000) suggest they are 3.8 times more likely to be neglected for various reasons.

Neglect of basic care should not be confused with a lack of resources.

Who would /could help the family?

- Multi-agency approach
- Discussing concerns with the parent/ caregiver
- Understanding and taking into consideration parental experiences of being parented
- Gathering information to support around the route cause- example, mental health causing stress and short temper parents reacting without consideration- referral to GP/ mindsmatter etc- then review impact.
- Consider parenting support- referral to triple P or completed one to one.

