

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark, curly hair, smiling and looking upwards. She is wearing a light-colored, possibly white, t-shirt. The background is bright and out of focus, suggesting an outdoor setting like a beach or a park.

napac

The National Association for
People Abused in Childhood

Survivors?

Booklet 1

Supporting recovery from childhood abuse

Survivors?

"I really need help, as I was raped as a child. I still have nightmares. Some days I feel I just can't do it any more, but I have a nine year old son and I have to remain strong for him. I would just like some help please, as this is my last hope."



What is a survivor?
How do you know if you're a survivor?
What is child abuse?
Why isn't there enough support for survivors?
What makes somebody abuse children?

Does the fact that I was abused mean that I am now a danger to children?

I want to make the world a better place.

I want to shout and scream and make abusers stop!

The word 'survivor' can have different connotations in different circumstances but here at NAPAC 'survivors' are adults who were abused as children. It's not a description that everyone feels comfortable with but the term survivor has been widely adopted by those of us who have survived childhood abuse. Often people refer to survivors as those that have escaped car crashes, or fires, or airline disasters. The sad fact is that some things happen that should never happen – and anyone who survives such things has the right to call themselves a survivor.

Many of us were quite surprised when we were told we were survivors. We didn't feel like survivors. Instead we felt like failures and good-for-nothings. We felt low and we were hurting. We had some good days but we had a whole load of bad days. We felt like imposters when people called us survivors.

There are many different types of child abuse and it exists on a huge scale.

Childhood abuse has many devastating effects. Being survivors doesn't mean that we have to have everything sorted out. Being survivors means we have recognised that we have been through something that should never have happened and we now want to let our wounds heal. If you were abused in any way as a child, then you have the right to call yourself a survivor. Abuse is the inappropriate, cruel or dangerous use of power. Adults have power over children, but so do older or stronger children.

All abuse of children is serious and fits into a number of categories which include:

Physical abuse

Sexual abuse

Emotional or psychological abuse

Neglect

Organised abuse



Physical abuse

Physical abuse involves contact intended to cause feelings of intimidation, pain, injury, or other physical suffering or harm such as:

- Throwing or knocking down
- Burning or scalding on purpose
- Threatening with a knife or gun
- Giving a child harmful drugs or alcohol
- Hitting with or without an implement
- Kicking
- Shaking
- Choking
- Poisoning
- Slapping
- Beating up
- Smothering

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse happens when a child is involved in any sexual activity (contact or non-contact) such as:

- Oral sex
- Explicit sexual talk
- Inappropriate kissing
- Showing pornography
- Vaginal or anal penetration
- Lack of privacy to bath or undress
- Exposing sexual organs to the child
- Touching a child's genitals or breasts
- Encouraging a child to touch another's genitals or breasts
- Watching or encouraging children to engage in sexual activities

**All abuse is wrong. No child should ever be abused.
Child abuse is never the child's fault. You are not alone.**

Emotional or psychological abuse

Emotional or psychological abuse happens when children are subjected to psychologically harmful behaviours which cause a child to lose confidence and their sense of self-worth. It is associated with situations of power imbalance. Narcissistic parents may be more interested in their own needs than in the child's needs. Emotional or psychological abuse may include:

- Threats
- Name-calling
- Constant put-downs
- Withholding love and affection
- Frightening and intimidating a child
- Silent treatment / ignoring a child
- Misuse of drugs or alcohol
- Being treated differently from siblings
- Public or private ridicule or humiliation
- Giving conflicting and/or inconsistent messages

Neglect

Neglect happens when the responsible adult fails (beyond constraints imposed by poverty) to adequately provide for the needs of a child. There are four main areas of neglect; physical, emotional, educational and medical, including:

- Failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, hygiene or supervision
- Failure to satisfy a child's normal emotional needs
- Displaying behaviour that damages a child's normal emotional and psychological development
- Failing to see that a child receives proper schooling, either persistent truancy not being addressed or a child being denied an education
- Failing to seek medical care for the child when appropriate

Organised abuse

Organised abuse is defined as a range of circumstances in which multiple children are subject to sexual abuse by multiple perpetrators, often over a long period of time. Organised abuse often includes child sexual exploitation where a child is offered gifts or money. Organised abuse may include situations where:

- The child is groomed for sexual abuse within the family before being passed on to strangers
- The child is abused within institutions such as care homes, church or schools
- The child is abused as part of initiations by stronger or older children or adolescents or gang members
- The child is forced into child sexual exploitation
- The child is made to believe s/he is in a loving, consensual relationship with one abuser before being passed on to other abusers
- The child is taken to parties and given drugs and alcohol before being abused
- The child is abused as part of the manufacture of abuse images for distribution
- The child is tortured
- The child is made to abuse other children or recruit other child victims
- The child is manipulated—through threat, deceit or controlling behaviour—to ensure compliance and prevent disclosure
- Children may be blackmailed or persuaded into sending or posting sexually explicit images of themselves; taking part in sexual activities via a webcam or smartphone; have sexual conversations by text or online

Organised abuse can involve particularly violent, humiliating and degrading sexual assaults.

Ritual abuse may be used by groups to frighten children into silence and co-operation. The perpetrators may subscribe to a belief system which, for them, justifies the abuse of children. Children may be intimidated or coerced into abusing other children or made to witness abuse.

We should never forget that the perpetrators of abuse are entirely responsible for that abuse

Abuse is primarily carried out behind closed doors and perpetuated using fear, silence, isolation, embarrassment, shame and guilt.

People who are abused will often not speak about it for many years. It's probably the biggest crime we have in this country but it's also the most secretive. It's a massive problem.

The types of abuse described here happen to countless children on a daily basis within the UK and given that most of those children survive into adulthood... a question that frequently arises is:

'Why isn't there enough support for abuse survivors?'

The abuse of power by adults to hurt children in any way is disempowering for the child.

NAPAC exists to support survivors in taking that power back.



Children are an easy target

In order to justify their choices, abusers come up with all sorts of nonsense. For example:

'They need to hear negative things to toughen them up'

'They need to learn to defend themselves'

'In other countries girls are married at 13 and have babies'

'They deserved it, without proper discipline children get out of control'

'I'm expressing love'

'I am preparing them for sexual relationships when they are older'

This is all nonsense.

Abuse is very much about power and control or rather the misuse of power and control

Ultimately we need to get to grips with society's failings to really understand where abuse comes from – it is a massive problem.

Abuse is always a choice. Abusers always make a choice when it comes to abusing children.

It is a myth that all those who were abused will become abusers

The myth is often peddled by abusers who want their victims to remain silent. Survivors often end up worrying that they are destined to hurt children because of what happened to them. This is enough to stop many from seeking the support they need and deserve.

Abusers use this myth as an excuse when they get caught, hoping they will be let off the hook if they disclose that they were traumatised in childhood.

There is never an excuse for child abuse

We know that as survivors we sometimes have a tendency to want to save the world from abusers by making as much noise as possible. There's certainly a lot we can all do to help prevent abuse.

We can report abusers if they are still at large and we can speak out in appropriate ways.

We can make the world a better place with small steps and at our own pace.

We have to remember that the majority of the population have not suffered child abuse. A significant minority have but we need to carry that majority with us in order to have an effective voice.

Let's not frighten people off by screaming at them – let's instead engage them in important conversations where solutions can be discussed.

It's important that we take time to get help for ourselves first before trying to save the rest of the world.

It's like being on a plane when the oxygen masks fall... we need to first fit our own mask before we help others fit theirs.

A Survivor...

- ...A survivor is strong because they have lived through something really awful.
- ...A survivor can be whole again because there are people who care.
- ...A survivor has stamina and determination because they have made it this far.
- ...A survivor is courageous because they are raising their voice against abusers.
- ...A survivor is compassionate because they know the importance of being loving.
- ...A survivor is unique because there is no-one in the world just like them.
- ...A survivor is free because they have fought for that freedom.
- ...A survivor is extraordinary because they've survived.
- ...A survivor can be anyone they want to be because they have options.
- ...A survivor can make a difference to the world because they have willpower and strength.
- ...A survivor can take back control of their lives because it's their right.

A soft-focus background of a lavender field with purple flowers and green stems. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

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napac.org.uk

Support line 0808 801 0331

Free from landlines and mobiles

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