



napac

The National Association for
People Abused in Childhood

Was it really abuse?

Booklet 2

Supporting recovery from childhood abuse

Was it really abuse?

“Things started to change when they got married, and over the next few years I got more and more aware of him touching me in ways I wasn’t completely comfortable with. Odd things he would say to me like: ‘I’m sorry, it’s because you’re so beautiful’, ‘I love you like I love your mum’.”



Can I call it abuse?

It wasn't sexual abuse...

I wasn't raped so I'm not sure if it counts as abuse...

Why is most of the support for survivors of sexual abuse?

What about the rest of us who were abused in other ways?

It only happened the one time and it wasn't really serious - so why do I feel so bad?

Others have been abused far worse than me...

I was one of the lucky ones really...

Maybe they didn't mean to do it...

Maybe they couldn't help it...

Do females abuse as well as males?

Abuse is defined as someone using a position of power to cause significant harm. So if you are still struggling with what happened to you and if the memories of what happened still bring you pain or distress then sadly you were abused.

Not all abuse is sexual, and it doesn't have to be sexual abuse for you to call it abuse and for you to get support.


The media tend to focus on sexual abuse.

At NAPAC we know that sexual abuse is a massive problem – but we also know it's not the only problem.

We know from experience that other forms of abuse - physical, emotional and neglect - are also very damaging to the individual.

That's why NAPAC is dedicated to supporting survivors of all types of abuse – not just sexual abuse.

There are still pitifully few resources in the UK for survivors of childhood abuse. A lot of the support that is available is for survivors of sexual abuse. Again, this tends to be because of the media's focus on sexual abuse.



“For years it seemed like I was getting nowhere. I reported my story to the police, they could do nothing. I told my mum the story and my behaviour at that time made more sense to her. But then one day I realised the frightening nightmares, waking soaked in sweat and screaming had stopped.”

The result is that attention is frequently diverted away from the other forms of abuse which we know still exist and are just as harmful.

Society hasn't yet seen the significance of other types of abuse. This needs to change.

With many types of abuse there is no physical 'evidence'. The emotional impacts of abuse are not so easily 'fixable' because people can't see them and people aren't talking about them.

As the wide range of impacts across all types of abuse become better acknowledged we hope more specialist support will become available. It doesn't have to be rape for you to call it sexual abuse and for you to get support.

For many survivors it is the emotional impact of any type of cruelty on their self-esteem and shame that are the hardest things to live with.

It doesn't have to have happened more than once for you to call it abuse and for you to get support.

There is no minimum requirement of the number of times abuse occurs for you to be allowed to call it abuse.

Once is too much

At NAPAC we hear from people who have been abused on a single occasion and are struggling to cope.

We hear from other people who have been abused many times throughout their childhood who seem to be finding things easier to handle.

There is no hierarchy of abuse. There is no grading of what was better or what was worse.

All abuse is bad whether it happened once or whether it happened a thousand times – it can leave you feeling equally bad and in need of support.

There will always be someone out there who seems to be worse off in life than ourselves. We may have a tendency to say that what happened to us was ‘insignificant’ when compared to the experiences of others. But let’s not go there because diminishing our own experience of abuse really only serves to play into the hands of abusers.

All abuse is bad. Let’s not minimise what happened to us, let’s not overstate what happened to us, let’s just state the reality – that it was very bad, it shouldn’t have happened, it has had devastating consequences and we have a right to move on.

What happened to you is worth you getting support and you don’t have to make it sound any worse than it was. What happened to you was bad enough for you to deserve support if that is what you want.

Abuse isn't a gender issue

Both males and females can be abused and both males and females can be abusers.

Males, females, cis, trans, agender or non-binary people can be abused or be abusers.

It’s all abuse.

Many people who call NAPAC were abused by a woman – most commonly their mother. This includes sexual abuse. As women are often stereotyped as a caring nurturing gender, this can come as a big shock to some.

Abuse isn't an age issue

An abuser does not have to be an adult.

An older, bigger or more powerful child can abuse another child.

If you were pressured, or coerced, or didn't understand, if you did not want it to happen but couldn't prevent it, it was abuse.

Child abuse is always a choice

Child abuse isn't about compulsion, illness or misfortune. It's about making choices. People who abuse children always make a choice to do so and that choice is never justifiable.

Even if an abuser had suffered horrific childhood abuse themselves - it is never an excuse for them to pass that on.

People who abuse children always know what they are doing. It's always a choice... and it's always the wrong choice.

Sometimes it's not easy to see that what happened to us was abusive. A useful exercise may be to imagine a child (at the age that you were at) going through the experience that you'd been through. Would you call what was happening to that imaginary child abusive? If you would then what happened to you was also abusive and you can call it abuse.



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