

## Just What Do We Mean

For most people, the word abuse implies violent and malicious behavior. In fact, most mistreatment does NOT fall into that category. ALL MISTREATMENT LEAVES EMOTIONAL SCARS There are several basic types of mistreatment, but one thing that all types of mistreatment have in common is that they all cause great mental suffering. It's important to realize that this damage occurs even if the abuse is committed out of ignorance or exhaustion or any other mitigating factors.

Children have no way of discerning between intentional or unintentional harm. To them, it all hurts just the same. PHYSICAL MISTREATMENT AND NEGLECT Physical abuse includes any kind of corporal punishment: hitting, pushing, slapping, burning, biting, and even yanking. You often see parents yanking their children by the arm as if they were dragging something by a leash. These behaviors may or may not leave physical scars, but the emotional scars always remain. There is also neglect, which is a deprivation of basic necessities: food, clothing, shelter, medical attention or adequate supervision. Leaving children alone who are too young to be in charge of themselves and their own safety is not only dangerous. It is cruel. The child might assure the parents that it's okay with him because he senses that that's what his parents want. In reality, the child may be terrified of staying alone and even more afraid to say so. WITNESSING PHYSICAL ABUSE IS EQUALLY ABUSIVE Most people do not recognize that just witnessing physical abuse is also horrifying and extremely damaging. If the parents beat up on each other and the kid is forced to watch or hear or even witness the aftermath, no one gets out of that scenario unscathed. SEXUAL ABUSE IS NOT CONFINED TO INTERCOURSE Sexual abuse occurs when a child is forced, tricked, or threatened to engage in any kind of sexual behavior. It is not limited to penetration or fellatio or fondling. It includes even watching or listening to any kind of sexual activity. Most people do not realize that sexual violation also occurs when there is a distortion of boundaries: • Grown-ups walking in on kids without regard for their intimate space • Grown-ups being too seductively clad or unclad • Ogling the child in a state of undress • Making sexual observations about someone's body These are all inappropriate behaviors and they leave the child feeling very confused and uneasy. They might not understand why they feel bad, but it becomes a great source of discomfort from there on out. EMOTIONAL ABUSE IS DIFFICULT TO DETECT The most difficult type of abuse to identify is emotional or psychological in nature. It is very subtle and difficult to recognize because so much of it is a non-behavior, such as giving someone the cold shoulder or the silent treatment, or simply not being present. The fact that a parent may be doing something legitimate like working and not just hanging out in some bar does nothing to alter the fact that the child is deprived of his parent's company, guidance and affection. A parent can be physically present but emotionally unavailable. Some parents may have too many responsibilities and not enough time or energy for their children. Others are simply ill-equipped to offer proper nurturance or psychological support. The term emotional orphan comes to mind. Another thing that makes emotional abuse hard to pinpoint is the fact that the victim is not outwardly mangled. Emotionally abusive behaviors include: • yelling • belittling, criticizing • blocking, stifling • too demanding of perfection • domineering, controlling • name-calling, ridiculing, mocking • not taking interest, ignoring • not showing affection or physical contact • constant complaining about providing necessities • general absence or unavailability. Threats of abandonment or withdrawal of love are very frightening and a very cruel form of discipline. Other forms of psychological abuse are over-protection, adulation and overly doting behaviors. And then there is over-reliance on a child, referred to as emotional incest, where the child is used to fulfill a void left by an absent partner. All of these behaviors distort healthy development and growth. Muddled boundaries make it difficult to form and sustain healthy human relationships later in life. Now, using these parameters, it's safe to say that the vast majority of people have been abused to one degree or another. Unfortunately, these types of behavior are far too common and many of us have been affected more deeply than we care to admit. However, until we acknowledge the truth of our personal history, we will continue to expend tremendous amounts of psychic energy trying to squelch the pain of these subconscious wounds. In the meantime, it is my hope that a greater understanding of how much long-term damage these behaviors cause might prevent us from perpetuating such mistreatment. With a bit of attention and intention, the abuse can stop here.

## About the Author

Food Franchise provides a comprehensive directory of food franchises including coffee franchise, pizza franchise, fast food franchises, ice cream franchise.

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