

## UNDERSTANDING CHILDHOOD ABUSE

Many children have been exposed to one or a series of significant life events that place considerable stress on them. These may include witnessing a range of violent actions that involve a parent(s). They may have been part of this violence and received beatings or other physical punishments.

They may have experienced lots of ongoing criticisms. There may have been statements that consistently suggest that the child is worthless, useless, or generally bad in some way. The child(ren) may have witnessed violence towards you or other members of your family. These kinds of experiences are typically thought of as *emotional abuse*.

Children who have been exposed to *sexual abuse* will have typically experienced sexual contact with an adult or older child that is not appropriate for their age. Last but not least, is the category of neglect..... This is a particularly difficult experience for children and may go undetected for much longer than other types of abuse simply because it is not so obvious. Children may not be given enough food, their bedding may be old and dirty, and their clothes may be very inadequate for the weather. This kind of *physical neglect* also goes along with *emotional neglect*. Children who are emotionally neglected have been unloved, ignored, never cuddled, and generally considered as either not there or just a nuisance.

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY TRAUMA

All of these kinds of experiences affect children. But not all children respond in the same way. As a parent, you may find yourself in a situation where you can see one of your children is behaving quite differently from another. To some extent the child's reactions and behaviours will depend on their age and for how long they have experienced the stresses we talked about above.

Trauma symptoms are what happen when children have experienced an event or even a series of events where they felt **unsafe** and **unprotected**. These symptoms may only last for a short time and can go away when a child is in a safe place and feels cared for. For some children the trauma symptoms may be longer lasting and may affect many different areas of their lives.