Worried about a child?

A guide for Jewish communities
The NSPCC is dedicated to keeping children from all cultural and religious backgrounds in the UK safe. So this booklet addresses concerns that you may have around taking action to protect a child from abuse. It provides information on abuse, how children can be protected and gives guidance on where to go for help and support. The information and advice was informed by members of the Jewish community as well as statutory child protection agencies.

We’re here to help. If you’re worried about a child, you can call our helpline on 0808 800 5000.
What is child abuse?

Every child’s situation is different but the most common types of abuse are:

- **Physical abuse**
  This involves the hurting or injuring of a child by ways such as hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning and suffocating.

- **Sexual abuse**
  This involves forcing or persuading a child to take part in sexual activities. This could be directly – by touching a child – or indirectly, for example, making a child watch sexual activities or act in a sexualised way. It includes grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Child sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse.

- **Emotional abuse**
  This includes a child being repeatedly rejected, humiliated, bullied, or scared and “denying” their self-worth.

- **Neglect**
  This is the repeated or continued failure to meet a child’s basic needs such as food, warmth and love. It also includes failing to supervise a child effectively and failing to provide an education and access to medical care.

Each form of abuse can have a significant impact on a child. Try to imagine:

- living in fear of being hurt by someone who should be looking after you (physical abuse)
- being forced or threatened into a sexual act against your will (sexual abuse)
- being repeatedly told that “you’re useless and I wish you’d never been born” (emotional abuse)
- being hungry and having no one to turn to (neglect).

Bullying is also abusive and can include both physical and emotional abuse.

Children living in difficult situations, such as growing up with domestic violence, or in households where parents misuse alcohol or other substances or have mental health problems, are particularly vulnerable to abuse. Whatever the reason, if a child is at risk, we believe everything possible should be done to help.
How do I know if a child is being abused?

Abuse happens in all walks of life and in all communities, including Jewish communities. It’s an uncomfortable truth, but child abuse can be committed by anyone – both male and female adults and even other children. This can sadly include people who are close to you, who you’d expect to trust, including members of your family or respected members of your community. Only a small minority of cases of child abuse involve a stranger.

Abuse is frightening and often hidden, so abused children may communicate their distress in different ways other than directly saying what’s happening to them. Some children may also have additional needs or not have the vocabulary, understanding or confidence to say what is happening. In the case of neglect, children rarely talk about it, so it’s vital to recognise the signs. Common concerning signs of different forms of abuse include those in the table opposite.

A child may experience more than one form of abuse. Bullying, anti-Semitic harassment, and witnessing violence in the home are also abusive and can harm a child, both physically and emotionally.
## Types of abuse and what to look out for

### Physical signs of abuse:
- repeated or constant hunger or stealing food from others
- repeatedly or constantly being dirty or smelly
- loss of weight or being constantly underweight
- wearing unseasonal clothing (for example, having no coat in winter).
- unexplained bruising or injuries
- multiple bruises in clusters or in unusual places
- cigarette burns
- human bite marks
- scalds with upward splash marks.

### Changes in behaviour:
- a baby constantly crying
- repeatedly or continually complaining of being tired
- not receiving necessary medical assistance (ie not being taken to appointments)
- having few friends
- being seen or mentioning being left alone or unsupervised
- being quiet and withdrawn
- being angry and moody.

- aggressive behaviour or severe temper outbursts
- flinching when approached or touched
- a reluctance to get changed in front of others
- a baby constantly crying
- depression
- withdrawn behaviour
- running away from home
- fear of their parents being asked for an explanation.

- becoming aggressive or withdrawn
- expressing a fear of being left alone with a specific person
- having nightmares or bedwetting
- running away from home
- having sexual knowledge beyond their developmental stage
- acting in a sexually explicit way towards adults
- sexual drawings or language
- eating disorders, self-harm or suicide attempts
- talking about secrets they can’t share.

- frequent neurotic behaviour (eg sulking, hair twisting or rocking)
- fear of making mistakes
- sudden speech disorders
- self-harm
- signs of depression
- difficulties in interpreting emotions
- aggression and hostility.

### While there may be physical signs, such as looking withdrawn or changes in weight, emotional abuse is mainly identified through changes in behaviour.
How can I help?

Whether a child tells you they are being abused or you have concerns based on other signs, such as their behaviour, it’s important to act on your concerns. Child abuse is unacceptable in all faiths and communities.

If a child tells you they’ve been abused:

1. limit distractions such as people who could interrupt your discussion
2. allow the child to share what they want with you; your role is to listen rather than ask lots of questions
3. offer emotional support; this can include telling them you believe them and will take action to help them
4. explain the next steps you will be taking, which may include speaking to your rabbi and should include immediately reporting what you have been told to the police, local council’s children’s services or the NSPCC helpline
5. reassure them that it’s not their fault and they won’t get into trouble
6. explain that although they may want you to keep this a secret, it’s important to report it
Worried about a child?

If a child decides to tell you that they have been abused, they’ll be looking for your support. While this news may come as a shock, try to compose yourself as quickly as you can, and then follow our tips on the page opposite.

It might never be fully clear why a child has decided to tell someone they’re being abused. Factors such as the abuse getting worse, being unable to cope with the abuse, wanting justice or hoping to protect siblings can all contribute to their decision.

Remember

Dealing with such news may be very upsetting for you and, while it’s important to avoid taking your own action against an abuser, it may be helpful to get support for yourself at a later stage. Your rabbi, family doctor, school nurse, health visitor, or the person responsible for safeguarding in the school, synagogue or shul may be able to help. You can also contact one of the organisations on the last page of this booklet for information and specialist support.

Reporting the abuse

If there is an allegation or suspicion of abuse within a synagogue, shul, yeshiva, school, centre, youth camp or other organisation, you should report it immediately to the person responsible for safeguarding children in that organisation. That person should then contact the local council’s children’s services immediately to investigate.

You might be used to going to your rabbi to seek advice or guidance. However, to help the child and make sure the abuser is dealt with appropriately, child abuse must still be referred to the agencies in the UK that have the legal authority to protect children from harm.

If there are circumstances that mean you feel unable to report the abuse, it’s important that you still seek professional advice.

If the suspected abuser is a member of the community, you may feel uneasy about reporting them. However, please remember that abusing a child is against the law. Religious belief, laws or traditions cannot excuse it.
Things you can do

Even if a child doesn’t tell you they are being abused, there are still things you can do to help them. It may be that the child isn’t ready to tell anyone about what is happening and some children will never feel able to tell, but you can give them support.

You can...

• Build your relationship to help them feel at ease when discussing issues with you.

• Let them know they can always discuss concerns with you in the future if they want. If a child is worried about trying to find the right words, suggest that they may find it easier to write their worries down in a letter. Or let them know that they could speak to another trusted adult.

• Explain that a child never needs to feel alone, even if they have acted in a way they may think others will disapprove of. If you’re comfortable telling the child about ChildLine, then explain that it’s a free and confidential service for children to call (0800 1111) or visit online at childline.org.uk

• Don’t take it personally. There could be a variety of reasons a child doesn’t want to open up to you — ranging from embarrassment to wanting to protect you and the individual — particularly if it is a member of the family or community.

• Talk to someone who works with the child about your worries, for example a teacher, your GP or a health visitor, or discuss your concerns with a trained NSPCC helpline practitioner on 0808 800 5000 for further help and advice.

• Offer support or babysitting to a family under stress. The whole family may benefit from the parents taking a break.
How can I be sure?

It’s natural to worry about how people might react to you reporting a concern. To help with this, you could talk it over with a trusted or close friend. You can also talk to the NSPCC helpline without giving your name. This means that you can help a child while not having to worry about someone knowing it was you who reported the concern.

What if I’m wrong?

You might have doubts about reporting your concerns, and start to think “What if I’m wrong?” But the most important thing to consider is “What if I’m right?” Imagine how hard it would have been for that child to tell you about their situation. If you don’t report your concerns, the abuse may continue.

The best way to make sure a child is safe is to let experts in child protection assess the situation. That’s exactly what will happen when the helpline receives your call. Child abuse is complicated, but when it comes to calling our helpline, it’s a simple case of “better safe than sorry”.

“What if I’m right?”
Helping children protect themselves

Many Jewish children are taught acceptable ways to dress and behave. You can also teach them how to protect themselves from being sexually abused.

You can start this conversation by teaching them to talk PANTS:

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P: Privates are private
A: Always remember your body belongs to you
N: No means no
T: Talk about secrets that upset you
S: Speak up, someone can help
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You can find out more about talking to your child about abuse on our website at [nspcc.org.uk/underwear](http://nspcc.org.uk/underwear) or by contacting our helpline.

Encourage children to tell their parents or another adult they trust such as a teacher if they or someone they know has been abused. ChildLine is also available on [0800 1111](tel:08001111) or at [childline.org.uk](http://childline.org.uk) if they want to talk things over with someone, and you’re happy to tell them about ChildLine.
Who can I talk to?

We’re here for you 24/7. If you’re worried about a child, please get in touch with us.

Our trained experts at the NSPCC helpline can give you advice, help or support.

Call **0808 800 5000**

Email [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)

Or talk to us online at [nspcc.org.uk/help](http://nspcc.org.uk/help)

You might also want to speak to your local council’s children’s services if you think a child is being abused.

If you think a child may be in immediate danger, please contact **999**.

See inside for a list of Jewish support services
Jewish support services

We’ve brought together details of different types of support which you may find helpful, in addition to the NSPCC helpline.

The FED (The Federation of Jewish Services) provides a professional social work assessment and support to Jewish children and families in need living in Greater Manchester.

0161 772 4800
thefed.org.uk

The Jewish Helpline (Miyad) provides a lifeline to those who are feeling lonely, anxious, depressed or suicidal. Open from 12 noon to 12 midnight every day except Shabbat and Yom Tovim.

0800 652 9249
jewishhelpline.co.uk

Jewish Women’s Aid provides a confidential, non-judgmental service for Jewish women and their children who have experienced domestic violence. Services include client advocacy and support, Freephone helpline, refuge, counselling and specialist children’s workers.

0808 801 0500
jwa.org.uk
Norwood is the UK’s largest Jewish charity supporting vulnerable children and their families, children with special educational needs and people with learning disabilities.

020 8809 8809  
info@norwood.org.uk  
norwood.org.uk

Migdal Emunah provides a support service for Jewish victims of sexual abuse and their families. They work across all denominations of the Jewish Community and offer services to meet the needs of clients including access to advice, advocacy and support.

07899 814 137  
info@migdalemunah.com  
migdalemunah.com

London Jewish Family Centre provides a family support service with a clear understanding of the Charedi community that they serve. They provide therapy, counselling and advocacy for children, young people and their families.

020 8209 1117  
www.ljfc.com

The inclusion of these support services does not imply endorsement by the NSPCC.
You’re not alone

Child abuse happens in all communities, including Jewish communities. Having concerns about a child is an uncomfortable feeling. Whether you’re worried about your own child or another child, not knowing what to do or questioning if you’ve got things wrong can make it hard to act upon our worries.

We can help you, and give you the confidence to make the right decision.