# Parental abuse and its effects on children

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**Abstract**

 I’ll talk about parental figures that take advantage of their kids in a way that should never be accepted. The four main forms of abuse are: physical, verbal, sexual and emotional. You’ll observe that I’ll point out one of the most common categories. Unfortunately, not everyone pays enough attention of the signs that can be considered serious mistreat, which later can lead to major problems affecting the welfare of the children. Through this article I want to raise awareness so the rest of the world knows how to identify the signs and how to help the little people.

**Keywords:** parents, abuse, sexual, physical, verbal, emotional, parentification, harm



**THE DEFINITION OF ABUSE:**

Abuse is when someone causes harm or distress. It can take many forms, ranging from physical or mental pain to sexual harassment. It can occur in someone’s home, a care home, a hospital or a public place. Often the people who commit abuse are taking advantage of the relationship between them and the victim. Among children there are four common type of abuse: physical, verbal, sexual and emotional. (1)

In the following lines you will notice how they affect the development of the kids and how can you help them recover if you have the possibility.

#### PHYSICAL ABUSE:

Childhood physical abuse is categorized by the deliberate use of physical force against a child, either causing bodily harm or having the potential to do so.

There is limited current research that examines how physical abuse experienced in early childhood affects children socially and cognitively in their middle childhood years. Middle childhood refers to the ages of 6 to 12 and is a crucial period for the social and cognitive development of a child. Essentially, during this time, children are learning the important skills necessary to build strong, appropriate relationships with the people in their life. This is the moment when they understand that relationships with others outside the family are meaningful.

A team of therapists demonstrated the next facts: teenagers who experienced parental physical abuse rated themselves as more socially isolated from both their friends and their school compared to adolescents with no physical maltreatment; maltreated children showed higher levels of verbal abuse and deliberately instigating peers compared to non-maltreated children; the behavior of these people has also been associated with anxiety, over- aggression and delinquent behaviors. (2)

But why do these monsters hit their kids? The answer is simple.I still remember from the lessons that I did in high school, because then I studied the same ,,degree’’ that I’m now studying in college. The violence of these so-called ,,parents’’ depends on their own childhood experience, quality of marriage or on the social environment. All of us should never excuse this type of behavior!

#### VERBAL ABUSE:

Verbal violence refers to scolding, yelling, swearing, blaming, threatening, demeaning, mocking, insulting, criticizing and shouting. As for preschool children, they are in the psychological growth stage, who are also often sensitive and vulnerable. As far as family education is concerned, parents’ negative language such as negation, attack, and criticism comes from the outside world. If the child is unable to resist and digest this verbal violence, he or she will self-criticize and deny it.

According to Erikson’s psychosocial stages, preschoolers are experiencing the “Initiative vs. Guilt” stage, in which they started to initiate activities and emphasize doing things “all by themselves”. We think they will start to realize whether their word and deeds fit, if the parents give damaging language, then will deepen their sense of guilt. During this period, if children experience verbal violence, they will be unable to smoothly enter the next stage, and thus, it will influence the subsequent stages. (3)

#### SEXUAL ABUSE:

If a child is raped, sexually assaulted or is involved in anything that involves sexual activity with a minor( an action that obviously should not be happening), that kid will be forever haunted by a trauma.

So what things could he suffer from?

1. Post-traumatic stress disorder(he can frequently re-experience the event through his mind, specific locations can trigger that thought);
2. Depression(if the child is not believed when he confesses he can be gaslighted;eventually he’ll isolate himself from the rest of the world and he’ll question his own existence);
3. Impaired sense of self(severe child maltreatment may interfere with the child’s development of a sense of self);
4. Anger(such feeling can become internalized as self-hatred or be externalized and result in the perpetration of abuse against others)
5. Substance abuse or addiction(you’ll be surprised how many of them live in a place that encourage these things at a very young age). (4)

#### EMOTIONAL ABUSE:

Unfortunately, there are also many types of emotional abuse against children and I’ll mention the next ones:

1. Criticizing;
2. Name-calling and swearing at that person;
3. Silent-treatment;
4. Shaming and blaming;
5. Withholding affection and attention;
6. Parentification.

This type of maltreatment also leaves great scars on the existence of a child. Children who suffered emotional harm seek confirmation in the adulthood. They involve themselves in relationships where childhood emotional abuse patterns are replicated. They really limit their potential to impact their environments. They carry unchallenged shame forward. The society generally doesn’t recognize emotional abuse as serious so adults who suffered such harm see little to no confirmation that their experience represent abuse at all. As a result, many never question their feelings of inadequacy, deficiency, lack of self-worth and shame. (5)

Now I’m going to talk about a category of emotional abuse that has a special place in my soul, and that is parentification. You may wonder why I chose this and the answer is simple: I saw and I know many teens that have taken the role of a parental figure when they were supposed to just enjoy their childhood, therefore I empathize a lot with them.

But first, let’s define this concept: ***parentification*** is the distortion or lack of boundaries between and among family subsystems, such that children take on roles and responsibilities usually reserved for adults.

The child must be emotionally available for the parent, even though the parent is often emotionally unavailable for the child, which may engender a chronic state of anxiety and distress in some emotionally parentified children.

Studies in the last 30 years have established a relationship between parentification and later maladjustment.

Some scientists have found correlations from early childhood stress/trauma to child and parent factors such as:

* divorce;
* parental alcohol and drug use(there’s a perfect example for this in the ,,Shameless’’ series on HBO Max);
* interruption of the attachment;
* depression;
* relationship difficulties.

Certain people, Valleau, Bergner, and Horton (1995) found that children who are parentified have significantly more “caretaker characteristics” in adulthood than do those children who are not parentified. Similarly, Jones and Wells (1996) found a link between personality characteristics such as “people pleasing” and adults who had been parentified. The process is in fact adverse for most children and it can later be linked to poor adult functioning. The process of childhood parentification can, in the adults those children become, produce a fear of having children and/or lead to the transmission of parentification across many generations (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Bowen, 1978; Chase et al., 1998). (6)

One of my friend’s relatives is a good example of a parentified child. She’s the oldest sibling from a family with 5 children. Their dad is abusive and the mom won’t divorce him because she thinks that’s a sin. Flora(this is not her real name) often has to look after her 2 brothers and 2 sisters: she bathes the little girls, tries to do homework with all of them, gives them good advice for this challenging life and in the same time she always makes an enormous effort when she takes care of herself. Unfortunately for these kids not a single teacher or another relative observed the signs of maltreatment.

In addition, I will now mention some consequences that are on a child:

* They become caretakers and suppress their own needs – causing depression;
* They have difficulties in recognising boundaries in relationships as adults;
* This behavior can be copied as adults and can develop toxic relationships;
* They become perfectionists.

Let’s not forget about the adultification, that’s a different thing. So what does this mean?

***Adultification***  is a form of role corruption characterised by a parent’s enrollment of a child in a peer- or partner-like role. As distinct from parentification, the adultified child becomes the parent’s friend, confidante and ally.

After a more intense reading I’ve found out that it’s not a child’s job to:

* Make peace between 2 adults;
* Be sure that the bills are paid;
* Look after the siblings or his parents;
* Do the majority of the housework;
* Be an emotional support for their parent.

These emotionally immature parents that parentify their kids meet the following criteria:

* They find boundaries selfish;
* They have to be centre stage;
* Have low stress tolerance;
* Can’t cope with different opinions;
* Envy their children if they’re getting too good at something;
* Make the children feel like they own them something. (7)

After all, we can conclude the following when it comes to harm against these little people:

1. Children must always be believed when they disclose abuse. It is a fact that children rarely make up such allegations.
2. If a child has disclosed to you, it means you are trusted to them. Listen to the child as calmly and quietly as you can. Do not make promises you cannot keep.
3. Consider telling the child:
* that you believe them;
* that you are glad they told;
* that the abuse is DEFINITELY NOT their fault;
* that you will do your best to find help.
1. After a child discloses abuse, your responsibility is to report it to child welfare authorities.

 Through this process you can find more services to help the victim, such as therapy and counselling. (8)

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**Webgraphy:**

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8: <https://www.crcvc.ca/docs/child_abuse.pdf>