



If you would like more information in your own language,
please contact us at the address shown in the bottom box.

Albanian

Nese deshironi me shume informacion ne gjuhen tuaj, ju lutemi te na
kontaktoni ne adresen e dhene ne kutine me poshte.

Arabic

إذا أردت معلومات إضافية بلغتك الأصلية الرجاء الاتصال بنا
في العنوان المدون ضمن الإطار أدناه.

Bengali

যদি আপনার নিজের ভাষায় লেখা আরও তথ্য চান তাহলে দয়া করে
আমাদের সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করুন, ডানার বক্সে আমাদের ঠিকানা রয়েছে।

Chinese

如果您需要用中文印成的資料，
請按低端方格內提供的地址與我們聯系。

French

Pour tout renseignement complémentaire dans votre propre langue, veuillez
nous contacter à l'adresse figurant dans l'encadré du bas.

Gujarati

જો તમને તમારી પોતાની ભાષામાં વધારે માહિતી હોય, તો કૃપા કરીને
નીચે અંતમાં આપેલા ખાનામાં દર્શાવેલા સરનામે અમારો સંપર્ક કરો.

Punjabi

ਸੇਵਰ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਵਿਚ ਹੋਰ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਲੈਣੀ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਹਿੱਸਾ ਕਰਦੇ
ਹੋਣ ਲਿਖੋ ਖਾਨੇ ਵਿਚ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਪਤੇ 'ਤੇ ਸਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

Serb-Croat

Ako želite više informacija na svom jeziku, obratite nam se na
adresu koja se nalazi u kvadratu na dnu strane.

Somali

Hadlii aad u baahan tahay faahfaahin intaa kabadan oo ku soobsan afkaaka
hooyo ama AF Somali fadlan lana soo xiira cinwaanka hoos ku qoran.

Spanish

Si usted desea mas informacion en su propia lengua, por
favor contactenos en la direccion al pie del formato.

Tamil

உங்கள் மொழியில் மேலதிக தகவல்கள் பெற விரும்பினால், அடியிலுள்ள
மேலதிகத் தரப்பட்டிருக்கின்ற விவரத்தை அமர்த்தி தொடர்பு கொள்ளுங்கள்.

Urdu

اگر آپ اپنی زبان میں مزید معلومات حاصل کرنا چاہتے ہیں تو براہ کرم
ہم سے اس پتے پر رابطہ قائم کریں جو کہ نیچے کے خانے میں درج ہے۔

KCPCC administrator,
Social Services,
Brenchley House,
125 Week Street, Maidstone,
Kent, ME14 1RF

Medway ACPCC
Medway Social Services,
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This booklet was given to you by

who can be contacted on



The Safe Parenting handbook



Introduction

Welcome to the Kent and Medway Safe Parenting Handbook.

Your job as a parent is one of the most difficult there is - it will be both challenging and rewarding. It is a job where very little training is given to prepare parents for what lies ahead. Each of you will have had different experiences of being a child. Most of you will have had good experiences of being parented yourselves, this will give you a good grounding for the job of bringing up your own children. Some of you will have had childhoods which ranged from being slightly unsettled to being very unhappy. Some of you can use your own parents as models, others will want to do things differently.

Every family experiences difficulty from time to time and this can test the best of parents. When additional pressures come along, these can make a hard job nearly impossible. At these times it may be hard to think about what help or information you might need.

When things seem to go wrong it does not mean that someone has failed in parenting- things go wrong for everyone. It is often the way difficulties are handled that can make a difference to your children, both now and in the future.

There is no such thing as the perfect parent. However, there are ways to make it a less stressful and more rewarding experience. The most important gifts you can give your children are to bring them up knowing that you love them dearly, giving them as much stability as possible, providing gentle but firm guidance and boundaries and by simply doing your best in a demanding but important job.

What is the handbook about?

The handbook can offer some ideas and information to help you find your way through what can be a maze of issues and advice. It gives contacts and further information you can follow up when you are deciding how to deal with your worries and difficulties. This handbook also lists some of the warning signs of particular difficulties and offers helpful tips.

Who has produced this guide?

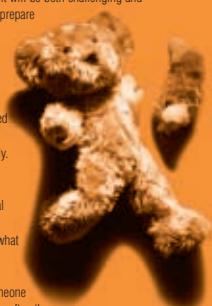
This handbook has been produced by the Kent and Medway Area Child Protection Committees, in partnership with the Children's Fund and the Early Years Development & Childcare Partnership.



Peter Gilroy
Strategic Director of Social Services



Ann Windiate
Director for Health & Community Services,
Medway Council



Contents

	Page
Babysitting who can I leave my child with?	4
Bedwetting & sleeping difficulties how can I help my child ?	6
Bullying the real story	8
Child protection myths and realities	10
Childminding, daycare & private fostering how do I make the right choice?	12
Children left alone common sense and the law	14
Children with disabilities you're not alone	16
Domestic abuse how does it affect children?	18
Don't shake the baby different ways to cope	20
Drug & alcohol misuse how would I know?	22
Health & safety making your home safe	24
Internet safety new technology, old problem	26
Missing from home and school	28
Positive parenting & self-esteem make them feel great	30
Sexual exploitation drawn into prostitution	32
Smacking the great debate	34
Teenage pregnancy & sexual health preventative parenting	36
Temper tantrums when every day is a difficult day	38
Worried about a child? should you mind your own business?	40
Helpful organisations	42





Babysitting

“ Leaving Natalie with anyone is difficult, but I really need to have a break sometimes. I would worry all the time if I could not rely on and trust the person looking after my child. I'm really glad I spent the time I did finding the right babysitter. **”**



Warning Signs

Children will not always be able to tell you if something is wrong, so note changes in their mood, behaviour and physical appearance. Agree with the babysitter to discuss, from the beginning, all accidents and incidents.



Action

Use people you trust to care for your child or ask them to recommend someone. Speak to other families who have used the babysitter you are considering.



What to say

Tell the babysitter all about your child's routine and their likes and dislikes. Tell the babysitter about your rules, like no smacking. Always leave a contact number in case of emergencies.



Prevention

Make sure you feel completely comfortable about your babysitter before you leave your child in their care.



Contacts

- Kent Children's Information Service
08000 32 32 30
freephone provides information on choosing and arranging childcare
- NSPCC
For guidelines
0800 800 5000
- Parentline Plus
(advice line)
0800 800 2222

- Children rely on their parents for their safety
- Your child has the right to care which is free from harm
- Make sure your child gets the best quality care
- Select your babysitter carefully
- Avoid leaving your child with someone under 16
- Ensure your babysitter can be contacted in an emergency

who can I leave my child with?

As parents you have responsibility for the safety and well being of your children. As a result it is important that you think very carefully about the person you are going to leave them with, whether this is a stranger, close relative or a friend.

babysitter should be 16 years of age. This is based on the idea that at 16 and above, an individual is much more aware of potential dangers and risks and could seek help quickly if necessary.

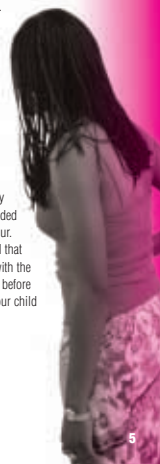
This age limit is also linked with the possible action which could be taken by the police if anything were to go wrong and an injury resulted. It is most likely that you as a parent would be held responsible if anything goes wrong if your babysitter is under 16 years of age.

When you leave your child in the care of someone else you are taking a risk with his or her safety and welfare. When considering a temporary carer for your child it is important that you choose someone with the abilities and high standards that you would expect of yourself. This includes someone who will make sure they are fed, changed, kept safe, given room to play, feel secure and can deal with difficulties which may occur.

Generally a babysitter will come to your home to take care of your child. Make sure you talk to your babysitter before you leave. Let them know when to expect you back and make sure they have contact details in case of emergencies.

Often a good babysitter will have a good reputation locally and can be recommended by a friend or neighbour. However it is essential that you meet personally with the prospective babysitter before you decide to leave your child in their care.

Babysitters do not need qualifications or a certificate to look after children. As a result anyone can advertise his or her services as a babysitter. The Children's Legal Centre and the NSPCC recommend that the minimum age of a



Bedwetting & sleeping difficulties

“ I felt myself getting panicky every time I put him to bed. Maybe it was a lack of proper routine, but at the time I felt so tired and had so little patience. I never praised him for going all night without wetting his bed. I just got cross when I had to change the sheets again, which didn't really help at all. ”



WARNING SIGNS

There may be none, but does your child seem to be unhappy? Has something happened in the family or in your child's life that is worrying him or her?



ACTION

Stay calm if your child is wetting or soiling the bed.

Try to check whether there is a particular time when your child wets or soils. Make sure your child goes to the toilet immediately before going to bed.

If you are worried discuss your concerns with your health professional. Seek support for yourself.



WHAT TO SAY

Give your child the chance to discuss their feelings with you. Try to keep calm and relaxed without showing signs of anxiety or strain. Praise your child when they sleep through the night. Do not scold your child if they do not sleep through the night, or if they bed wet. Try to develop an understanding for how they feel and whether they are worried by the wetting.



PREVENTION

Make sure your child is aware that they can share any worries with you. If you want advice about things you can do to try to prevent wetting, discuss your concerns with your health visitor, GP or school nurse.



CONTACTS

- Health visitor/GP school nurse
- Parentline Plus (National help and advice line) 0800 800 2222
- Bedwetting (online advice see weblinks below)
- Sleep Problems (see weblinks below)

- Children do not wet or soil deliberately
- It is estimated that 1 in 4 of three year olds and 1 in 6 of five year olds repeatedly wet the bed
- Bedwetting may be a sign of a physical problem, but more often your child will learn bladder control at their own pace
- Each child's sleep pattern is different
- Take time to establish a bedtime routine, including a time for your child to relax and unwind before going to bed
- If your child often wakes in the night try to find out why he or she has woken, for example a bad dream or hunger

how can I help my child?

Potty training

Your child is more likely to learn to control their bladder if you are relaxed and calm about it. Remember your child will learn at their own pace and praise rather than punishment will help. Between the ages of three and four years your child is likely to be dry during the day, with the occasional accident. Remember, this is often not an instant change but a gradual process where more and more nights will be dry nights.

Bedwetting

It is not easy to know why some children take longer to be dry at night than others. However, bedwetting is not due to laziness or lack of will power. Some children, in fact up to one in six seven year olds, bed wet. Although this may be stressful for both you and your child, try not to lose your patience; it is rare for a child to wet or soil deliberately. If, after the age of seven, your child continually wets his bed, the problem may be caused by a number of factors. Talk to your child about it and reassure them that other older children experience this too. Discuss any concerns about your child with your GP, Health Visitor or School Nurse.

Sleeping difficulties

- There are many different reasons why babies and young children do not sleep through the night.
- Try to establish a sleep routine as early as six weeks if possible.
- Feel confident in yourself to know whether your child is really distressed or just restless.
- If your sleep is frequently disrupted by your child's restlessness, arrange for a trusted relative or friend to care for your baby or child so that you can get some sleep.

Establishing a routine

Many children and babies experience sleeping difficulties at some time. It is important to try to establish a regular night time sleep routine for your child by going to bed at a regular time each night. Prepare a warm, comfortable environment for them to relax in. Reading to your child at bedtime helps your child to unwind and relax. If your child is scared of the dark, try keeping a night light on. A few favourite toys in the bed will be a comfort if your child wakes up during the night. If you are concerned that your child has serious difficulty getting to sleep, or does not regularly sleep through the night, discuss your concerns with your GP, Health Visitor or School Nurse.

“ It happens most days. They call me smelly and fat. They made me give them money again yesterday. They're in the same class and they're always laughing at me. They said if I tell it will be ten times worse. Sometimes I don't go to school... I can't stand it anymore. ”

Bullying

- Children have the right not to be hurt
- Bullying behaviour is unacceptable
- Bullying can happen to any child at any age
- Act immediately if you think your child is being bullied
- Children need ways to protect themselves and seek help
- Advise your child to run, yell and tell

the real story

Bullying is a frightening experience. It can isolate and damage a young person's self-confidence. Some ongoing bullying can have negative long-term effects on children, leading to depression and even suicidal thoughts and actions.

School days are a time when the influence of other children is very important and fitting in is seen as essential. If children are thought of as different for any reason, they can be picked on and bullied. Sadly, we still live in a society in which to be different in any way can mean ridicule and bullying (often copied from parents) and this ensures that prejudice will continue into the next generation. It is crucial to be alert to the possibility of bullying and make sure you know the tell-tale signs.

You may think that your child is unlikely to be bullied but the reality is that bullying can happen at any time and to any child.

Bullying can continually harm other children need support and help as well. They may have experienced difficulties of their own at home, which may have led to their actions. Reporting concerns may help them to get help as well.

- Bullying can happen anywhere but most commonly it happens in school
- Bullying can take many forms, from verbal abuse to physical attack
- Bullying is the repeated abuse of a child by one or several people
- Bullies are not always older than the child they harm
- Most bullying is done by children who are the same age as the victim.

If your child tells you about a friend or any other child who is being bullied - listen carefully and take this seriously. That child may not be able to say for themselves what is happening.

Today all schools are required to have an Anti-Bullying Policy. However, school action alone cannot guarantee success and so it is important that parents and schools work together.

If you are not satisfied with the way your child's school is dealing with the matter, you can ask for advice from the Safe Schools project.



Warning Signs

Running away, non-attendance at school, other learning and behavioural difficulties for no obvious reason. Your child has injuries with no feasible explanation for them.



Action

See the headteacher at the school for their support and action. If bullying is happening outside school, consider contacting the family of the child who is bullying and try to find a way to work together to sort it out.



What to say

Refuse to get up with bullying. Walk away, tell an adult or friend and avoid fighting. Parents - listen to your child, reassure and be there for them.



Prevention

Talk to your child about their school day. Teach your child to respect others from a young age. Teach your child that prejudice and bullying is unacceptable.



Contacts

- Kent Safe Schools for advice on bullying in schools 01227 284490
- Kidscape 0845 1205 204
- NSPCC 0800 800 5000
- Parentline Plus 0800 800 2222



Child protection

“ Social work has changed a lot. In the past our approach to child protection wasn't very flexible. Now we work more in partnership with families where there are concerns to make sure they get support before things reach a crisis. ”



WARNING SIGNS

Social workers will get involved when they believe that physical injury, neglect, sexual or emotional abuse has occurred. Make sure you know what child abuse is – see the helplines in the Contacts column for more information.



ACTION

A social worker (and sometimes a police officer) will meet with the family when abuse is reported. They will also talk with other professionals in order to make decisions about how to help.



WHAT TO SAY

If you are worried about your own or someone else's treatment of a child, seek advice about what practical and emotional support is available.



PREVENTION

It is important that children know what to do when they feel unsafe. Do they know who to talk to and how to get to a safe place or person?



CONTACTS

- Family Rights Group 0800 731 1696
- NSPCC 0800 800 5000
- Parentline Plus 0800 800 2222
- For Social Services, see back of book
- For Police, see back of book

- Parents are responsible for their children's safety
- Social Services become involved once concern is shared
- Decisions about abuse need careful assessment
- Children are best cared for by their own families
- Professionals want to work in partnership with families
- Very few children are removed from home following abuse

myths and realities

Very few adults harm children deliberately and most often, when harm does happen, families need support, not punishment or the removal of their children.

Kent social workers and other professionals get involved when parents may be unable to protect their child from harm and need some help. In some cases Kent's Police Child Protection Unit will investigate with social workers to help protect children and decide whether an offence has been committed against a child.

There have been lots of negative reports in the media about social workers and what happens when concerns about child abuse are reported.

Many **myths** exist, so for the record:

1. Child abuse is not easy to recognise, prevent or stop.

It is rarely possible to definitely say that a child has been abused or by whom. A careful assessment is needed in order to find out what has happened and what support and protection will best help the family. As a result it can be difficult to avoid some intrusion into family life. A social worker will ask questions about the family circumstances, consider the frequency and the seriousness of the incident and the effect on the child. All of these factors will help

to decide what should happen next to support and protect the child and family.

Social workers and the Police have a duty (they have no choice about this) under The Children Act 1989 to investigate concerns of child abuse.

2. Professionals are not solely responsible for protecting children.

Traditionally, social workers have been expected to make sure that children are safe. In order to do this well, they rely on information from parents, family, other professionals and the local community who all play an important part in identifying concerns about those close to them. This helps to ensure that they are offered support before the situation becomes far worse.

3. Reporting child abuse rarely results in the child being removed from home.

This is not the main aim of child protection investigations and rarely happens. Social workers can only remove children from home with a court order, having demonstrated that there is serious and immediate risk. In emergency situations the Police have power to remove a child for up to 72 hours.

“Andrew is 7, and I was very careful to visit and discuss his needs at the after-school club. It now means I can work a full day knowing his needs are being met and he is in a safe environment. He has made lots of new friends not just other kids but members of staff too. I can relax and get on with what I need to do... life is so much easier.”

Childminding, daycare & private fostering



WARNING SIGNS

Sometimes, children are not always able to tell you if something is wrong so note changes in their moods, behaviour and physical appearances.



ACTION

Speak promptly to the person in charge about concerns. If you have serious concerns about your child's safety, remove your child immediately and contact the duty team at your local social services office. Call the OISTED complaint line.



WHAT TO SAY

Tell your child who will be looking after them, where they are going, how long for and whom they need to ask for their daily needs. Find out about what a typical day or session consists of. Be prepared and ask plenty of questions.



PREVENTION

Take up references from others who have used a particular childcare service. Look for trained and experienced staff. Visit the facilities and look for busy and relaxed children. Check how you will be informed about your child's progress and in case of emergency.



CONTACTS

- Kent Children's Information Service 08000 32 32 30 www.ecipg.com
- Daycare Trust 020 7840 3350
- Childcare Link 08000 96 02 96
- OISTED Complaint Line 0845 881 4772
- Medway Children's Information Service 01634 335566

- All registered childcare in England must meet national standards set down by the Department for Education and Skills
- Children's information services hold lists of registered out-of-schools clubs, playgroups and children's leisure activities
- Talk to other parents. Personal recommendations are helpful, but you should take up at least two references
- Make a list of questions and take it with you when you visit each childcare centre
- Make sure the childcare provider knows how to contact you in an emergency and who you will allow to collect your child
- If you are considering a private foster carer, you must contact your local social services office

how do I make the right choice?

As a parent you are often the best judge of whether a childcare service will suit your child.

When you leave your child in the care of others, you might want to check that:

- Their needs are being met and respected.
- Their cultural background is recognised.
- They will be happy there.
- The atmosphere feels right.
- There is a settling in arrangement.
- A stable group of children attends so your child can make friends.
- Mealtimes are relaxed and fun.
- The outside area is well planned and spacious.
- Activities are varied and carefully planned.

Ensure that your child is left in secure premises and that well trained and experienced staff are caring for your child. You will also want the opportunity to get involved and know about what your child is doing day to day.

The main types of childcare available are:

Day nurseries are for the under 5s for the length of the working day. Voluntary organisations, private companies, individuals, business or community groups might run them. They are registered and inspected by OISTED.

Playgroups are for children aged between 3 and 5. Sessions usually last no longer than four hours. Most of them are run by groups of parents with one or two paid staff.

Out-of-school clubs, or kids clubs, provide sessional play and care for school-aged children from 3 upwards. There are breakfast clubs, after-school clubs and holiday playschemes. They are inspected by OISTED.

If your child is between 3 and 4 years old, they might be entitled to a free part time nursery place. Early education and nursery classes are usually open during term time. Children can attend all day or just on a sessional basis. Contact your Children's Information Service for more information.

Private fostering is very different from the care provided by local councils through approved foster carers. It occurs when a child under 16 is cared for for more than 28 days by an adult who is not a close relative, by private arrangement between the parent and the carer. If you are thinking about placing your child with a private foster carer, or becoming a foster carer, the first thing you must do is contact your local social services area office. Social Services are required by law to approve such arrangements. The prospective foster carer will need as much information as possible about your child (including medical history) and Social Services can give you a form to help with this. As the birth parents, you retain full parental responsibility. You must remain in touch with the private foster carer and participate in all decision-making processes concerning your child's life.

Children left alone

“ When mummy goes out, I lock the door from the inside... she calls in the letterbox to say goodbye, I leave the lights on in case anyone tries to get in. Mummy usually comes home in the night when I am asleep. **”**

- Never leave a young child alone
- Children under 13 years should not be left
- Children are not ready for this amount of responsibility
- Leaving a child alone places them at risk of harm
- It can be a lonely and frightening experience
- Plan who you could contact for emergency care

common sense and the law

If a child is not ready to be left alone it can be a sad, lonely, frightening and dangerous experience. There are many possible risks, both physical and emotional, which could affect your child in a negative way.

In addition, the level of responsibility which is given to the child to look after themselves to somehow manage whatever may happen is impossible for a younger child. They may say that they do not mind being left and may find it exciting initially, but they cannot fully know the possible risks and how to handle them.

Even the relatively ordinary things that happen in life, such as hunger, a storm, the phone ringing or someone coming to the front door can cause problems. An accident, feeling ill or a power cut may occur and these are not issues that a child could deal with.

Whatever kind of neighbourhood you live in, it is rarely, if ever, possible to leave your children and assume that someone will look out for them if necessary, as may be the case in some communities and cultures.

If they are alerted, the Police and/or Social Services may take action if they think that a child has been neglected by being left alone. Neglect happens when a parent or carer fails to meet children's basic needs of food, shelter, security, attention or protection from exposure to danger.

The NSPCC have issued guidelines advising that children under the age of 13 should not be left alone. While this recommendation does not have the force of law, it is suggested as good practice. Children under this age do not have the maturity to manage the responsibility of being left alone and this may be particularly so if they are physically or learning disabled.

As a young person reaches adolescence, leaving them alone after school, for an evening or during the day is less concerning as long as they are prepared and aware of what to do if they are worried or need anything. So preparation for this is necessary. If your child is 13 or over and you feel he or she has the maturity and ability to deal with this, it is important that they know where you are and who to contact in an emergency.



WARNING SIGNS

Parents who have limited support. A child who is frequently observed outside and alone for extended periods of time. Childcare arrangements that keep going wrong.



ACTION

If there is immediate risk of harm to a child, call the police.



WHAT TO SAY

If you are worried about a child being left alone, talk to the parent, a health visitor, teacher or a social worker.



PREVENTION

Think about shared babysitting and discuss this with neighbours, friends or other parents you have contact with. Find out about After School Clubs and Holiday Play Schemes.



CONTACTS

- Children's Information Service 08000 32 32 30 www.nspcc.com
- NSPCC 0800 800 5000
- Parentline Plus 0800 800 2222
- For Social Services, see back of book
- For Police, see back of book

Children with disabilities

“ When I found out that Josie was disabled I didn't know how I was going to cope. I just didn't think I'd be able to do it alone. Pretty soon I realised I didn't have to. **”**

- Disability affects some 15% of people in the UK at some time in their lives
- Your child is protected by the Disability Discrimination Act
- The government, your local council, education and health authorities are there to help
- You may be able to receive financial help to assist with caring for your child
- There are many forms of extra services and support available to you and your child
- Support groups, parent groups and other organisations are out there to help you cope

you're not alone

If your child has a disability the future may seem like a daunting struggle, not just for them, but for you too. The word 'disabled' covers a very wide range of different conditions and it is estimated that some 15% of people in the UK experience some form of disability at some time in their lives. Remember you and your child are not alone.

The government, local council, health and education authorities provide a wide range of benefits, facilities, support and advice for disabled children and their carers.

Legal protection

Your child is especially protected by law. The Disability Discrimination Act makes it unlawful for any service provider (including schools, businesses and organisations) to treat disabled people less favourably than other people because of their disability. It also requires them to make reasonable adjustments to make their services accessible to disabled people.

Health

From the start, your GP and local health authorities are there for you. They'll provide the help and advice you need to discover and assess your child's disability. They'll help you plan the treatment, therapy, equipment and ongoing medical care that your child may need.

Benefits

There are several specific benefits that you could receive to help you with the costs of caring for a

disabled child. These include Disability Living Allowance, Carers Allowance, help with extra housing costs and Carers Blue Badge scheme. And don't forget free dental treatment and prescriptions, help with the cost of glasses, and in some circumstances travel to hospital, school meals, and even road tax exemption.

Education

Depending on their kind of disability, your child may benefit most by attending a special school - an environment specifically designed to match their educational needs. Alternatively your child may receive the extra support they require through the Special Needs provisions available in a mainstream school. Your education authority and health service providers will help you assess your child's special educational needs and recommend the most appropriate way forward for their education.

Extra support

Your council can provide extra support for you and your child. This can include special leisure facilities, holidays, short breaks and many additional services for particular needs. Also there are many local, national and international organisations and charities specially set up to provide further help, advice and support to people just like you.

Make contact

On the left you'll find a list of contacts that you may find useful. You're not alone, so make contact today and get the support you need.



WARNING SIGNS

Some children's disabilities are diagnosed fairly early. Others take time to appear or happen suddenly. If you think your child may have some form of disability, contact your Health Visitor or GP for advice.



ACTION

Don't think you have to go it alone. Get as much information as you can about your child's condition. Find out what services, support, benefits and advice is available and make contact.



WHAT TO SAY

There are many organisations specially set up to give support and advice to parents of disabled children. Contact them and tell your story. There will be others out there just like you.



PREVENTION

You can't prevent your child's condition. But you can minimise the disability they experience by ensuring that they get the best support available, and by remembering that they have rights.



CONTACTS

- Kent Education Special Education Needs:
 - Mid Kent 01233 898639 - East Kent 01227 772992 - West Kent 01732 525000
- Social Services - to contact children with disability teams phone your local office
- Contact a Family (national support group) 0800 808 3556
- Council for Disabled Children 020 7643 1900
- Medway Special Education Needs 01634 331130
- Medway Disabled Children's Resource Centre 01634 338500
- Kids Parent Partnership Service 01634 577657

WEBLINKS

- www.cafamily.org.uk • www.ncb.org.uk/cdc • www.medwayppn.org
- www.mencap.org.uk/html/information/links • www.scope.org.uk/kidyears

“ I crept downstairs because I heard arguing. Dad was standing over mum kicking her. I made sure that my sister did not see, but we still heard. When mum came upstairs, her nose was bleeding and we all cried, we stayed there until dad went out. ”

Domestic abuse



WARNING SIGNS

Any violence or abuse between adults will negatively affect children. Seek support and help as soon as possible. The longer it lasts, the more damaging living with domestic abuse becomes.



ACTION

Report your concerns about yourself or someone else to the police. If you are worried that your child might be affected, talk to them about what is happening.



WHAT TO SAY

Children need time to discuss the feelings they have about violence or abuse. Children need to know that it is not their fault and that this is not the way relationships should be.



PREVENTION

A violent partner can take responsibility for violence by seeking help to stop. Make sure that you offer a positive role model for children so that they learn other ways of behaving.



CONTACTS

• Women's Aid National Helpline 08457 023 468
• Mankind National Men's Helpline 0870 794 4124
• For Social Services, see back of book
• For Police, see back of book
• National Domestic Violence Helpline 0800 2000 247
• Escape Package 01293 520562
• 24 hour domestic abuse helpline 0800 2000 247

- Domestic abuse teaches children to use violence or abuse
- Domestic abuse can affect children in serious and long-lasting ways
- Where there is domestic abuse there is often child abuse
- Children will often blame themselves for domestic abuse
- Alcohol misuse is very common when domestic abuse occurs, as a contributing factor and as a survival mechanism
- Pregnant women are more vulnerable to domestic abuse

how does it affect children?

Domestic abuse is a crime and a major social problem affecting many families. In 90% of reported domestic violence incidents, children have either been present in the same or a nearby room. It is overwhelmingly women and children who are affected by domestic abuse and men who are the perpetrators.

Children who witness, intervene or hear incidents are affected in many ways. What can be guaranteed is that children do hear, they do see and they are aware of violence in the family.

Children learn how to behave in part from examples parents set for them. Domestic abuse teaches children negative things about relationships, and how to deal with people.

For instance:

- It can teach them that violence is a way to resolve conflict
- They learn how to keep secrets
- They learn to mistrust those close to them and that children are responsible and to blame for abuse, especially if it erupts after an argument about the children.

Many people find it difficult to understand why people remain in or return to abusive situations. A combination of fear, love, the risk of homelessness and financial issues can make it very difficult for women with children to leave and some may want to stay put, and get their abuser to leave.

Short term effects:

Children are affected in many ways by domestic abuse, even after a short time. These effects

include: feeling frightened, becoming withdrawn, bedwetting, running away, aggressiveness, behavioural difficulties, problems with school, poor concentration and emotional turmoil.

Long term effects:

The longer children are exposed to violence, the more severe the effects on them are.

These can include:

- A lack of respect for the non-violent parent
- Loss of self-confidence, which will affect their ability to form relationships in the future
- Being over-protective of parent
- Loss of childhood
- Problems at school
- Running away.

If you are worried about domestic abuse, discuss it with someone else.

If you are violent or abusive, you can seek help to stop what is happening.

If you are affected by domestic abuse you are not alone - you can seek help from a range of specialist services in Kent. You can also report incidents to the police - this will provide valuable evidence for any charges against your abuser in the future.

Apart from any criminal proceedings, you can apply for an injunction in the civil court to protect yourself. If you would like details of solicitors in your area who deal with family law, contact the local domestic abuse services.

“ I thought I couldn't manage. She cried all the time, I was exhausted and nothing worked. I felt such a failure. I got so angry with her I felt like shaking her to stop her noise. I had no idea how much that could hurt her. **”**

Don't shake the baby



WARNING SIGNS

A range of signs can indicate if a child may have been shaken, including feeding difficulties, lethargy, eye injuries, vomiting, irritability, speech and learning difficulties, developmental delay, seizures and paralysis.



ACTION

If you are worried about your child, take him or her to see your Doctor, Health Visitor or to the Casualty department. Seek support, including the helplines listed under Contacts (see right).



WHAT TO SAY

Develop communication with your child using eye contact, smiling, cuddling and talking. This will develop your understanding and responsiveness to your baby's needs when he/she is having difficulties.



PREVENTION

It is never safe to shake a child, not even in play. It is important for siblings playing together or for the babysitter or any other carer to be made aware of the dangers.



CONTACTS

• CRY-SIS (helpline) 020 7404 5011
• Parentline Plus 0800 800 2222
• NSPCC 0800 800 5000
• NHS Direct 0845 4647

- Shaking is often a response to extreme frustration
- Shaking can cause damage that you cannot see
- Shaking can cause damage that is long lasting
- Never shake a child for any reason
- There are different ways to cope with a crying baby
- Do not suffer alone, seek support from others

different ways to cope

Why do people shake babies?

Often, although not always, babies and young children are shaken when a parent or carer becomes very frustrated when they will not stop crying due to colic, illness or feeding difficulties. On average a baby will cry for at least two hours every day. If a baby has additional difficulties, they will cry more and this can be very stressful. One in ten babies cry much more than this average and many parents experience a great deal of difficulty managing this.

Many parents may not realise the extent of the damage that a shake can do to a young child. Parents/carers who have a low tolerance level may become angry and more likely to give in and shake the child. However there are many alternatives to try and people to talk to.

Some very rough play with a young child can also cause some similar injuries so never shake a young child.

What damage can shaking cause?

Shaking a baby can cause death or serious and long-lasting brain damage. Shaken Baby Syndrome is an injury that results when a baby is shaken so that his or her head wobbles rapidly back and forth. The force of this can tear the blood vessels that connect the brain and skull. This happens because a young child's neck muscles are not strong enough to hold

their head firmly. The action of shaking can cause serious damage, even though the parent does not perceive it as fierce. Never ever shake a baby for any reason.

Ways to cope with a crying baby

Crying is the way all babies make sure that their basic needs are met - they may be hungry, thirsty, need a change of nappy or even some company. Crying is neither your fault nor the fault of your baby.

Some of the ways to cope include:

- Count to ten before doing anything and allow yourself to calm down.
- Consider using a dummy.
- Hug and cuddle your child - perhaps with the use of a baby-carrier so that they are close to your body in order to help soothe them.
- Go for a walk or a drive to help them sleep.
- Make use of a helpline in times of crisis.
- If necessary walk out of the room for a short time, ensuring that you are nearby.
- Ask someone else you trust to take over for a while.

Drug & alcohol misuse

“ At first I thought it was just a teenage thing. Paul started to come home late, a row always started and he'd storm off to his room. He was losing weight, looked terrible and I felt he was lying to us. He just wanted to be out all the time.”

- Many parents worry that their child may use drugs
- Prevention is better than cure
- Drug use is increasing among young people
- Make sure you know about drugs and their possible effects
- Talk to your children about drugs from a young age
- Kent schools teach drug prevention in the curriculum

how would I know?

If you find out that your child has or may have taken drugs, it can be frightening because of the potential effects. This can be due to your lack of knowledge about drugs and not feeling confident about talking about them. Most young people who experiment with drugs do not go on to use them on a permanent basis. Therefore addiction, crime and death are not as usual as the stories in the media can lead us to believe.

It is vitally important, however, that children are aware of the risks of using drugs, alcohol and volatile substances (e.g. solvents). More young people experience problems caused by too much drinking than through drug use.

before they leave primary school. It is likely that at this early stage, children will be more responsive to being told about the risks of drug use. Make sure you tell your children about the risks. Accurate information and support will help them decide what to do. It does not guarantee non-use but will increase the chance of an informed choice.

Why do young people use drugs?

They are curious about them, they want to break the rules, to relax, to escape reality, to cope with difficult situations or feelings, because they enjoy them, because their friends do it.

How would I know?

There are many telltale signs, which include a young person who is panicky, tense or drowsy, complaining of sickness, has impaired concentration, lack of energy, depression, skin problems or aggression.

There may be a change in relationships with family and friends, a change in behaviour, or a change in performance at school.

Other signs can involve changes in a financial situation and personal possessions 'disappearing' and being sold.

Drug and alcohol misuse by parents

Drug and alcohol misuse by the adults in a household can seriously affect the care and wellbeing of children. Advice can be obtained from KCA on 01795 590795.

Drug use among young people - how widespread is it?

Drugs are more widespread among children and young people than ever before.

Research shows that about one in twelve 12 year olds and one in three 14 year olds have tried drugs. By the time they reach 16 years of age, two in every five young people will have tried one type of drug or a mixture of drugs. These figures apply across all ethnic groups, whilst drug use is increasing amongst girls.

It is important to discuss drugs use early. Some parents/carers worry that doing this encourages their child to use drugs. Avoiding talking about drugs will not protect them. Children will be aware of drugs in some way



WARNING SIGNS

In general terms if your child's appearance, behaviour or financial situation changes dramatically you should include drug and alcohol use in your list of "I wonder if..." questions.



ACTION

Observe and talk to your child if you are worried. In an emergency contact an ambulance immediately. If your child is not in immediate danger talk with them about their drug use at another time when they are not using.



WHAT TO SAY

Use every opportunity to discuss drug use, for example, when drugs are mentioned in a television programme. You can give accurate information regarding the risks of drug use at an early age.



PREVENTION

Ensure that you are informed about drug use and the effects of different types of drugs. There are many helpful guides available from the helplines listed below.



CONTACTS

• FRANK (national helpline)
0800 77 06 00
• Kent Drug and Alcohol Action Team see drugsuk link below
• KCA
01795 590795
• Kenward Trust
01622 814167

“ Before Joe was born I never thought about where I left things. Nowadays, everything in the house seems dangerous. I feel I have to follow him everywhere. Yesterday he found my painkillers in the bedroom and nearly swallowed some. It happened so quickly. ”

Health & safety

- Babies and children learn by exploring their surroundings
- Babies do not automatically know what is dangerous
- Babies need guidance to keep safe at home
- Remove all potential dangers in your home
- Watch your child and remove him or her from danger
- Explain about safety to your child from an early age

making your home safe

Babies and young children learn about their world by exploring it. This means that, as soon as they are able to, they will crawl, touch and grab at whatever is in their line of vision. They are curious by nature and need careful and gentle guidance from a young age about what danger is and what to stay away from. Shouting at or smacking children will not teach them about safety.

Most accidents happen in the home and this is why it is important to ensure that your home is safe for all your family especially for young children. There are many situations each year in which children have overdosed on their parents' drugs and medicines.

- Crawling and exploring are an essential part of their development - keep an eye on your young children, especially near wires and sockets.
- Small children should never be left alone with pets. Even trained and good natured animals can turn on them.
- Make sure that irons, saucepans and hot drinks are kept out of the reach of children. Scalding and burns are common and avoidable accidents.
- Inhaling cigarette smoke is bad for children's health. Children will be affected by passive smoking and your smoking may encourage them to smoke when they are older.
- Check toys for safety marks. Ensure that your child does not play with toys that are not suitable for his or her age, especially if the pieces are small enough to choke on. Unsafe toys can be very dangerous.

Some dangers around the home:

- Make sure that all medicines and drugs are locked away well out of reach and your use of them is private to avoid your child copying you.
- Certain rooms are necessarily full of danger, such as the kitchen, and should remain out of bounds or made safe by the use of safety devices.
- Are your children contained within the house? Is the safety chain high enough on the front door even for a very active toddler?



Warning Signs

Spend some time exploring your house as if you were a young child. This will show you the many potential dangers which, if not removed, could harm your child.



Action

Make a list of these potential dangers and remove them to safety or protect your child from them by using safety devices. Talk to the contacts listed if you are unsure about this.



What to say

With very young children the tone of your voice and facial expressions alongside explanations are extremely important. Children will begin to sense the warning tone in your voice over time.



Prevention

Remove dangerous objects like drugs, syringes, medicines and household chemicals out of the reach of children and lock them away safely. Do this before your child is exposed to any hazard.



Contacts

- Talk to your health visitor or midwife
- Child Accident Prevention Trust 020 7608 3828
- General Baby Safety (see Weblinks)

“Greg is ten - same age as me. I haven't met him, but we chat on the internet all the time. He's really funny. He wants to meet up tomorrow to play football... I can't wait to see what he looks like.”

Internet safety

- Child exploitation has devastating effects on children, both physical and mental
- Exploitative adults have been quick to use the Internet as a tool; they are very sophisticated and well practiced in how they approach children
- Children are fascinated by the 'adult' world, but there are measures you can take to protect your child from online risks and help them make the most of the Internet safely
- Be sensitive to changes in your child's behaviour. It is up to attentive adults to recognise the signs of sexual exploitation.
- Recent research from the NSPCC revealed that one in five 9 to 16 year-olds use Internet chat rooms

new technology, old problem

Risks from the Internet

The Internet has proved a useful tool for people wishing to exploit children. Recent high profile cases in the news have revealed that Internet chat rooms can be used by paedophiles to establish deceptive relationships with children. They then 'groom' children to become victims, either psychologically on the Internet itself, or by arranging to actually meet with them. Often victims believe that they are chatting to other children online.

Learn all you can about the Internet. In the same way that you would teach your child about the dangers from strangers, warn your child about dangers on the Internet and lay down some ground rules regarding the time they spend online. If possible avoid your child going online in private, or at least ensure you have access to their computer. Make sure that they know they should never arrange to meet a new friend made on the Internet without a trusted adult present.

Internet pornography can cause psychological damage to children who are exposed to it. But worse still, the Internet is a major method by which pornographic images of children are obtained and exchanged by exploitative adults. Sadly such images are in high demand, so pornographers will go to extreme lengths to entice and coerce children into getting involved against their will.

Watch out for possible signs of exploitation or abuse. Some of these signs are often completely innocent, but look out for changes in your child's mood or behaviour, sleep disturbances or bed wetting, unexplained marks, problems at school, going missing or self-harm, asking about sexual experiences and terminology or evidence of pornographic material. Be especially aware of any new friendships between your child and older people, whether male or female.

Making it safe to surf

There are ways in which you can help to protect your child online and ensure that the Internet is a safe way to learn and have fun.

Ask your Internet Service Provider or local computer specialist about installing parental controls, which can prevent your child accessing websites with sexual content. These methods cannot provide a total safeguard but do offer some degree of protection.

If your child does experience some form of exploitation, whether mild or severe, it is crucial to be 100% supportive, make it clear that it is not their fault and that you are there to help and protect them no matter what.

Make Contact

Local police and social services have specialist teams who are specially trained to counter these forms of exploitation and offer support to children and parents.



WARNING SIGNS

Prolonged, secretive periods on the Internet, changes in behaviour or mood, inappropriate sexual behaviour, asking questions about sexual experiences or terminology, leaving pornographic material, diaries or letters where they can be found.



ACTION

If you think your child has been exposed to any form of exploitation encourage them to confide in you, assuring them that they've done nothing wrong and that you will support them. Contact child protection, youth services, child abuse or other appropriate organisations for further advice and support.



WHAT TO SAY

Assure your child that you believe what they are telling you; create a positive sense of confidence between you. Explain in your own way why these things happen and avoid making them feel ashamed or foolish about what they have experienced. Let them know that you will protect them from further harm.



PREVENTION

Know where your child is; be familiar with their friends and daily activities. Teach your child to trust their own feelings and assure them that they have a right to say NO to what they sense is wrong. Listen carefully to your child's fears and be supportive.



CONTACTS

- NCH Internet Safety (see weblinks below)
- Childnet
- Internet Watch 0845 600 8844
- Parents Information Network (see weblinks below)
- Police, see back of book
- Social Services, see back of book

Missing

“I was shocked when she ran away although, looking back, she was more of a loner than her brother. I now know that she had been missing school quite a bit. We stopped talking when my partner moved in but had been really close before that.”



WARNING SIGNS

There may be none but does your child seem to be unhappy? Are you sure that they are not truanting from school? Has anything happened in the family that you haven't talked to your child about?



ACTION

If you think your child might be skipping school, talk to the school or an Education Welfare Officer. Contact the police if your child goes missing and you don't know where they have gone.



WHAT TO SAY

Make sure that your child knows how important they are to you. When you have to tell your child off, tell them that it's their behaviour that's the problem - not them. If something has gone wrong in the family, don't let your child think that it's their fault.



PREVENTION

Be alert to any unexplained changes in your child's behaviour. Spend time with them and be interested in their lives and worries. Do you know who your child's friends are? Be very careful about their access to the Internet and 'chat rooms'.



CONTACTS

• Missing Persons Helpline
0800 700 700
• National Missing Persons Helpline
0208 392 4527
• Message Home (for young people to get a message to their family)
0800 700 740

- Make time for your child to talk to you about their worries - even when you have to tell them off
- You know how important a good education is - let your child know this
- Only keep them off school if they are too ill to attend - not for days out or shopping trips
- Be honest about things that might be happening in the family
- Look for early signs that your child might not be happy and talk to their school about these
- Help is available - please don't be too embarrassed or afraid to ask

From home and school

The law says that parents must ensure that their children receive a proper, full time education and they can be prosecuted if their child does not attend school regularly and on time. Children who miss school are much more likely to have problems with their learning and getting the job or college place that they would like. They will often find it harder to make and keep friends and they are at much greater risk of getting into trouble in and out of school. If they are skipping school or lessons, they are more likely to come across adults or other young people who might want to cause them harm.

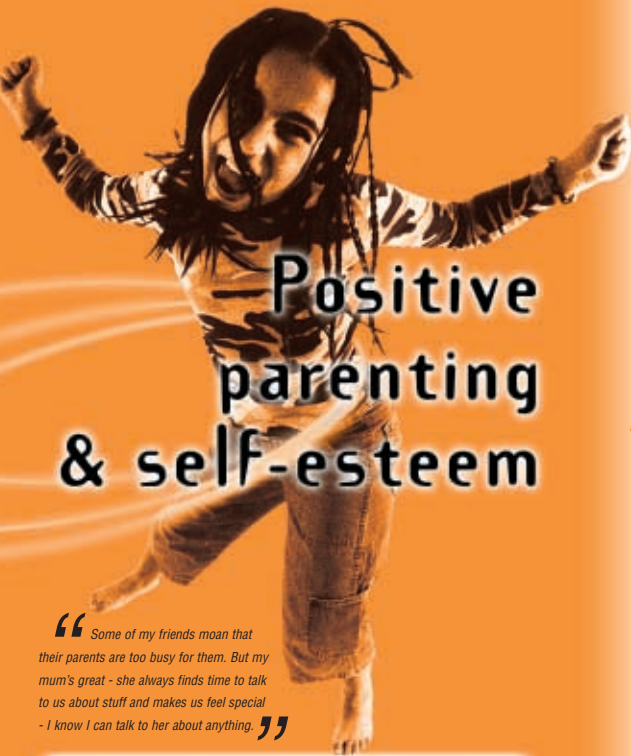
When children miss school without their parents' knowing, this is called truancy. Children who truant regularly often do this because they are worried about something. There might be something happening on the way to or from school that is causing them concern. They might be being bullied. They might be finding some lessons or subjects too hard (or too easy) or they might be having problems in completing their homework. Sometimes, children will be reluctant to leave

home because they are worried that their parent might come to some harm whilst they are at school.

Children from all sorts of backgrounds run away from home for a variety of reasons. Many of us will remember planning to run away when we were younger because we felt unable to cope with our problems, that nobody cared about us or because we had been treated unfairly. Usually, if a child does go missing from home, it will be for a very short period - usually until the child thinks that the parents have noticed. Often, they will turn up at the home of a friend or relative.

When children run away, they are not being naughty - they are trying to tell us that they are unhappy or trying to find out just how much we do care about them.

However, if a child goes missing from home repeatedly, receives unexplained gifts, and possibly has an older 'friend', there is a possibility they could be sexually exploited (see page 32).



Positive parenting & self-esteem

“Some of my friends moan that their parents are too busy for them. But my mum's great - she always finds time to talk to us about stuff and makes us feel special - I know I can talk to her about anything.”

- Children need to feel secure, loved and valued - this is the basis of self-esteem and confidence
- Noticing and rewarding good behaviour is the best way of influencing your child's behaviour
- Be realistic about what you expect from your child
- Parents and carers need to work together and be consistent
- Listen to and talk to your child - it's good to talk!
- Do things together with your child that you both enjoy - have fun!

make them feel great!

Positive parenting is about bringing out the best in your child, by listening and understanding, praising and encouraging their efforts, noticing and rewarding good behaviour and doing things together that you both enjoy.

This starts from the earliest days of your relationship with your child.

In trying to be helpful, it is often easy to point out where a child is going wrong and forget to notice the things that go right. By doing this you are unwittingly giving your child lots of attention for negative unwanted behaviour, rather than for the good behaviour you would prefer them to develop. It can also undermine your relationship with your child. Parental attention and praise is one of the biggest motivators for children so you need to use it in the right direction! Not only will this influence your child's behaviour in a positive way, it will also make your child feel happy, loved, wanted and secure and this is the basis of life-long confidence and self-esteem.

A sense of self-esteem is your child's best protection from peer pressure. You can help to foster this in many ways, for example by being a positive role model, giving positive accurate feedback, identifying and redirecting your child's inaccurate beliefs and by being spontaneous and affectionate. Make them feel great!

Healthy eating is about having a varied, balanced diet and enjoying lots of different foods. Younger children often refuse to eat certain foods and teenagers may go through food fads. These differences are normal. But some eating problems are more serious and if you are recognising signs of difficulties, contact a health professional for advice and support.

Promoting the health of your child is a task that most parents do without thinking. Whether it involves encouraging your child to brush their teeth, keep fit by sport and regular physical exercise, and reminding them to pay attention to personal hygiene, you are an important source of information and advice and an influential role model for your child.

Teenagers have to learn to make their own decisions and establish their independence from their parents. Unfortunately their decisions might not always agree with yours. That is why tension is normal. Choose your battles and let some go! Be friendly and supportive and let them know you have been through it and that you are always willing to talk. The main concern for adolescents is whether what they are going through is normal. Remember to give them the practical information they need about the physical changes and reassure them that their physical development is perfectly normal.

Encouraging your child to eat healthily does not mean denying them food they enjoy.



WARNING SIGNS

There may be none. Is your child eating well? Getting enough exercise? Any changes in their behaviour? Is your child trying to tell you something?



ACTION

Be involved and develop a good relationship with your child before they reach their teens. Adopt a healthy lifestyle. Share activities together.



WHAT TO SAY

With younger children, set boundaries. With teenagers, remember that you are in charge. Even if you only get a grunt, don't give up on communication.



PREVENTION

Be a little crazy! Have fun with your child. Encourage good friendship and outside interests. Listen carefully to your child's point of view. Help them think through choices.



CONTACTS

• Parentline Plus
0800 800 5000
• NSPCC
0800 800 2222 (for positive parenting materials online)
• Talk to your health visitor or approach your local SureStart

Sexual exploitation

“ I used to blame myself. How could I be so stupid to get into this! Now I know better. I was thirteen; he was twenty. He said he loved me, but all along he knew exactly what he was doing.”

- The prostitution of children is a form of sexual exploitation and abuse
- Children can be drawn into prostitution by manipulative adults who wish to make money
- Adults who abuse children should be held responsible, rather than blaming the children
- Children involved in prostitution face devastating physical, emotional and psychological risks
- It's never too early or too late to get help

drawn into prostitution

How can it happen?

It may be hard to imagine how any child could be drawn into prostitution. The sad fact is that those who benefit from child prostitution use sophisticated methods to lure their victims in, and keep them there. It can begin with an 'exciting' new relationship with an older boyfriend who may in fact be, or become, a pimp. The child may receive expensive gifts and be introduced to alcohol and drugs. Before long the pimp creates a loyal and dependent relationship with the victim and can then persuade or force them to make money for him by providing sexual services to others. But this is not a business relationship – it is an illegal form of sexual abuse, which puts the child involved at risk from severe physical, emotional and psychological damage.

child is at risk from or is involved in prostitution. If all or even some of them apply to your child, you should consider that they might be at risk.

How to stop it

Keeping or getting children out of child prostitution can require specialist help. A close and positive relationship with your child can reduce their vulnerability. Ensuring that they have high self-esteem and feel good about themselves can prevent them falling prey to abusive relationships. However, even with the best parents in the world, some children will find themselves vulnerable to this form of abuse. Parents can often feel powerless to intervene in what can be a complex and threatening situation.

The damage

Children involved in prostitution can become victims of serious physical and sexual attacks, which can sometimes be fatal. They can easily become addicted to drugs and alcohol and face a high risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. The emotional and psychological damage can be devastating and can lead to self-harm, severe depression and suicide.

How to spot it

There are some warning signs detailed on the opposite page that could indicate that your



WARNING SIGNS

Absence from home or truancy from school; unexplained money, clothes, jewellery or other gifts; new relationships with older men; evidence of drug or alcohol abuse; changes in mood or behaviour; loss of contact with former friends and new relationships with an older age group; lack of self-esteem.



ACTION

Try to encourage your child to confide in you about their situation; avoid alienating your child or making them feel that they are to blame; get in touch with information and support agencies that can help you and your child.



WHAT TO SAY

Make sure that your child knows that you are there to help them, no matter what they have experienced. Assure them that they shouldn't feel ashamed, that they are victims of abuse and that you understand how difficult it must be for them.



PREVENTION

Offer a positive and supportive home environment. Watch out for low self-esteem and other warning signs. Get information and support from local agencies if you feel your child may be at risk.



CONTACTS

- NSPCC 0800 800 5000
- Rape Crisis (offers help to mothers and their children who have suffered rape) see weblinks below
- Sexwise (free advice service for teenagers) 0800 28 29 30
- Parentline Plus 0800 800 2222
- For Social Services, see back of book
- For Police, see back of book



Smacking

“ Smacking is the only thing that works... I get so angry with him sometimes. Besides, I was smacked when I was a child and it never did me any harm. **”**

- Smacking does not teach children self-discipline
- Smacking gives attention to a child's bad behaviour
- Children learn best by attention to things they do well
- There are many positive alternatives to smacking
- Smacking teaches children to hurt others
- When self-discipline is taught, smacking becomes unnecessary

the great debate

It is important that children learn how to behave and control their own behaviour as they get older. Parents have a very important job as a role model for their children in helping them to learn how to do this.

Teaching children from a young age by setting limits and explaining reasons for these limits helps to instill self-discipline. Smacking, which controls your child from the outside, has no long-lasting positive effect. In fact smacking usually has to increase in severity in order to have the same impact on your growing child. This is where the thin line between smacking and hitting can be crossed.

However, simply because lots of people may have smacked their children does not mean it is the best way to punish your child or ensure good behaviour. Those who say smacking is acceptable have argued that it is not harmful in the long term and is the most immediate form of discipline. It is much more helpful and safer to notice and reward your child's positive behaviours, to encourage the behaviours you want.

The numbers of parents who smack their children is decreasing and lots of those who continue often do so because they are not sure that other methods will work.

Have you ever smacked your child? The answer from many parents reading this will be yes. Every parent experiences frustration with his or her child at various times. It is at these times that a parent may smack in the heat of the moment, but this is an outlet for the parent's frustration, rather than a helpful way of influencing the child's behaviour.

In this society parents are not allowed to physically harm their children regardless of any individual, cultural or religious justification. As a result, child protection professionals will assess incidents of physical ill treatment of children, in order that they can understand, prevent and explain the consequences of further incidents.



WARNING SIGNS

A child who flinches when they fear they will be hit. Smacking a child in frustration with a force, which in hindsight was unnecessary. Leaving bruising and other marks on a child.



ACTION

If you are concerned about your own or someone else's smacking get support from the organisations listed under Contacts (see right). If it is someone you know, offer practical help and suggestions about alternatives.



WHAT TO SAY

Tell your child they have crossed boundaries or broken family rules. Use your tone of voice and facial expressions to help them understand. Explain your reasons why.



PREVENTION

Make it a general rule not to smack your child. Use other ways to discipline; set clear limits and explain them, be firm and consistent, ignore trivial bad behaviour and reward good (perhaps use a star chart).



CONTACTS

- Parentline Plus 0800 800 2222
- NSPCC 0800 800 5000
- CRY-SIS (for help and advice about crying babies) 020 7404 5011
- Talk to your health visitor

“ I know my boyfriend loves me really... it's just that he's at school too, so it's a bit difficult at the moment. I never knew you could get pregnant the first time you have sex... mum never told me - I thought it would be alright but it's not, I just don't know what to do.”

Teenage pregnancy & sexual health

- The UK has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Europe
- Be proactive in your approach by taking the initiative in raising the issues about sex and relationships
- Explain that sex is not compulsory and that saying no is an option
- Try not to give the message that sex is necessarily a problem. Be prepared to talk about sexuality, even if it seems difficult
- Remind early teens that the legal age of consent to sexual activity is 16
- Try not to be judgmental, but don't be afraid to say if you think an activity may be unhealthy or could put your son or daughter at risk
- Your child will learn by example - they will learn your family's way of doing things based on your values, culture, faith and belief

preventative parenting

Children will learn about sex whether you want them to or not. Children are constantly exposed to information about relationships and sex: in magazines and newspapers, in films, adverts and soap operas. Children and young people also learn about sexual behaviour from each other - and what gets passed on in the playground may not be accurate or what parents want them to hear!

All these confusing messages may lead young people into situations they don't know how to deal with. As a parent you have an important role in making sure your child has the right information and skills to cope with these pressures. **It is your job to help them appreciate the importance of loving relationships, and to understand that most people regard a sexual relationship as the most intimate relationship they will ever have with another human being.**

You have the advantage of having had your child's lifetime to impress upon them what the important messages and values really are. You know your child's attitudes and personality, you understand their history and know their goals for the future. Each family has their own views on relationships and sex - you need to give children clear messages about your expectations, give as much useful information as you can, and try to keep communications as open as possible.

You might feel concerned that by discussing sex and relationships, particularly at an early age, you will encourage your children to start having sex when they're very young. But research has proved that the opposite is true. In fact, teenagers from families where parents talk frankly about sex wait until they are older than others before they start having sex. And when they do have sex for the first time, they are more likely to use contraceptives.

Most teenagers are sexually active before they graduate from college. It is shocking to know that some young people are sexually active as young as 11 or 12, although the average age for first sex is 17. The fact is that you can't always stop your teenagers from having sex and many of them will do it anyway. What you can do is to educate them about sex, pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, HIV/Aids and contraception.

If you feel uncomfortable or unsure about talking about sex with your children, don't worry - this is a common reaction. But don't let it put you off. Sex education shouldn't be a one-off talk but a gradual process of communication. If your children grow up knowing it's ok to discuss sex and the feelings they have with you, then they're much more likely to come to you for support when they need it.



WARNING SIGNS

Young people will not always tell you if there is something that is worrying them. You need to be attentive to their needs and let them know that you are there and be prepared to listen.



ACTION

If you think that your child is sexually active, ensure that they know where to get the right information. If you think your daughter may be pregnant or if she has told you that she is, ensure she sees her GP.



WHAT TO SAY

Talk to your daughters about birth control. Make your sons aware that pregnancy is not just a girl's problem.



PREVENTION

Make sure that your teenagers know about, and practice, safe sex. Remember it's not just about avoiding unplanned pregnancy but also to avoid sexually transmitted infections.



CONTACTS

• Parentline Plus 0800 800 2222
• Brook Advisory 0800 018 5023
• Family Planning Association 0845 310 1334

Temper tantrums

“Not only has he learned to walk and talk, but now he’s learned to stamp his foot, argue, scream until he’s bright red and embarrass me in public on a regular basis. What’s happened to my baby?”



WARNING SIGNS

It could happen anywhere, but watch out for a tired or hungry child in any situation when he or she wants something that you have said “no” to, especially when out shopping, or during a social event or a day out.



ACTION

Keep calm, consider whether your child needs food or rest. Give your child attention and if possible, find a quiet place or some way of distracting his or her attention. Don’t give in, but do try to understand your child’s feelings.



WHAT TO SAY

Try to offer your child a choice or a positive way out. Be calm and understanding. Keep it simple and clear. Praise your child for calming down afterwards.



PREVENTION

Avoid long shopping trips or tiring days out. It often helps to give your child extra attention and affection. Try to foresee possible causes for tantrums in the day ahead and find ways to avoid them.



CONTACTS

- Parentline Plus 0800 800 2222
- Talk to your health visitor

- 1 in 5 two-year-olds has a tantrum at least twice a day
- The ‘Terrible Twos’ are a normal part of your child’s development
- Getting angry is a natural reaction but it just makes the situation worse
- Be firm but find a positive way to deal with the problem
- Plan to avoid the causes of tantrums
- Remember, they won’t last forever!

When every day is a difficult day

Why temper tantrums happen

Tantrums may start around 18 months, are common around two years old and become much less common at four. Very young children are often not able to express themselves as much as they want to and their frustration may come out as a tantrum.

Tantrums are especially likely to happen if a child is tired, hungry or uncomfortable. Tantrums also often happen in busy, public places, which can be highly embarrassing and add to the parents’ stress.

If you are worried about your child’s behaviour discuss your concerns with your Health Visitor or GP.

Dealing with temper tantrums

- Keep calm. Getting angry and shouting at your child will only make things worse.
- Your child might be tired or hungry so rest or food might help. Or they might just need some attention or comfort.
- Try to find a distraction. Finding something else interesting to do or look at can help. If you’re in a busy or noisy place try to go somewhere quieter.
- If none of the above works, try to see things from your child’s point of view and understand what they actually want. Try offering them a choice, as this gives your child a sense of control and can be more effective than simply saying “no”. Always try to offer a positive way out.

- If you do say ‘no’ don’t be tempted to give in later to calm them down. If you give in your child will learn that tantrums work!
- If you’re at home you can try ignoring the tantrum, perhaps walking away into another room if it’s safe to do so. Encourage your child to cool down on their own and talk more calmly about what they want.
- After the tantrum, praise your child for settling down. Even though they may no longer be angry they may still be upset, so give them a cuddle and make it clear that you still love them no matter what.

Avoiding temper tantrums

You can reduce the likelihood of a tantrum by planning ahead.

- Try to avoid your child becoming hungry or overtired.
- Make sure your child is getting enough personal attention and affection.
- Make sure your time together is quality time together especially if you work for most of the day.
- Keep shopping trips and outings as short as possible.
- Try to plan a regular method that you’ll use to deal with tantrums when they happen.

Remember, temper tantrums are normal and do not usually lead to serious problems. As your child gets older they will learn to deal more calmly with the stresses of everyday life.

“Everyday I hear the young child next door crying, her parents constantly shout at her. Yesterday, in the street, I saw her mother hit her hard across the side of the head. This is probably none of my business but I am worried and not sure what to do.”

Worried about a child?

- Protecting children is everybody's business
- Adults have a responsibility to report abuse
- Consider offering some support if you are worried
- If in doubt share your concerns about children
- Reporting concerns rarely leads to a child being removed
- Act now - long-term abuse is damaging for children

should you mind your own business?

All parents experience difficulties at various times that can be helped by other family members or close friends.

Many people do not tell because they fear the following:

If someone you know is having difficulties, you could offer the following:

- Children will be at further risk of harm
- They believe that nothing will be done
- They believe that the child would be taken away
- They worry that the family may find out who reported them
- Telling may ruin family relationships.

- A listening ear
- Ideas to cope with problems
- Encouragement to get some help
- Practical support (childcare/shopping).

However there may be times when a child may be at risk of significant harm and professional support needs to be provided.

In reality, it is best that action is taken early to stop things getting worse. Long-term abuse is much more likely to cause problems for a child as they get older. Even if you think an incident is just a one off, other professional agencies may already have concerns about the child. So your information could be very important.

How would you want other people to act if your child was being harmed?

You can discuss your concerns in confidence by telephoning your local social services office or the police. Whilst we will make a record of your call, if you explain that you do not want to be identified, we will promise to respect your request.

- Would you want them to mind their own business?
- To report their worry to a professional who could help?

When we suspect, witness or are told of a child that is being hurt we can react in many different ways. We may feel guilt, anger, disbelief or denial. Some of these reactions can prevent help getting to a family who need it.



WARNING SIGNS

There are many possible signs of abuse, ranging from physical injury to changes in behaviour. Alternatively you may witness an incident or a child may tell you that he/she is being harmed.



ACTION

If you think that a child has been harmed, contact the Duty Social Worker or the Police. If you are not sure, you can speak to a confidential helpline, at the NSPCC.



WHAT TO SAY

Explain exactly what you have seen or been told. If you can, keep a note of dates, injuries and the exact words used. These will help you.



PREVENTION

Make sure your child knows who they can share worries with if and when they need to. Listen carefully to children and be alert to changes in them.



CONTACTS

- For Social Services numbers, see back of book
- For Police contacts, see back of book
- NSPCC 0800 800 5000

Helpful National Organisations

- Advisory Centre for Education Exclusion Line**
020 7704 9822
- CRY-SIS Helpline**
020 7404 5011
- Disabled Parents Network**
08702 410 450
www.disabledparentsnetwork.org.uk
- Family Friends of Lesbians and Gays (helpline)**
01454 852 418
- Family Rights Group**
0800 731 1696
- Gingerbread**
0800 018 4318
www.gingerbread.co.uk
- Kidscape**
0800 7730 3300 (parents bullying helpline) www.kidscape.org.uk
- Message Home**
0800 700 740
- Missing Persons Helpline**
0500 700 700
24 hours

- National Council for One Parent Families**
0800 018 5026 or 020 7428 5400
www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk
- National Drugs Helpline**
0800 77 66 00
24 hour free advice
- NHS Direct**
0845 4647
www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk
- NSPCC**
0808 800 5000
www.nspcc.org.uk
- Parentline**
0808 800 2222
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)**
0121 248 2000 www.rospa.co.uk
- Samaritans**
0845 790 9090
- Useful comprehensive local website**
www.childrentfirst.org.uk
- Women's Aid (national helpline)**
08457 023 468
- Young Minds**
020 7336 8445
www.youngminds.org.uk

Kent and Medway SureStarts

incorporates:

- ASHFORD**
01233 641156/08005877455
info@suresstart-ashford.co.uk
- CANTERBURY**
01227 477964
suresstart@canterbury.gov.uk
- CHATHAM**
01634 336603
- DARTFORD**
01322 276317
suresstartdart@btconnect.com
- DOVER**
01304 226919
suresstartdover@hotmail.com
- GRAVESHAM**
01474 357569
graveshamsuresstart@hotmail.com
- FOLKESTONE**
01303 856200
Sylvia.Scott@suresstartfolkestone.co.uk
- MARGATE**
01843 224119
admin@suresstartmargate.plus.com
- MILLMEAD**
01843 280555
suresstart@millmead.freeserve.co.uk
- SHEERNESS**
01795 667070
suresstart@sssheerness.demon.co.uk

Kent and Medway Social Services & Police

- ASHFORD OFFICE**
0845 3302967
- CANTERBURY OFFICE**
01227 451741
- DARTFORD OFFICE**
01322 277744
- DOVER OFFICE**
01304 204915
- GRAVESEND OFFICE**
01474 328664
- MAIDSTONE OFFICE**
01622 691640
- KENT & MEDWAY OUT OF HOURS**
0845 7626 777
- MEDWAY DISABLED CHILDREN'S, PARKLANDS**
01634 338500
- MEDWAY FAMILY CENTRES**
Rochester and Strood Family Centre
01634 291391
- Chatham Family Centre**
01634 300302
- Gillingham Family Centre, Sunlight Centre**
01634 336686
- MEDWAY SOCIAL SERVICES**
Access and Information
01634 334466
- SEVENDAKS & SWANLEY**
01322 611000
- SHEPWAY OFFICE (FOLKESTONE)**
01303 253476
- SWALE OFFICE**
01795 473333
- THANET OFFICE**
01843 860000
- TONBRIDGE OFFICE**
01732 362442
- TUNBRIDGE WELLS OFFICE**
01892 515045
- POLICE**
999 in emergency
Canterbury Police
01227 762055
Maidstone Police
01622 690055
Medway Police
01634 827055
North Kent Police
01474 331055
South East Kent Police
01304 240055
Swale Police
01795 477055
Thanet Police
01843 231055
Weald Police
01233 611055
West Kent Police
01732 740055

WEBLINKS

Child Care Link - www.childcarelink.gov
Positive Parenting Network - www.medwayppn.org