Happy children

Sad children

All about children's feelings
Why do some children feel sad?

Most adults are kind and loving to children. But sometimes adults hurt children or make them feel bad. These are some of the things that adults may do to children:

- Kick, beat or punch them
- Say unkind words and not hug or cuddle them
- Leave them at home alone, or not give them enough to eat
- Touch or kiss them in a way that makes them feel worried or unhappy, maybe pretending it's a game or a secret.

When an adult treats a child like this it is called child abuse. Child abuse isn't about getting told off now and then. It's about people treating you badly most of the time, making you feel that nobody loves you and that your feelings are not important.

Remember:
- You have a right to say what happens to your body and who can and can't touch it.
- Child abuse is never the child's fault, even if they think they have done something wrong.

What kind of adult hurts children?

It's really difficult to tell which adults hurt children badly. You certainly can't tell by looking at them.

Most children know the adult who is hurting them. It might even be the child's own parent or stepparent. But sometimes a child does not know the person who is trying to hurt them. A stranger may start talking to a child he or she doesn't know, and try to trick the child into going somewhere or doing something. This can happen anywhere — outside school, in the street, in a playground or park.

Which of these children will be abused?

Any of these children might be abused and feel bad. But you can't tell which ones it will happen to. They might be boys or girls. They might be a bit naughtier or very well behaved. They could come from rich families or much poorer ones. They can also be of any race or religion.

Why do some adults make children feel bad?

It's hard to understand why adults hurt children. They may have problems of their own, be upset about money or jobs, or they might have been treated badly when they were small. But whatever the reason, it's never OK and they must get help.

What's going on?

Sometimes it can be very hard to tell what is child abuse and what isn't. The pictures on this page show adults and children doing different things. See if you can tell which ones are child abuse and which ones aren't.

This isn't child abuse. Sam scratched a boy from his little story. Sometimes people hurt each other without really wanting to. The boy didn't get hurt, but he's going to have a little cut.

This isn't child abuse. Jane took a toy from her little sister, then threw it in the corner. She thought she could have it because her mother needs it. She's just going to have to go and play with something else.

This isn't child abuse. Sam scratched a boy from his little story. Sometimes people hurt each other without really wanting to. The boy didn't get hurt, but he's going to have a little cut.

This isn't child abuse. Jane took a toy from her little sister, then threw it in the corner. She thought she could have it because her mother needs it. She's just going to have to go and play with something else.
Stay safe!

- If an adult who is looking after you is making you feel bad most of the time, tell another adult who you trust.
- If an adult or much older child wants to touch you in a way that makes you feel unhappy or uneasy, or wants you to touch them, say "NO" as loudly as you can, even if the person is someone you know or love.
- Never go out on your own without first telling the adult looking after you where you are going, who you are going with and when you will be coming home.
- Never go off with anyone you don’t know. And never accept sweets or presents from them, however friendly they seem.
- If someone you don’t know tries to force you into a car or do things you don’t like, you should shout, kick and bite and do everything else to escape.

Is it happening to you?

- Tell an adult
  If you have been abused, the first thing to do is tell an adult you trust what has happened. If the adult you tell doesn’t believe you, keep telling until someone does.
- Phone a Helpline
  Phoning a helpline means talking on the phone to someone who will listen to you talk about a problem. You do not need any money to make these calls and you can make them from any telephone, including public telephones. You can ring at any time of the day or night.

ChildLine

- Telephone: 0800 1111
  This helpline is for children and young people, and can help with any kind of problem, including child abuse. You can also ring them if you are worried about a friend. You can also write to them at: Freepost 1111, London NW1 OBR. You do not need a stamp.

What happened to Jamie?

If your parents are kind and look after you well, you might find it hard to imagine what it's like to feel unloved. Here is nine-year-old Jamie’s story.

I used to get into bad tempers all the time because I wanted my mum and dad to love me and be interested in me, but they kept telling me I was a bad boy.

One day I made my mum so angry, she hit me. Later she told me she was sorry and that she had telephoned some people called the NSPCC who could help make us happy. I thought they would take me away. But they didn’t. They said that I wasn’t bad and that what had happened to me wasn’t my fault.

We went to the NSPCC every week. My mum and dad talked about how they felt and I told them how angry I was. I know now that my mum loves me, and she shows it.

My mum and dad pay me lots more attention, and I’m so much happier now.

The NSPCC visits primary and middle schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. If the NSPCC visits your school, please join the fun and find out what you can do to help children at risk.