



# The Invisible Child Abuse

Of all the types of abuse, emotional child battering can be the most difficult to determine. However, the law recognizes it as a crime. Mental injury is illegal when caused by the person responsible for the welfare of a child under the age of 18.

## What You Can See

A child can be emotionally abused in various ways. In sorting out the situation, our individual standards as parents can cause confusion about what's abuse and what's an acceptable child training practice. In addition, there's no clear definition of what constitutes an abusive parent. Only a small number of child abusers are mentally ill or psychotic. Most simply can't control their impulses under stress. They take out frustrations, or make up for a lack of self-esteem by abusing children. A sad fact is that many child abusers were themselves abused. Their behavior is handed down from their own parents. In these cases, neither the child nor the abuser may know what the limits should be.

## Types of Mental Abuse

**BRIBERY**—offering rewards for extreme favors

**BULLYING**—taking advantage of age or size

**WITHDRAWAL**—denying affection

**HUMILIATION**—public name calling or disapproval

**BETRAYAL**—exploiting a child's natural trust

**GUILT**—blaming the child for family problems

To a youngster, emotional manipulation can be as forceful and painful as physical battering. The effects can be permanently damaging.

## Signs of Abuse

Our children look to us for everything. They learn that adults control their lives and are not to be questioned. A child trusts grownups to do what's right. What a child says is not

taken seriously in many cases.

For these reasons, a child may not protest or understand that abuse exists. But you can be alert for signs such as these:

- problems with authority figures
- passiveness
- withdrawal
- fearfulness
- sleepiness
- staying away from home

Rather than confronting a parent with your suspicions, it's usually better to contact professionals. The issues are complicated and the people involved may not understand your intervention. Experts suggest that help be sought from counselors and social workers. Many organizations, such as Parents Anonymous and social agencies, have 24-hour telephone numbers for support and assistance.

If you want more information about child abuse, contact your local child protection agencies, school counselors and support groups. Most are listed in the telephone directory.



## How to Spot Emotional Assault