



**AFRUCA – Africans Unite Against Child Abuse**  
Promoting the Rights and Welfare of African Children

# WHAT IS SEXUAL ABUSE?

Safeguarding African Children in the UK Series 7  
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition



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# 1 About AFRUCA

**AFRUCA - Africans Unite Against Child Abuse** was established in May 2001 as a platform for promoting the rights and welfare of African Children in the UK. AFRUCA has developed a national profile as an organisation rooted in the African community bringing specialist knowledge and expertise to the work of practitioners and policy makers to safeguard African children.

AFRUCA works in five key areas to help promote the rights and welfare of African children in the UK:

**Awareness Raising and Sensitisation:** With African communities and among young Africans about the children's rights as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international conventions and UK legislation promoting the rights and welfare of children.

**Information, Education, and Advisory Services:** To raise the profile of African children in the UK, increase awareness of their needs, improve policies and practices, and develop the leadership potential of young Africans. Activities include research and publishing reports; media work; conferences, seminars, workshops and training programmes for parents, policy makers, service providers, community leaders and young people; community meetings; advice and consultancy services.

**Advocacy and Policy Development:** Working closely with policy makers to shape the development of policy and regulatory action to promote the welfare of children.

**Community and International Development:** in partnership with others, establishing programmes and projects to help relieve some of the suffering and hardship that trafficked African children experience in Europe.

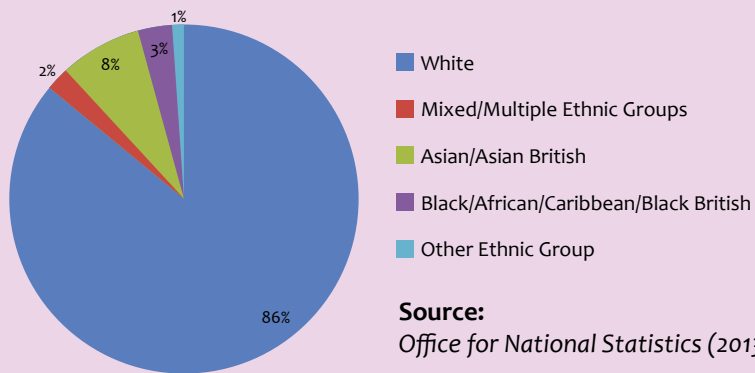
**Support for Children, Young People and Families:** Working to support children, young people and African families in crisis or at the point of breakdown through effective early intervention services.

## 2 Africans in the UK

The UK, through its historical links with a number of English speaking African countries, and also due to its reputation as the most multicultural country in Europe, has become home to many African people.

The 2011 UK census indicated that there are over 1.8 million Africans in the UK, an increase of 1.1 million from the 2001 census making up 3.3% of the overall UK population.

### Ethnic Groups: London and Wales 2011



Africans are generally well integrated into the British society and are economically and academically driven, making vast contributions within the health and social care system and in business. Children from African backgrounds are achieving particularly well above other groups within the British education system, and continue to strive.

### Social Issues affecting Africans in the UK

Africans like many other immigrant groups in the UK tend to migrate with their values, beliefs and work ethos. While we acknowledge some cultural practices, beliefs and values are beneficial, others are particularly harmful to certain sections of the community such as to children and women. Increasingly, Local Authorities across the country are reporting a rise in cases of African families coming to the attention of Children's Services mainly due to differences in approaches to child rearing, physical discipline and religious or cultural practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and witchcraft branding.

These are practices seen as normal by many Africans but could be considered as posing significant harm to children according to UK laws. Moreover, many African parents, faith and community leaders themselves are unaware of the UK laws and practices that safeguard children. As a result, many African children are being

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removed from their families and placed into the care system, leading to more African families being broken up, with significant psychological impact.

There are high levels of unemployment as new arrivals face difficulties in accessing jobs that match their qualifications or experience. African communities, particularly new immigrants also find themselves without decent housing and a high proportion of Africans live on the poorest and most neglected estates in the UK's largest cities. Finally, many Africans have difficulty accessing social and health care, some due to their immigration status, but also, sometimes, because they are unaware of the local support services available to them. Children can also be exposed to some form of emotional abuse because of the level of stress and reality of life experienced by their parents or others looking after them.

AFRUCA has produced the **“Safeguarding African Children in the UK”** series of publications to highlight different safeguarding issues and to assist members of the African community in the UK to know more about different forms of child abuse and how to identify the signs so children can be safe and be better protected. The **“What is Sexual Abuse?”** booklet is the seventh in the series.



### 3 What is Child Abuse?

The UK government has identified four main categories of child abuse. At AFRUCA we know from experience that these forms of abuse can occur in different ways – especially in places where people are not aware of child protection rules and regulations or do not understand how to ensure children are safeguarded.

The four categories of child abuse are:

- Physical Abuse
- Neglect
- Sexual Abuse
- Emotional Abuse

Although there are other categories, most forms of abuse will fall under one or more of these. You can read more about Child Abuse and the different categories in our publication: [“What is Child Abuse?”](#)



## 4 What is Child Sexual Abuse?

Child sexual abuse involves having inappropriate sexual relationships with children. It means involving a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and that violates the laws or social taboos of society.

All sexual activity between an adult and a child is sexual abuse. Sexual touching between children can also be sexual abuse especially when there is a significant age difference (usually 3 or more years) between them, or if the children are very different developmentally. Sexual abuse does not have to involve penetration, force, pain, or even touching. Any sexual behaviour (looking, showing or touching) with a child to meet the adult's interest or sexual needs is sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse includes both harmful contact and non-contact behaviours.

Sexual abuse happens when an adult pressures, forces or tricks a child into taking part in any sexual activity. It can also occur when words of an explicit sexual nature are communicated to (or about) children.

Many of the activities identified in this publication constitute an offence under the UK Sexual Offences Act 2003.

### SIGNIFICANT HARM

The government uses the term “*significant harm*” to decide at what point to intervene in a family to safeguard a child believed to be at risk of abuse. In the UK, when a local authority has reasons to believe a child is suffering or is likely to suffer “*significant harm*”, it has the legal duty to make enquiries to assess what is happening to that child. Although this activity can be regarded by parents as interfering in their family, it is usually seen by the law to be done in the “*best interests of the child*”.

For this reason, many African children have been referred into the Child Protection system in various local authorities nation-wide due to allegations of Sexual Abuse and sexual exploitation. However, the number of children referred into the system under the category of “*Sexual Abuse*” is still relatively lower than the number of those referred under the categories of “*Physical Abuse*” and “*Neglect*”. This is not to say that African children are less likely to experience sexual abuse. Rather, it is to draw attention to the fact that this form of abuse is mostly hidden, and people, including victims do not like to talk about it.

## 5 Forms of Sexual Abuse

In the African community, sexual abuse can occur in different ways. Many forms of sexual abuse are linked to religious or cultural practices. Others are facilitated by the use of modern means of communication including mobile phones and the internet. Sexual abuse can occur as a result of parents' negligence. No matter the cause, sexual abuse can have long term, devastating consequences on children.

### a Physical Sexual Abuse

Abusive physical contact or touching includes:

Touching a child's genitals or private parts along with penetration is abusive. Making or encouraging a child to touch someone else's genitals or play sexual games such as putting objects or body parts (like fingers, tongue or penis) inside the vagina, in the mouth or in the anus of a child is also abusive. Kissing, touching or fondling a child's breasts, sexual assault and molestation are further forms of child sexual abuse. These are termed as physical sexual abuse.

### b Non-Contact Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse does not only have to be physical contact such as penetration or touching. Any of the following sexual behaviour is termed as non-contact sexual abuse.

- Showing pornography to a child
- Deliberately exposing an adult's genitals to a child
- Photographing a child in sexual poses
- Encouraging a child to watch or hear sexual acts
- Inappropriately watching a child undress or use the bathroom
- Viewing and downloading child pornography
- Using sexual words in conversations with children or when talking about children
- Sending letters, emails, text messages of a sexual nature to children

An adult who engages in any of the above activities is sexually abusing children. These activities are also against the Law in the UK and those caught will be prosecuted and can be imprisoned.

### c Culture and Child Sexual Abuse

Certain African cultural and traditional practices are harmful and abusive to children. Female Genital Mutilation is the act of mutilating the female genitalia and thus constitutes sexual abuse towards children. Under the UK Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003, it is a criminal offence liable to prosecution and imprisonment. You can read more about Female Genital Mutilation in our publication: "*What is FGM?*"



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In Ghana, Togo and Republic of Benin, under the Trokosi Ritual Slavery system, a young girl - usually a virgin - can be given to a shrine in atonement for a crime committed by a family member. Such girls are also sexually abused and exploited as they are seen to be “married” to the shrine.

There have been many cases of young Nigerian girls trafficked to Europe for prostitution and sexual exploitation. In order to coerce and subjugate their victims, child traffickers compel many of these girls to take oaths of allegiance, secrecy and confidentiality in order to bind them to their traffickers, ensure compliance and guarantee the repayment of the huge sums of money claimed to be owed for transporting them to Europe. The fear of juju makes it very difficult to support victims and for the authorities to investigate, prosecute and bring suspected child traffickers to justice. You can read more about this in our publication: *“What is Child Trafficking?”*

In some cultures, young girls are made to undergo “virginity tests” to ascertain their sexual “cleanliness”. This involves inserting the fingers inside the child’s private parts to ascertain if the hymen is intact. In 2013, a secondary school head teacher in Nigeria was arrested by the Police for conducting virginity tests on some of her students without the knowledge and consent of their parents.

Another culturally based sexual abuse revolves around the belief that sexual intercourse with a virgin will cure a man of HIV or AIDS, because some African men believe that the blood that is spilt from having sex with a virgin is pure. This belief has led to the rape of many babies and children in some African countries which is an extreme form of child sexual abuse thus exposing them to HIV infection with all its consequences.

## Case Study One

### Child Sexual Abuse and “Cultural Smokescreens”

Some years ago, AFRUCA was approached by a Police Constabulary to assist in the case of a man who sexually molested a young girl in his care. When arrested, he did not deny the abuse, but claimed it was customary in his culture, when a child complains of a tummy ache, to put ones hands in their private parts so as to diagnose the problem by smelling their urine. The police approached AFRUCA for advice. We told them there was no culture that permitted an adult to violate a child in that way. Culture should never be a reason for abusing children.

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#### d Religion and Sexual Abuse

There are known cases of children sexually abused in places of worship in the UK. Many people claim that sexual abuse in places of worship is largely unreported and well hidden due to a culture of silence which persists in faith settings. Many victims of abuse by faith leaders, for example, might not report their experiences as a result of the possible repercussions, including ostracisation and stigma.

In January 2013, a UK Channel Four TV Documentary “*Hidden Children*” showed a Jewish faith leader actively discouraging a victim of sexual abuse from reporting his ordeal to the Police. In March 2011, a popular Nigerian Pentecostal faith leader was convicted and jailed for sexually abusing a young boy in his church in Kent. In a unique case, in February 2013, an African man launched a lawsuit in the Irish High Court against the “*Holy Ghost Fathers*” who owned the Irish catholic boarding school he attended in Sierra Leone as a child. He claimed to have been sexually abused by catholic priests working in the school at that time. This would be one of the few court cases where Catholic priests would be involved in allegations of child sexual abuse in Africa.

Allegations of child sexual abuse in faith settings therefore cut across different religions. This subject has generally been considered a taboo and consequently there has been little discussion taking place on the subject at any level. Child sexual abuse by manipulative faith leaders, workers and or members of the congregation is often swept under the carpet. When this happens, members of the congregation fear to denounce perpetrators for fear of bringing shame on their church or mosque. Many are afraid of speaking out against a powerful faith leader and as such keep silent about their abuse.

Children with disability and other vulnerable children are also prone to being sexually abused as a result of being branded as witches or as possessed by evil spirits. Such children can also be made to undergo exorcism rites or ‘deliverance’ which might lead to sexual abuse.

Some religions sanction early marriages. However, young girls married off early are also victims of child sexual abuse as their roles as “wives” include having sex with their “husbands”. Such girls can develop Vesico Vaginal Fistula - a terrible condition in which they constantly leak urine because of the terrible damage done to their urinary tract.

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### e New Technology and Sexual Abuse

With increased access to the internet in homes, schools, cafes and on mobile phones, children are now spending considerable periods of time online. African children are not different from any other children when it comes to use of the internet. They may be on Snapchat and go onto different social networking sites. Many child sex abusers gain access to their victims through the internet.

There is also a growing problem of people making and downloading sexual images of children on the internet. To view sexually abusive images of children is to participate in the abuse of a child. This is because the child is the central victim. Anyone taking part in any of these activities is participating in child sexual abuse thus committing an offence. The downloading of child pornography is a strict liability offence, rendering the culprit liable to prosecution.

As a community, we have to develop strategies to keep our children safe online, particularly, from being groomed by adult sexual predators who they might meet on social networking sites, such as Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram or Twitter.

### f Sibling Sexual Abuse

Siblings include all children who grow up together in the same family, including step, foster and adopted children. Sibling sexual abuse (sibling incest) is sexual contact between siblings who are of a different age, size, strength and developmental level. It constitutes an abuse of power by a more powerful sibling over a less powerful sibling and usually involves some form of force, coercion, manipulation or intimidation.

Sibling sexual abuse can involve non-contact abuse, such as forcing another to view pornography or exposing of genitals or contact abuse such as touching a sibling's genitals or private parts along with penetration or making or encouraging other siblings to touch each other's genitals or play sexual games. Sibling sexual abuse is very often a serious and hidden problem and difficult to identify.

### g Child Sexual Exploitation

Children can be transported across countries or internally for the purposes of being sexually exploited or prostituted for money. Child Trafficking is a growing problem across the UK and children from different backgrounds and races are affected as victims. Young children are being groomed for sexual exploitation by grown men and recent cases in different cities have highlighted this as a growing problem across the country. You can read more about Child Trafficking and Exploitation in our publication: *"What is Child Trafficking?"*

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### g Gang Culture and Gang Rape

The growing gang culture across much of London and other major cities in the UK encourages negative behaviour among young people which could also lead to sexual bullying, unhealthy relationships, forced sexual advancements and gang rape of affiliates. Many girls join gangs in order to gain status but this can result in gang leaders taking advantage of them. Depending on the ages of those involved, these assaults can constitute child abuse and should not be ignored.

### h Child Sex Tourism (CST)

Child Sex Tourism (CST) is the commercial sexual exploitation of children by men or women who travel from one place to another, usually from a richer country to one that is less developed, and while there engage in sexual acts with children. Child sex tourism is child sexual abuse and can involve both physical and non physical contact.

It is estimated that more than one million children are sexually abused by tourists every year within the global child sex tourism industry. Victims of CST often come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. However, this is not the only characteristic; some come from ethnic minorities and displaced communities. Victims are both girls and boys, some of whom may also have been victims of other forms of child abuse and neglect.

Most child sex tourists are males spanning all income levels, although occasionally, women also engage in child sex tourism. Perpetrators often originate from Western Europe and North America and travel to many African countries including Ghana, Gambia, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria and other places for the sole purpose of gaining access to and abusing children.

### Laws on Child Sex Tourism in the United Kingdom

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 enables British citizens and residents who commit sexual offences against children overseas to be prosecuted in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Similar provisions are in force in Scotland under the Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 1995. Therefore, if tourists sexually abuse a child outside the UK they can be trialled in the UK as well as the other country if the country where the offence was committed has no legislation against child sex tourism. Some of the offences carry penalties of up to life imprisonment and anyone found guilty will be placed on the Sex Offenders Register. The UK police, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) and Interpol are actively involved in monitoring child sex tourists and do prosecute when possible.

## 6 Child Sexual Abuse: What is the Scale of the Problem?

Child sexual abuse is often hidden so the statistics vary widely. Some experts estimate that 1 in 4 girls (25%) and 1 in 6 boys (17%) are sexually abused before their 18th birthdays. This means that in any classroom or neighbourhood full of children, there are children who are silently bearing the burden of sexual abuse.

There is a widespread false belief that child sex abuse can be attributed to the insidious forces of modernity, 'foreign influences' and rapid social change. It is deemed to be 'un-African,' 'unnatural' and very rare among the African Community. This is one of the reasons why children might not be believed when they do disclose sexual abuse as some people think it is a taboo to talk about it. It is also the reason it is such a hidden problem as victims are usually afraid to disclose abuse.

## 7 Who Abuses Children?

Child sexual abuse happens in all racial, religious, ethnic and age groups, and at all socio-economic levels. In as many as 93 percent of child sexual abuse cases, the child knows the person who commits the abuse. The people who sexually abuse are either immediate or extended family members (fathers, mothers, stepparents, grandparents, siblings, uncles, aunts, cousins, etc.). They can also be neighbours, babysitters, religious leaders, teachers, group or gang members, coaches, or anyone else who has close contact with children. Across London, there are growing reports of children abusing children as part of the gang culture spreading across the capital and in other cities.

Since children are mainly abused in their own homes across the country, adults need to learn what makes children vulnerable. Through guidance and supervision, children need to be aware of boundaries and inappropriate behaviour. Parents and guardians must recognise warning signs of those who may be sexually abusing their children and what to do if sexual abuse is suspected.

## 8 How do People who Sexually Abuse Children Behave?

Experts have described the *modus operandi* of child sexual abusers as follows: a blatant violation of personal boundaries, the giving of unwanted attention to children by kissing and hugging them, or frequently walking in on children in the bathroom.

Such abusers have secret interactions with children for their own emotional or physical comfort by sharing personal or private information, normally only shared with adults. They often want uninterrupted time with children, such as insisting on babysitting alone.

Another scenario is that they seem “too good to be true”. For example, they could give money for no apparent reason, or let children get away with inappropriate behaviour. Talking “dirty” around children is perhaps more obvious as are suggestive jokes and pointing out sexual images. Any type of sexualised conversation or behaviour in the company of children is a red flag, such as being overtly interested in their body.

**In addition to the above, there should be cause for concern about someone’s behaviour if they:**

- a Spend long periods on the internet, so that it becomes a preoccupation and impacts on their family and work.
- b Become secretive about their online activity, i.e. shutting the door, or changing the screen if someone comes into the room.
- c Regularly make plausible excuses for working online, i.e. regularly uses the internet at night.
- d Become emotionally distant and less available, withdrawn from usual family and social activities.
- e Break promises not to go online so often and hide traces of their online activity and file storage.
- f Increase their pornography viewing and change their sexual attitudes and preferences.
- g Use new technologies with children, whilst excluding adults.
- h Meet up with children in real life who they met online.

However, sex abusers behave in many different ways and despite their abusive behaviour are very often parents, guardians or grandparents themselves.

## 9 What are the Signs of Child Sexual Abuse?

The signs of sexual abuse in children can be either physical or emotional. However, in some cases, there will be no outward signs so parents need to be vigilant.

### Physical Signs

Physical signs include pain, discolouration, bleeding and genital discharge in the vagina, anus or mouth. There may be pain during urination and bowel movements, along with wetting and soiling accidents, unrelated to toilet training. Medical evidence in this regard can lead to a child sexual abuser's conviction, including DNA profiling.

There are various lists of possible physical and behavioural indicators of child sexual abuse, some of which are:

- a Waking up during the night, sweating, screaming or shaking with nightmares.
- b Masturbating excessively.
- c Showing unusually aggressive behaviour toward family members, friends, toys and pets.
- d Complaining of pain while urinating or having a bowel movement, or exhibiting symptoms of genital infections such as offensive odours, or symptoms of a sexually transmitted disease.
- e Having symptoms indicating evidence of physical traumas to the genital or anal area.
- f Beginning wetting the bed.
- g Experiencing a loss of appetite or other eating problems, including unexplained gagging.
- h Sexually transmitted infections.
- i Developing frequent unexplained health problems.

Adolescent reaction to sexual abuse can be extreme and highly visible; such as self-injury, poor personal hygiene, alcohol abuse and compulsive eating disorders. Promiscuity, depression, anxiety, suicide attempts and fear of intimacy are also indicators of such trauma-inducing events.

Sexual dysfunction, loss of childhood and engaging in prostitution are other effects of such abuse, along with teenage pregnancy and Vesico Vaginal Fistula. This latter condition disproportionately affects children who have been involved in early marriages.

## Behaviour (Emotional)

Behavioural changes are often one of the most common signs of child sexual abuse. These changes could include for example, a sudden fear or refusal to spend time with someone the child is well acquainted with or even a relative. On the same note, a seemingly unreasonable fear or refusal to go to certain places could occur. Some children will run away from home whereas others will turn to drugs or alcohol. Many will display changes in character, like developing a negative self image or becoming self-conscious, withdrawn, angry, aggressive or erratic.

**There are various other possible behavioural indicators of child sexual abuse including:**

- j** Engaging in persistent sexual play with friends, toys or pets.
- k** Having unexplained periods of panic, which may be flashbacks from the abuse.
- l** Regressing to behaviours too young for the stage of development they already achieved.
- m** Initiating sophisticated sexual behaviour or using inappropriate sexual language.
- n** Engaging in self-mutilation, such as sticking themselves with pins or cutting themselves.
- o** Withdrawing from previously enjoyable activities, like school or changes in performance at school.
- p** Asking an unusual amount of questions about human sexuality.





# 10 What are the Consequences of Child Sexual Abuse?

Child sexual abuse happens in all communities with terrible consequences for the victims. The actual consequences depend on the seriousness, the type and the duration of abuse the child was exposed to. Those abused in their childhood, or recently, retain certain problems due to this trauma. These can be divided into psychological, social, sexual and physical problems.

## Psychological problems:

### a Emotional isolation

Children can be very emotionally isolated. If the abuser is a family member, the child may worry about what will happen to the family if the secret is told. The burden of the secret can be carried into adulthood. Carrying a secret, and the abuse itself, can make the child feel different from others.

### b Self-blame and guilt

The child may feel they are to blame for the abuse. They may have felt that the abuse was punishment for something they did wrong. Children usually assume that adults, who are in a position of authority, are right. The guilt and shame felt by the child can persist into adult life.

### c Betrayed trust

As an abused child, his/her trust was betrayed, perhaps by someone trusted by the family, or even by a family member. When this happens it can be difficult to trust again.

### d Experiencing triggers

For people abused in childhood, there may be things that trigger memories. These include not only obvious things like childbirth, smear tests or the way their partner touches them sexually, but also everyday things such as colours, objects, sounds or smells that bring back memories or feelings associated with the abuse or the abuser.

### e Anger

Some adult survivors report problems with anger. It may be anger that is hard to direct, such as anger with fate or God. Adult survivors may feel angry with themselves for not being able to stop the abuse, angry with the abuser, or angry with parents or care givers for not protecting them.

### f Depression

Some adult survivors report depression as a symptom of abuse. Some research shows, in fact, that depression is the most frequently reported symptom.

**g Fear, anxiety and always feeling on guard**

Fear and anxiety are normal responses to trauma, and so is feeling the need to be on guard against possible danger. Research shows that survivors of sexual abuse are up to five times more likely to be diagnosed with at least one anxiety disorder than other people.

**h Self-harming and addictive, compulsive, and suicidal behaviours.**

Many survivors develop strategies to avoid overwhelming feelings and memories and the pain associated with them including:

- > Eating problems, including starving, bingeing, vomiting food or overeating.
- > Sexual difficulties, including avoidance of sex, promiscuity or experiencing fear and flashbacks.
- > Being a workaholic, over exercising or other compulsive behaviours.
- > Engaging in self-harm, including cutting and burning one's arms, legs and genitals or other parts of the body.
- > Repeatedly thinking about wanting to die.
- > Fears, panic attacks, sleeping problems, nightmares, irritability, outbursts of anger and sudden shock reactions when being touched.
- > Little confidence and self-respect and changes in respect for one's own body.
- > Behaviour that harms the body: addiction to alcohol and other substances, excessive work or sports, depression, self-destruction and prostitution.

**Social problems:****i Increased likelihood of homelessness**

A study of homeless people found that many, especially homeless women, reported serious family problems or a history of sexual or physical abuse as children that predisposed them to homelessness as an adult. Many children who have been abused also run away from home in order to escape their abuser.

**j Increased risk of drug and alcohol abuse**

Research indicates that repeated sexual abuse causes physical changes that may lead to drug and alcohol abuse later in life.

**k Fear of loss of control in relationships**

Abused children are forced to do what the adult abuser wants. In relationships, the survivor may have problems asserting themselves. This may be with friends, partners, relatives or people at work. Some survivors have problems in sexual relationships because sex and physical contact may recall the circumstances of the abuse.

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## Sexual problems:

As adults, while making love problems often occur. The partner may be confused by a certain remark, touch or behaviour that brings back memories of the abuse. Victims sometimes don't want to make love at all anymore or make love less. Sexual relation problems may occur, for instance with pain while making love, and problems getting aroused or with orgasm.

## Physical complaints:

Abdominal pain, pain while making love, menstrual pain, intestinal complaints, stomach ache, nausea, headache, back pain, painful shoulders - in short, all kinds of chronic pain may occur. The pain is often inexplicable. Eating disorders often occur in sexually abused people.



## 11 How do we Prevent Sexual Abuse?

Everyone has the collective responsibility to prevent child sexual abuse. To accomplish this, we must strengthen child abuse prevention services that support children and families in the African community across the country. We must promote the laws that protect children so everyone is aware of these. There need to be increased community education and awareness raising activities to address the risk factors that can lead to child sexual abuse. Faith groups especially need to accept that child sexual abuse does occur and that the children who attend have the right to be protected from abuse at the hands of people who use religion as a cover to harm children. Everyone must know that child sexual abuse is a crime that often causes severe, long term - even permanent damage to children. Everyone must be aware of how to get help for those who need it. Most importantly, everyone must know that by law, children can never consent to sexual activity. Any form of sexual activity with a child as outlined in this publication is therefore a criminal offence.



## 12 What Must Parents do to Prevent Sexual Abuse?

Parents need to communicate with their children about child sexual abuse. Talking to children about sexual abuse will help to minimise opportunities for abusers and being alert and realistic will reduce the likelihood of such abuse. Children need to know that they can say “No!” or “Stop!” to adults who threaten them sexually. Children must know it is okay to tell their parents about any attempt to abuse them-no matter who the offender is. Parents should therefore take the following steps as means of prevention:

- a Talk to your child about sexual abuse and about the privacy of their body parts. Read more about the NSPCC’s Underwear Rule below.
- b Listen when your child tries to tell you something, especially when it seems hard for them to talk about it.
- c Give your child enough of your time so that the child will not seek attention from other adults.
- d Know with whom your child is spending time. Be careful about letting your child spend time in out-of-the-way places with other adults or older children.
- e Plan to visit your child’s caregiver at some stage without giving them advance notice.
- f Tell someone in authority if you suspect that your child or someone else’s child is being abused.
- g Parents should ensure their children do not give out personal information about themselves to strangers.
- h Monitor Internet Use. Parental controls are a good way of limiting your child’s activities online. It is not just about blocking or locking access to certain sites, but they help to set appropriate boundaries - giving your child some freedom to explore, while filtering out unwanted, dangerous material. Parents should learn how to set the internet controls on their child’s computer.
- i If something does go wrong, parents must know when and how to report any problem. If you believe your child is at risk, you must inform the police immediately.
- j Parents need to gain more knowledge and understanding of how certain cultural and religious practices like Female Genital Mutilation can be harmful towards children.

## 13 The NSPCC's "Underwear Rule"

The NSPCC have initiated a very useful campaign to help parents teach their children about how to protect themselves from Sexual Abuse. Called the "Underwear Rule", it uses the PANTS approach to explain self-protection to children as follows:

**P**

### **Privates are Private.**

The parts of the body covered by their underwear are private. No one should ask to see or touch their private parts and no one should ask them to see or touch their own private parts.

**A**

### **Always Remember, Your Body belongs to You.**

Teach your child that their body belongs to them and no one else. No one has the right to make them do anything that makes them feel uncomfortable and if anyone tries, your child has the right to say "no". Remind your child they can always talk to you about anything that upsets or worries them.

**N**

### **No means No.**

Explain to your child that they have the right to say "no" to unwanted touch – even to a family member or someone they know and love.

**T**

### **Talk About Secrets that Upset You.**

Explain the differences between good and bad secrets. Good secrets are things like surprise parties or presents for other people. Bad secrets make you feel sad or worried or frightened. Your child needs to feel able to speak up about secrets that worry them and confident that saying something won't get them into trouble.

**S**

### **Speak Up, Someone Can Help.**

Tell your child that if they ever feel sad, anxious or frightened they should talk to an adult they trust. It doesn't have to be a family member. It can be a teacher or a friend's parent. Remind them that whatever the problem is, it is not their fault and they will never get into trouble for speaking up.

The Underwear Rule is reproduced courtesy of the NSPCC. You can read more on the NSPCC website at:

[www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/underwear-rule](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/underwear-rule)

## 14 AFRUCA'S Work Against Child Sexual Abuse

Many cultural practices like branding children as witches, female genital mutilation, forced marriages, using children as domestic slaves as well as the harsh treatment of girls and firstborn children need to be revisited.

At AFRUCA, we are actively campaigning against these practices. We run very regular community education events and activities across the country. In particular, our Children's Champion's Project across London and the South of England, and our Anti-FGM Youth Project across Greater Manchester ensure we are able to regularly pass on the message that children must be protected and safeguarded from abuse and harm at all times. You can learn more about how to protect children from sexual abuse and other forms of abuse by taking part in our range of community activities which are often well advertised on our website at [www.afruca.org](http://www.afruca.org) and on social media.

You can also become an AFRUCA Champion and help to spread the child protection message. Further information is available on our website. It is wrong to turn a blind eye when you see child abuse and neglect happening. People who do so are contributing to a child's suffering. Failure to act to prevent abuse can be a contributory factor in a child's death or long term harm.



## 15 Reporting Child Abuse

If you see a child being abused, harmed or neglected in any way, you must report it to the authorities as follows:

- Step One:** In the first instance, contact your local authority children’s services department. You can reach them by calling the Local Authority switchboard number which is on your Council Tax bill or in Yellow Pages.
- Step Two:** When you are put through to Children’s Services, state that you want to make a Child Abuse “referral”. This simply means you want to report a case of child abuse.
- Step Three:** You will be asked to provide further details about the case you are reporting. Please note that you do not have to provide your personal details if you do not wish to.
- Step Four:** The local authority is obliged to make an investigation. If you do not see any changes in the case you have reported, please follow up with another phone call.
- Step Five:** You can also call the police on 999 to report a case of child abuse.
- Step Six:** If nothing happens, you can contact AFRUCA and we will pursue the case until action is taken. Our contact details are at the back of this publication





## 16 Getting Help and Useful Contacts

### **AFRUCA**

The leading Charity Promoting the Rights and Welfare of African Children in the UK

#### **Head Office**

Unit 3D/F Leroy House, 436 Essex Road, London N1 3QP.

Tel: 0207 704 2261 Fax: 0207 704 2266

#### **AFRUCA Centre for Children and Families**

Phoenix Mill, 20 Piercy Street, Ancoats, Manchester M4 7HY

Tel: 0161 205 9274 Fax: 0161 205 2156

Email: [info@afruca.org](mailto:info@afruca.org) Website: [www.afruca.org](http://www.afruca.org)

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### **BULLYING UK**

Providing advice to children experiencing bullying

Tel: 0808 800 2222 Website: [www.bullying.co.uk](http://www.bullying.co.uk)

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### **CCPAS**

Provides help and support to faith organisations on child protection

Tel: 0845 120 4550 Website: [www.ccpas.org.uk](http://www.ccpas.org.uk)

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### **CHILD LINE**

A help line for parents and children to go to when in need of help and advice

Tel: 0800 1111 Website: [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

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### **FORWARD**

Campaigns against Female Genital Mutilation and Early Marriages

Tel: 0208960 4000 Website: [www.forwarduk.org.uk](http://www.forwarduk.org.uk)

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### **NAPAC**

An organisation providing support to people abused in childhood

Tel: 0800 085 3330 Website: [www.napac.org.uk](http://www.napac.org.uk)

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### **SAMARITANS**

Providing confidential emotional support for those feeling despairing or suicidal

Tel: 08457 90 90 90 Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

Website: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

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### **STOP IT NOW**

Offers advice and a confidential helpline for victims of sexual abuse

Tel: 0808 1000 900

## 17 AFRUCA Resources on Child Safeguarding

We hope you found this booklet useful. There is a lot of information out there that can help you carry out the task of protecting and safeguarding children.

At AFRUCA we have produced a range of materials to help parents, carers, faith and community leaders and workers. Here is a list of publications where parents can get additional information.

### AFRUCA Child Protection Manuals:

- Manual on Child Protection for African Parents in the UK (in English and French)
- Manual on Safeguarding Children for African Faith Organisations in the UK (in Arabic, English and French)

### Safeguarding African Children in the UK Series:

- 1 What is Child Abuse?
- 2 What is Child Trafficking?
- 3 What is Private Fostering?
- 4 What is Female Genital Mutilation?
- 5 What is Witchcraft Abuse?
- 6 What is Physical Abuse?
- 7 What is Sexual Abuse?
- 8 What is Emotional Abuse?
- 9 What is Child Neglect?

### Support our Work: Donate to AFRUCA

Your support will enable us to make plans for long term work to address the abuse and exploitation of African children in the UK and in Africa.

Donations are made securely online at  
[www.justgiving.com/afruca](http://www.justgiving.com/afruca)

You can also donate by text: just text our code **AFRU01** + the amount you wish to give to **70070**. It is Quick, Easy and Free on all networks in the UK!

**JustTextGiving™**  
by  **vodafone**

# Notes

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## AFRUCA – Africans Unite Against Child Abuse

### **AFRUCA Head Office:**

Unit 3D/F Leroy House  
436 Essex Road  
London N1 3QP

**Tel:** 0207 704 2261

**Fax:** 0207 704 2266

### **AFRUCA Centre for African Children and Families:**

Phoenix Mill  
20 Piercy Street  
Ancoats  
Manchester M4 7HY

**Tel:** 0161 205 9274

**Fax:** 0161 205 2156

**Email:** [info@afruca.org](mailto:info@afruca.org)

**Website:** [www.afruca.org](http://www.afruca.org)

### **Our Safeguarding African Children in the UK Series of publications include:**

1. **What is Child Abuse?**
2. **What is Child Trafficking?**
3. **What is Private Fostering?**
4. **What is Female Genital Mutilation?**
5. **What is Witchcraft Abuse?**
6. **What is Physical Abuse?**
7. **What is Sexual Abuse?**
8. **What is Emotional Abuse?**
9. **What is Child Neglect?**