

## Legal Definitions of Child Abuse

**Child Abuse**, according to the Child Protective Services Law (CPSL), includes: serious recent physical injury which is non-accidental; mental injury which is non-accidental; sexual abuse; or serious physical neglect of children under age 18 caused by the acts or omissions of a perpetrator. "Recent" is defined as an abusive act within two years from the date ChildLine is called.

Child abuse also includes any recent act, failure to act, or series of acts or failures to act by a perpetrator that creates an ***imminent risk*** of serious physical injury to or sexual abuse or exploitation of a child under 18 years of age. These are situations that would have resulted in serious injury or sexual abuse if not prevented by happenstance, third-party intervention or the actions of the child.

**Serious Physical Injury** is non-accidental and:

- Causes a child severe pain; or
- Significantly impairs the child's physical functioning, either temporarily or permanently.

**Serious Mental Injury** is defined as a psychological condition, as diagnosed by a physician or licensed psychologist, including the refusal of appropriate treatment, that:

- Renders the child chronically and severely anxious, agitated, depressed, socially withdrawn, psychotic or in reasonable fear the child's life or safety is threatened; or
- Seriously interferes with a child's ability to accomplish age-appropriate developmental and social tasks.

**Sexual Abuse or Exploitation** is (1) the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of a child to engage in or assist another individual to engage in sexually explicit conduct. (2) The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of a child to engage in or assist another individual to engage in simulation of sexually explicit conduct for the purpose of producing visual depiction, including photographing, videotaping, computer depicting, and filming. It also includes any of the following offenses committed against a child: rape, sexual assault, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, aggravated indecent assault, molestation, incest, indecent exposure, prostitution, sexual abuse, or sexual exploitation.

**Serious Physical Neglect** is defined as "constituting prolonged or repeated lack of supervision or the failure to provide the essentials of life, including adequate medical care, which endangers a child's life or development or impairs the child's functioning." This represents the most serious form of neglect and may include multiple occurrences or a one-time critical or severe event that results in a threat to the health or safety of a child.