

The Effects of Child Abuse Depend on a Variety of Factors

We have learned from many people's experiences and a great deal of research that the effects of abuse and neglect depend on a variety of factors. Below I group these effects into those which research has shown to influence negative outcomes, and a variety of other factors that are harder to measure for research purposes and/or may be very important for some people but not others.

Factors research has shown to influence the effects of abuse:

- Age of the child when the abuse happened. Younger is usually more damaging, but different effects are associated with different developmental periods.
- Who committed the abuse. Effects are generally worse when it was a parent, step-parent or trusted adult than a stranger.
- Whether the child told anyone, and if so, the person's response. Doubting, ignoring, blaming and shaming responses can be extremely damaging - in some cases even more than the abuse itself.
- Whether or not violence was involved, and if so, how severe.
- How long the abuse went on.

Additional factors that are difficult to research or may differ in significance for different people:

- Whether the abuse involved deliberately humiliating the child.
- How "normal" such abuse was in the extended family and local culture.
- Whether the child had loving family members, and/or knew that someone loved her or him.
- Whether the child had some good relationships - with siblings, friends, teachers, coaches, etc.
- Whether the child had relationships in which "negative" feelings were acceptable, and could be expressed and managed safely and constructively.