



Strategic Partnership Boards
SAFETY SAFEGUARDING WELLBEING



Bitesize video guide: Emotional harm

Hello, my name is Selasie Bulmuo and I am a social worker in the children with disabilities team in children social care.

I am going to talk to you about Emotional Harm

Emotional harm, sometimes called psychological harm, can often be seen by practitioners as less serious than physical or sexual harm to a child. This can happen because unlike physical harm for example, emotional harm leaves no visible scars and consequently becomes harder to identify.

Emotional harm however is just as serious as other forms of abuse and in fact, it can have a much more profound effect on a child's development and well-being both in the immediate and long term. In many instances the effects of emotional harm can take much longer to heal.

When emotional harm is experienced children are hurting on the inside, so it can be difficult for family members or professionals to notice or its impact can be easily minimised.

Emotional harm takes various forms and can occur in a variety of contexts.

For example, a child who is repeatedly told that they're not good enough, that they're stupid, fat, lazy or where that child is being blamed for the problems occurring within the family. It can be experienced through witnessing domestic violence or in situations where a parent or carer seem unable or unwilling to understand and respond appropriately to the emotional needs of their child.

Emotional harm of course is also experienced when a child suffers other forms of abuse.

The experience of emotional harm may lead to failure to thrive in babies or older child may present with poor self-esteem, as very angry, withdrawn or aggressive or a child may find it hard to form relationships. This type of harm can even cause a child to engage in very extreme behaviour such as fire setting or animal cruelty.

Children experiencing emotional harm can experience delayed development and increased risk of developing many difficulties later on in life, such as, alcohol or drug abuse, depression, suicide or problems in maintaining stability in various aspects of their lives.

Recognizing emotional harm requires practitioners to engage in practice that is child-centred, where the focus on the child and their needs is maintained throughout.

This doesn't only mean listening to the child's voice; it also involves observing their behaviour and their parents' interactions with them to understand the effect on the child. Practitioners also need to be mindful that seemingly identical behaviours by parents or carers can affect individual children differently, so they need to consider the impact of emotional abuse on each child in the family separately and plan their interventions accordingly.

Your three messages to take away are

1. emotional harm is often not recognised as serious as physical harm, but it is and can have a profound effect on a child's development
2. it can be difficult to recognise emotional harm, so it is very important to not only listen to what children are telling you but observe their behaviour and interactions with their parents/carers
3. Some examples include being ignored, not feeling loved or cared about, being expected to provide emotional support to the parent, parent not able to put child's needs before their own

Thanks for watching and goodbye.