


# Emotional Maltreatment



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WI-CAN Educational Series - 2/16/18  
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Children's Hospital Wisconsin  
Medical College of Wisconsin



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- The content being presented will be fair, well-balanced and evidence-based
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- Topic and content may be disturbing
- Some images may be disturbing

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 Objectives

- Define emotional maltreatment
- Understand co-occurrence of other child maltreatment
- Recognize the impact of emotional maltreatment

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**TERMINOLOGY**

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 What is Child Maltreatment?

- The CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-320), "retained the existing definition of child abuse and neglect as, at a minimum:
- *"Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or failure to act, which presents an imminent risk of serious harm."*
- "Most states recognize four major types of maltreatment: neglect, physical abuse, psychological maltreatment, and sexual abuse. Although any of the forms of child maltreatment may be found separately, they can occur in combination."

NCANDS 2016

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## Another Definition of Maltreatment

- Child maltreatment is "acts of omission or commission by a parent or guardian that are judged by a mixture of community values and professional expertise to be inappropriate and damaging".
- Why this definition?
  - Human rights perspective – this states that the minimal standards of child care are being violated in ways that put the child at risk.
  - If a child was maltreated but is resilient and has a good outcome, the child's human rights were still violated and harm was done
    - The maltreatment is not negated
  - Risk of harm and harm are important in maltreatment, but should not be the only aspect considered maltreatment

Garbarino 2011 8

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## Terminology

- Emotional Maltreatment
- Psychological Maltreatment
- Emotional Abuse
- Psychological Abuse
- Emotional Neglect
- Verbal Abuse
- Mental Abuse

AAP 2012, Paluscki 2012 9

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## Terminology

- Emotional Maltreatment= Psychological Maltreatment
  - Emotional Abuse (commission)
  - Emotional Neglect (omission)
- While emotional abuse and neglect are sometimes separated, they both constitute forms of emotional maltreatment

AAP 2012 Hibbard, Simeon 2006 10

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 **Emotional Maltreatment**

- "Emotional maltreatment, although often overlooked and underappreciated, may be the most complex, prevalent, and damaging form of child abuse or neglect."
- "Children who experience emotional maltreatment undergo a unique form of abuse. The weapons used against them are not visible such as hands, belts, cords, or sexual acts, but rather ugly, hurting words or cold, uncaring silence. Although no physical pain or sexual contact is ever endured, the consequences can be just as severe and long-lasting."

Campbell 2014, Hornor 2012 11

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**DEFINITIONS**

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 **Path to the Definition**

- Various definitions used over time
  - Multiple terminologies has resulted in multiple definitions
  - No societal consensus on suboptimal parenting vs. emotional maltreatment
  - Reflects the relationship between child and caregiver, which is difficult to characterize
- AAP definition is standard for pediatricians

AAP 2012 Hibbard, Simeon 2006, Campbell 2014 13

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## Definition

American Academy of Pediatrics:  
 “Emotional or psychological abuse is a repeated pattern of behavior by a parent or caregiver that can be verbal or nonverbal, active or passive, intentional or unintentional, but is interpreted negatively by a child, and can result in developmental, social, emotional and academic problems.”

AAP 2012 Hibbard, Campbell 2014 14

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## Definition Cont.

- Caregiver omission (passive)
  - Not doing something one should/withholding
  - Example: Ignoring needs
- Caregiver commission (active)
  - Intentional or purposeful
  - Example: spurning, terrorizing
- Verbal or non-verbal
  - Spurning
  - Ignoring
- With or without intent to harm

AAP 2012 Hibbard 15

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## Types of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors by Caregivers

Spurning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belittling, denigrating, or other rejecting</li> <li>• Ridiculing for showing normal emotions</li> <li>• Singling out or humiliating in public</li> </ul>
Terrorizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Placing in unpredictable/chaotic circumstances</li> <li>• Placing in recognizably dangerous situations</li> <li>• Having rigid/unrealistic expectations accompanied by threats if not met</li> <li>• Threatening/perpetrating violence against child or child's loved ones/objects</li> </ul>
Isolating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confining within environment</li> <li>• Restricting social interactions in community</li> <li>• Failing to provide socialization and learning</li> </ul>
Exploiting/Corrupting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modeling, permitting, or encouraging antisocial or developmentally inappropriate behavior</li> <li>• Restricting/undermining psychological autonomy</li> <li>• Restricting/interfering with cognitive development</li> </ul>
Denying emotional responsiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being detached or uninvolved, interacting only when necessary</li> <li>• Providing little or no warmth, nurturing, praise during any developmental period in childhood</li> </ul>
Mental health/medical/educational neglect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limiting a child's access to necessary health care because of reasons other than inadequate resources</li> <li>• Refusing to provide for serious emotional/behavioral, physical health, or educational needs</li> </ul>

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## QUESTIONS?



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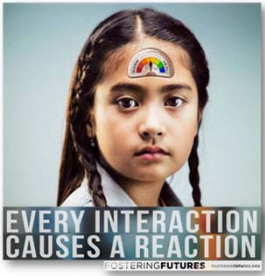
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## EPIDEMIOLOGY

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## Background

- Emotional maltreatment is thought to be the most prevalent form of child abuse and neglect
- Thought to be the least reported form of child maltreatment
  - Lack of consensus around definition makes it underreported
- Often NOT recognized when other forms of maltreatment co-occur
- When occurring alone, it can be harder to identify and intervention opportunities missed
- Difficult to study

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## Epidemiology

- 2016 NCANDS (screened in CPS data)
  - 5.6% experience psychological maltreatment
  - 2% experience neglect + psychological maltreatment
- 2010 U.S. DHHS
  - 7.6% experience emotional maltreatment
- 2010 NIS (Harm Standard, CPS data plus other data)
  - 27% experience emotional maltreatment (emotional abuse and neglect)
  - 25% of neglected children were emotionally neglected
- Retrospective studies estimate 8-10% of general population experience emotional maltreatment
  - 8-14% of women and 4-10% of men report exposure to severe emotional maltreatment as children

AAP 2012 Hibbard, NCANDS 2016, NIS 2010, Campbell 2014, Horner 2012 23

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## Risk Factors

Similar to other types of maltreatment

- Studies are lacking

- Domestic violence and family conflict (35%)
- Mental health (22%-44% of emotional abuse)
- Substance abuse problems (21%-49% of emotional neglect)
- Single parent
- Poor parenting skills
- Multiple family stressors

- While biologic parent is most common perpetrator (73%), can be other important adults in child's life

AAP 2012 Hibbard, NCANDS 2016, NIS 2010, Campbell 2014, Dong 2004, Horner 2012 24

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## COMMON MISPERCEPTIONS

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## They Don't Remember

- Infants and young children don't remember the emotional abuse
- It's better it happened when they were young



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## Domestic Violence

- Children that only witness violence in the home have better outcomes than children that are physically abused

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## Cursing and threatening

- Cursing and threatening is not as bad as physically abusing a child



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# QUESTIONS?



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# CO-OCCURRENCE

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# Emotional Maltreatment Alone

- Emotional maltreatment can occur alone and has significant negative impacts when occurring alone
- In adult women, controlling for the effects of SA and PA - emotional maltreatment alone had significant physical and psychological impacts
- Relationship between delinquency and physical abuse found to be minimal unless emotional abuse was present
- Psychological damage associated with physical abuse related to the emotional abuse that accompanied the physical abuse
- Adults with history of emotional maltreatment, compared to sexual and physical abuse, had higher rates of depression and anxiety.

Simeon 2006, Hornor 2012 © Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, all rights reserved. 31

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**Children's Hospital of Wisconsin** Co-Occurrence Take-Aways

- “The overlapping nature of the various types of child maltreatment make it imperative to consider all other forms whenever any one of them is suspected, as failure to do so could lead to an inadequate intervention plan.”
- Emotional maltreatment is often the greatest predictor of psychological problems later in life.

Campbell 2014, AAP 2012 Hibbard, NCANDS 2016

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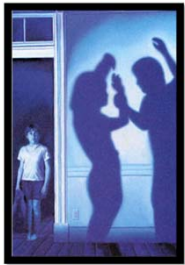
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**IMPACT AND OUTCOMES**

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**Children's Hospital of Wisconsin** Emotional maltreatment linked to problems in...

- Attachment
- Development
- Education
- Socialization
- Behaviors
- Psychopathology



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## Overall Impact

- Emotional maltreatment interferes with childhood development
- Impairs attachment to caregivers
  - Associated with future relationship dysfunction
  - Impairs psychological adjustment
  - Impairs beliefs about themselves and themselves in relation to others
- Impairs attachment in later childhood through adulthood
  - Peer relations, intimacy, caregiving, caretaking, sexual function, conflict resolution, aggression
- Psychiatric Morbidity
  - Social problems, delinquency, aggression, suicide attempts
  - Majority have 1 psych dx, ¼ have 2 or more dx
- Results in global, negative beliefs about the oneself
- Increased aggression and social withdrawal over time
- Emotionally maltreated children more likely to experience further victimization

AAP 2012, Horner 2012, Paluski 2012

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## Age Matters

- Infant brain is easily impacted - but also very adaptable
- Emotional maltreatment can have a profound impact in first 3 years of life
  - Rapid brain growth and development
  - Development of biological pathways (stress, hormone, immune)
  - The environment influences this growth
- Attuned, responsive parenting => Child flourishes and grows
- Abusive or neglectful parenting => damages developing brain



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## IMPACT OF EMOTIONAL MALTREATMENT BY AGE



**9-24 Months**  
Anxiously attached to caregivers, steep decline in intellectual functioning

**24 to 42 Months**  
Noncompliant, unhappy, lacking in persistence, displaying little positive affect, and scoring lower than non-maltreated infants on developmental exam

**Preschool**  
Negativistic, impulsive, and highly dependent on teachers, nervous, and displaying self-abusive behavior

**Elementary School**  
Ranked by teachers to be low in peer acceptance and overall emotional health, more aggressive than peers and performing significantly worse on achievement tests

**Teen Years**  
Higher number of social problems, more delinquent, more aggressive, and more suicidal than peers. Majority with at least two psychiatric disorders

Chart from Campbell 2014

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## Psychological Impact

- Somatic complaints (headaches, stomachaches, chronic pain):
  - Terrorizing, degradation, ignoring, witnessing family violence
  - Physical abuse
- Borderline personality:
  - Degradation, terrorizing and ignoring
- Somatic complaints and anxiety
  - Terrorizing
- Borderline and depression
  - Ignoring
- Significant impact on psychiatric disorders
  - Mood disorders (depression, anxiety)
  - Somatoform disorders (chronic fatigue)
  - Schizophrenia
  - Dissociative disorders
  - Eating disorders

Simeon 2006, Horner 2012

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## Factors that Impact the Impact

- Early caregiving experiences
  - Quality of interactions, parenting, other important relationships
- Frequency, intensity and duration of abuse
- Intrinsic factors
  - Coping, self-esteem, disposition
- Supportive relationships
  - Safe, supportive, nurturing relationships vs emotional maltreatment

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 **Maltreatment and Trauma**

- Not all emotional maltreatment results in trauma
- Thus the importance of prevention and early identification
- We can bolster the safe, supportive and nurturing relationships in a child's life
- We can improve relational experience with caregivers
- How much, how often and how badly all matter
- Improving social inequities also vital: poverty, educational differences, etc.

Garbarino 2011 44

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 **QUESTIONS?**



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 **BACK TO MISPERCEPTIONS**

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## They Don't Remember

Younger = More Vulnerable

- Children experiencing emotional maltreatment in first 3 years of life at greatest risk for most negative outcomes
- Their body and brain remembers – emotional maltreatment causes structural, developmental and stress-related changes that can be permanent

AAP 2012, Campbell 2014, Hornor 2012 47

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## Domestic Violence

- Witnessing violence can be more harmful than experiencing it
- In one study, children were present during 44% of domestic violence events in which police responded
  - 81% had direct sensory exposure (heard, saw)
  - 4% were injured during the event
- Another study, children exposed to DV were
  - 6 times more likely to be emotionally abused
  - 5 times more likely to be physically abused
  - 2.6 times more likely to be sexually abused

AAP 2012, Campbell 2014, Hornor 2012 48

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## Cursing and threatening

- Spurning and terrorizing
- Emotional maltreatment alone can result in significant negative social, emotional, developmental and cognitive problems

Simeon 2006, Campbell 2014 49

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## ASSESSMENT

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## What you might see in children

**Signs**

- Withdrawal
- Hostility, aggression, delinquency, or other behavioral disturbances
- Self-destructive behaviors
- Suicide attempts
- Truancy
- Poor dental health
- Poor hygiene
- Failure to thrive
- Decrease of growth across two or more standard growth curve percentiles, with or without a decrease in head circumference or height

**Symptoms**

- Feelings of inadequacy, isolation or being unwanted, unloved
- Expressions of low self-esteem, self-hatred, and sadness
- Depression or mood changes
- Somatic complaints: headaches, stomachaches

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## What you might see in caregivers...

**Box 1**  
**Caregiver behaviors concerning for emotional maltreatment or neglect**

- Shows little or no sensitivity to child's needs
- Emotionally or physically rejects child's attention
- Exhibits frightening, threatening, or insulting behavior toward child
- Refers to child as inherently bad or evil
- Shows lack of concern/interest when talking about child
- Responds to child inconsistently, often with emotional discharge

Data from Wolfe DA, Mclsaac C. Distinguishing between poor/dysfunctional parenting and child emotional maltreatment. Child Abuse Negl 2011;35:802-13.

Campbell 2014

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 **Assessing Emotional Maltreatment**

- High index of suspicion
  - Need to consider it, think about it
  - Be aware of bias, cultural sensitivity
- History of psychological or behavioral problems
  - From multiple sources: school, friends, parents, grandparents, physicians
- Interview child alone
  - Discipline, relationship with caregivers, self-worth, safety, feeling loved
- Observe child and caregivers
  - Observe parent and child together

AAP 2012 Hibbard 53

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 **Cultural Considerations**

- Cupping – recall Michael Phelps Olympics?
- Coining

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 **Gathering information: Caregivers**

**Box 1**  
Psychosocial history

1. Maternal age and current employment status
2. Paternal age and current employment status
3. Living arrangement/marital status
4. Educational level of parent(s); cognitive delays/mental retardation
5. Past or present parental drug/alcohol concern
6. Past or present parental mental health concern
7. Parental domestic violence concerns
8. Previous involvement with child protective services for the family
9. Parental involvement with law enforcement
10. History of child maltreatment (sexual abuse, physical abuse, or involvement with child protective services) within the family—mother and/or father victimized as a child

- What are discipline practices
- What is caregiver description of the child
- Observe interaction between child and caregivers

**Box 2**  
Questions for parents

1. What kind of child is \_\_\_\_\_?
2. Is he/she easy to care for?
3. Tell me something good/positive about \_\_\_\_\_.
4. What is hard/difficult about \_\_\_\_\_?
5. What is easy about \_\_\_\_\_?

Hornor 2012 55

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## Gathering information: the child...

- Talk to child alone
- Ask about discipline practices
  - what happens when you get in trouble?
- Screen for DV
  - What happens when your mommy and daddy argue?

**Box 3**  
Questions for children

1. How are things at home? At your dad's?
2. How do you get along with mom/dad/step-dad/step-mom?
3. Tell me something you like to do with mom/dad/step-dad/step-mom.
4. Tell me something you like about mom/dad/step-dad/step-mom.
5. Tell me something you don't like about mom/dad/step-dad/step-mom.
6. Does anyone make you feel scared, sad, or dumb?

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## QUESTIONS?



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## Prevention: Universal

- Primary prevention: Stop it before it starts
  - Universal interventions promoting safe, supportive, nurturing relationships
  - Targeting infants and their families
  - Nurse Family Partnership
- Programs designed to educate parents about proper parenting techniques and the negative effects of child maltreatment are found to reduce negative outcomes
  - Teaching social/emotional learning at home and in schools

AAP 2012 Hibbard, Campbell 2014 58

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## Prevention: Targeted

- Families with histories of abuse, domestic violence, mental health issues, financial difficulties, alcohol or drug problems, or mothers with postnatal depression may benefit most from a more direct or targeted approach.
- Secondary prevention: Targeted interventions/High risk
  - Working with those at risk, both parent and child
  - Focus on parent-infant psychotherapy, home-visiting programs
- Tertiary prevention: Treat those already impacted
  - Both parent and child
  - Minimize impact in the future
  - Child's safety should be first and foremost
- Evidence-Informed Programs:
  - Nurse Family Partnerships (home visitation programs)

AAP 2012 Hibbard, Campbell 2014 59

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## Prevention

In a 2012 study looking at substantiated emotional maltreatment CPS cases...

- Fewer than ¼ of families with confirmed emotional maltreatment were referred for services
- 9% had a second substantiated emotional maltreatment case within 5 years
- **Controlling for poverty, AODA and other violence, counseling referral decreased recurrence by 54%**
- However, other types of services did not show significant reductions in emotional maltreatment recurrence

Paluscki 2012 60

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## Reporting

- Important to report as soon as concerns arise
- Remember to include emotional maltreatment in reports of physical and sexual abuse and neglect
- Detailed documentation from multiple sources – other family members, school, preschool
- Recommending or providing mental health services is crucial prevention of additional harm

AAP 2012 Hibbard 61

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## Responding

- Programs that incorporate a multiagency, collaborative approach have had success in identifying victims of emotional maltreatment at a younger age and in helping to address the social, behavioral, and emotional symptoms these children often experience.
  - Medical provider, child abuse specialist, CPS, psychiatry, law enforcement, school staff
- Out of home placement should be considered equally for emotional maltreatment as physical or sexual abuse and neglect
- Safety of child is paramount – emotional maltreatment is harm
- Early intervention is key

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## Summary: Emotional Maltreatment

- Emotional maltreatment is underrecognized and underreported
- Can lead to lifelong cognitive, behavioral, emotional, health and social problems
- Effects children of all ages, young children are especially vulnerable
- Emotional maltreatment should be considered in other types of child maltreatment
- Protecting and strengthening family relationships is key in prevention and intervention

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