

Need for Constant Review to Meet Changing Needs in Society

What we have planned in the past and are providing at present may no longer meet the needs of the society. With rapid social changes faced by the family, there is always the need for the sensitivity to objectively review our service provision and delivery system, and redirect our resources to the areas of priority. Recently, there has been calls for social/family impact analysis so that our social policies are meeting the needs of the families at present and in the future. We can make better use of the 5-Year Plan Review mechanism and with the active input from the Social Welfare Advisory Committee and various working groups and committees, for example, the Committee on Child abuse, Committee on Services for Youth-at-Risk and Working Group on Battered Spouse, we will be in a better position to map out the blue-print for the future direction for welfare services in Hong Kong. In the past weeks, I have been meeting academics and service providers to initiate discussions on the review of our family services to meet the changing needs of our society, for example, the influx of new arrivals from Mainland China, increase in single parent families and growing incidence of domestic violence. The deliberation of this Conference will definitely stimulate our thinking and provide much food for thought in our coming exercise to review our family services to achieve the objective of promoting family well-being in Hong Kong.

Conclusion

To conclude, I want to reaffirm our commitment to develop and provide a child-centred, family focused, and community based Family and Child Welfare Programme to promote well-being of families in a most cost-effective manner to meet the challenges that I have described. It is only with an open mind, sensitivity and readiness to manage change, strong sense of commitment and accountability that we can demonstrate to our community that we are really investing now and working for the well-being of families in Hong Kong, and we are sure to reap the fruits of our efforts in the years to come.

Reference

1. 1996 Population By-Census – Census and Statistics Department.

Awareness of Psychological Abuse and Promoting Mental Health in Families¹

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Defining the Task of Parenting

Fulfillment of the needs of *dependent, developing/ changing* children:

- **Basic needs provision:** food, stable shelter, healthcare
- **Protection** including from abuse
- Response to **attachment needs**
- Ensuring **family tasks and functioning**

Family Tasks and Functioning

Consistent and Age-appropriate:

- Caring, nurturing, and stimulating
- Setting of boundaries
- Clear communication and affective expression
- Hierarchies and inter-generational boundaries
- Intra-generational alliances
- Balance between family cohesiveness and connectedness with outside world
- Models of non-violent conflict resolution

What is Child Abuse and Neglect

- *(Wo)man-made* and potentially avoidable harm to children
- Different forms may exist discreetly or co-exist
- All forms of CAN involve psychological harm
- Omission & commission forms of CAN:
 - neglect
 - physical abuse/non-accidental injury
 - sexual abuse
 - emotional abuse and neglect
 - factitious illness

Emotional Abuse and Neglect Refers to:

- Parent-child RELATIONSHIP (not event or single interaction)
- Characterises the relationship
- Heterogeneous collection of different forms of interaction
- Both omission **and** commission
- Physical contact not required
- Actually **or** potentially harmful to the child

Abuse threshold reached when the viability of the relationship is questionable without some intervention.

Thresholds

Definitions are culturally relative. In the UK, threshold criterion is **Significant Harm** **Ill Treatment** physical, mental or sexual AND/OR **impairment** of the child's physical or mental health, *or* physical, intellectual, emotional or behavioural development, *attributable* to the care given or likely to be given.

Impairments of Child's Health and Development by Emotional abuse and Neglect

Ranked in Decreasing Order of Frequency

- Emotional state
- Developmental/educational attainment/poor late school attendance
- Behaviour
- Peer relationships
- Physical symptoms/poor growth

American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children

- Spurning
- Terrorizing
- Exploiting/corrupting
- Isolating
- Denying emotional responsiveness
- Mental, health, medical and educational neglect

The Child's Needs which are Violated by Emotional Abuse & Neglect

- The child as a person who EXISTS
- THIS child
- Child as a developing CHILD
- The child as an INDIVIDUAL
- The child as a SOCIAL BEING

Categories of Emotional Abuse and Neglect

I. Emotional unavailability, unresponsiveness and neglect

II. Hostility, harsh punishment denigration and rejection of a child

Child perceived as deserving these based on persistent negative beliefs about, attributions or misattributions to the person of the child.

III. Developmentally Inappropriate or In-consistent

- Developmentally inappropriate or inconsistent expectations of, impositions on, and interactions with the child.
- Exposure to confusing or traumatic experiences.
- Failure to provide adequate cognitive stimulation and/or opportunities for experiential learning.

IV. Failure to recognise or acknowledge the Child's Individuality and Psychological Boundary

- Inability to distinguish between the child's reality and the adult's belief.
- Using the child for the gratification of the parents' emotional needs.

V. Mis-socialisation of the child within the child's context by failing to promote the child's social adaptation (including isolating) or actively promoting mis-socialisation (corrupting)

Impeding the Appropriate Socialisation of the Child within the Child's Context

- Active corruption
- Failing to promote socialisation

Two Questions to Ask of the Classification

I. First question to ask of a classification: What holds the classification together?

In EA/N:

- Does not require physical contact.
- It takes into account the essence of childhood dependency and development.

II. Second question to ask of a classification: What keeps the categories apart? i.e. the categories must be discrete.

- Different aspects of the child's needs.
- Different motivations in the carer.
- Different treatment approaches for the interaction/relationship.
- We hypothesise, different harmful consequence for the child.

	Sexual abuse	Physical abuse	Emotional abuse/neglect
Abusive act interaction	Hidden	Hidden or observed	Observable
Identify of Abuser	Usually questioned	Sometimes known	Known
Abuser/ primary carer	Usually different person(s)	Same or different person(s)	Same person(s)
Definition/ proof reliant on signs of harm	Not usually	Yes	Not necessarily
Need for immediate protection	Yes	Usually	No

Can We Ask Children to Describe Emotional Abuse?

“Biting the hand that feeds you”

- Emotional abuse not recognised/defined by society
- Abuser = primary carer
- Child loyal to/dare not upset primary carer
- Difficult to acknowledge awfulness of being rejected, unloved, exploited
- Threat to own survival and self worth
- Cannot reflect on it or describe abuse (procedural memory)
- Abuse rationalised by self-blame, denied, re-framed

Reasons for Registration

3 tiers of concern

1. **Parental attributes or risk factors**
2. **Categories of ill treatment or mediating mechanisms**
3. **Impairment of child's development or evidence of harm to child**

Child Protection

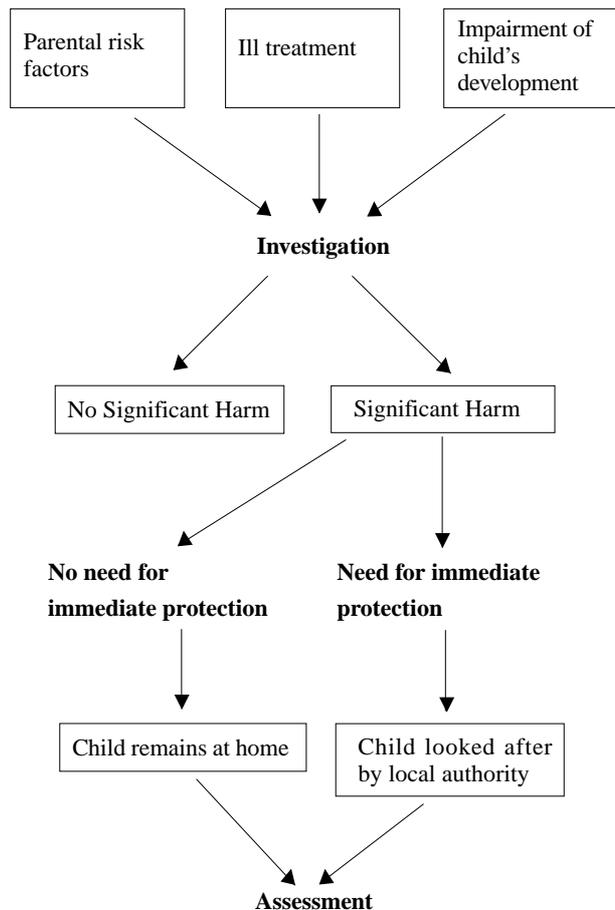
Implies the cessation of danger to the child which can only be achieved by:

- Ensuring the perpetrator(s) of abuse/neglect, or their circumstances, have **changed** sufficiently to no longer pose a risk to the child **or**
- Effectively **supervising** all contact between the child

& perpetrator(s) of abuse/neglect ("supervisor" must believe in abuse) **or**

- **Separating** child from perpetrator(s) of abuse or neglect

Process of Professional Involvement in Emotional Abuse and Neglect: Working Towards Protection



Assessment

I. Child

Developmental profile of child-physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, social.

II. Parents & Family

1. Family's concerns about child and explanations
2. What "remedies" have been tried
3. Nature of help requested by family
4. Account of salient family history
5. Parents' mental health including alcohol/drug misuse
6. Inter-parental violence
7. Strengths and protective factors

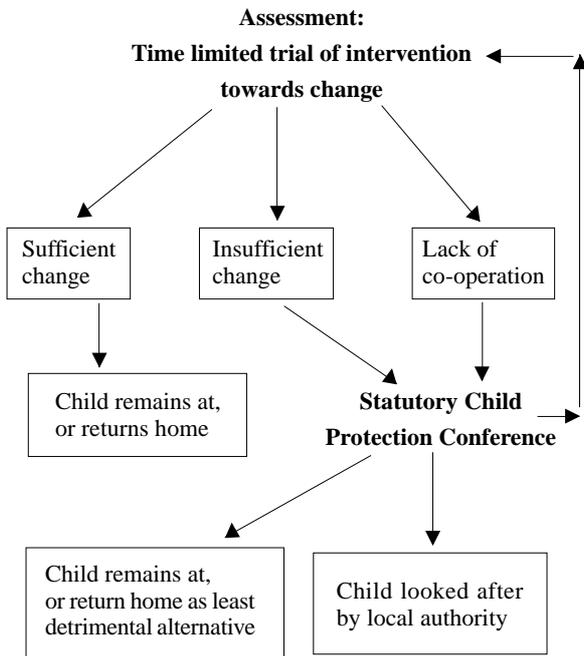
III. Family's Capacity for Change

In parental risk factors and relevant category(ies) of ill-treatment, by means of a **time-limited trial of intervention**.

Therapy

- Individual work with the child
- Parent-child and family work
- Individual work with parents

Process of Professional Involvement in Emotional Abuse and Neglect: Working Towards Protection



Therapeutic Interventions in Emotional Abuse

Category 1: Emotional Unavailability

- If no associated Category 2, explore underlying cause (s) and address those
- If associated Category 2, approach as Category 2

Category 2: Negative Attributions

- Explore with carer(s) what child's view of him/herself might be and how to alter it

Category 3: Developmental

- Parenting management

Category 4: Psychological Boundaries

- Explore with parent what child's perceptions
- Look for ghosts from the past
- Look for maintaining factors for parent

Category 5: Impeding Socialisation

- Explore with parent, child's experience in her/his environment

Treatment for the Emotionally Abused Child

Child's Status:

- Protected within family after sufficient change in parent interaction with the child
- Protected by move to another carer or family
- Not protected, but less detrimental to remain at home than to move

In therapy for child, now possible to *talk about the abuse*. If abuse continues, therapy can help child with *coping*.

Protective Factors

- Child's innate resilience (including good ability)
- Brief duration of abuse (early successful intervention)
- Late onset – earlier "good" experiences
- Other significant non-abusive relationships

Note

1. Article has been revised by author on 22 March 2001.