Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities. The activities may involve physical contact such as kissing or touching the child's genitals or breasts, vaginal or anal intercourse or oral sex.

They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

**Visible signs may include:**
- Genital or anal soreness, bruising or abrasions
- Infections, bleeding or pain
- Difficulty walking or sitting
*Not all cases involve clear physical signs*

**Sexualised behaviour:**
- Knowledge of sexual matters beyond a child’s normal understanding
- Sexual drawings or language
*Not all these behaviours would necessarily indicate sexual abuse.*

**Other signs to look for:**
- Fear of being left with a specific person or group of people
- Saying they have secrets they cannot tell anyone
- Disturbed emotional behaviour, ie. shame, depression, aggression
- Newly occurring behaviours such as soiling and smearing faeces, wetting themselves, nightmares
*Not all these signs would necessarily indicate sexual abuse.*

**If you suspect a child is or has been sexually abused:**
**DO:** follow your setting’s safeguarding procedure in all cases.
**DO:** contact your local police and/or children’s services, tel: 02380 833336
**DO:** record anything the child discloses ‘word for word’.
Use the child’s words; **DO NOT** question the child or ‘put words in their mouth’.
Record the time, date and witnesses of any disclosure.

**Further reading:**
- What to do if you’re worried a child is being abused ([www.everychildmatters.gov.uk](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk)) 2006
- Working Together to Safeguard Children ([HM Government](http://www.government.uk)) March 2013
- [www.southamptonlscb.co.uk](http://www.southamptonlscb.co.uk)
- [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)