



Mental Health Association of Northern Kentucky

A LEADER IN PROVIDING ADVOCACY, EDUCATION, AND SERVICES THAT PROMOTE MENTAL WELLNESS

EDUCATION AND SCREENING OUTREACH PARTNER FOR THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND
NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

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The Three Elements of Abuse

Abuse most often occurs in the home. Three elements are usually involved and create the environment for an incident of abuse to occur : 1) the abuser ; 2) the abused ; 3) a crisis.

1) **The Abuser** (usually a parent or caregiver) : Although all parents have the potential to be abusive, the chronic abuser has certain characteristics and a behavior pattern not representative of good parenting. Many abusers have a history of having been abused themselves or at least being raised in very strict families. Abusive parents keep to themselves, move from place to place and are usually young. They pick a mate who is of little help to them, who is rather passive. The mate almost always knows about the abuse but ignores it or may even participate in it.

2) **The Abused** (the child victim) : Usually only one child in the family is abused. Some children are more vulnerable to abuse than others. Children under six are considered a high risk population. Children with handicaps have a higher incidence of abuse as do hyperactive and emotionally disturbed children.

Some children are difficult to care for, so difficult that they irritate the parent to the point of losing control. A child may even provoke abuse as an attempt to get attention. Some children are seen by their parents as stubborn and deliberately annoying.

3) **A Crisis** : A crisis is the precipitating factor that sets the abusive parent in motion. The parent over-reacts as the result of other stresses that have become too numerous or too complex to cope with. The abuse is the result of this frustration and anxiety. Many things can precipitate a crisis ; loss of a job, divorce, illness, death in the family, etc. The child refuses to eat, he wets his pants again, he won't stop crying. As a result, the parent suddenly loses control and the child is abused.