

6. In What Circumstances Can Abuse Occur?

6.1 Abuse can take place in any context. (See "No Secrets" - Section 2.14.)

6.2 **What degree of abuse justifies intervention** Building on the concept of 'significant harm' introduced in the Children Act 1989, the Law Commission suggested that:

"Harm' should be taken to include not only ill treatment (including sexual abuse and forms of ill treatment which are not physical), but also the impairment of, or an avoidable deterioration in physical or mental health; and the impairment of physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development'." (See "No Secrets" - Section 2.18.)

6.3 The seriousness or extent of abuse is often not clear when anxiety is first expressed. It is important, therefore, when considering the appropriateness of intervention, to approach reports of incidents or allegations with an open mind. In assessing seriousness, the following factors need to be considered:

- The **vulnerability** of the individual.
- The **nature and extent** of the abuse.
- The **length of time** it has been occurring.
- The **impact** on the individual.
 - and
- The risk of **repeated or increasingly serious** acts involving this or other vulnerable adults. (See "No Secrets" - Section 2.19.)