**Additional Vulnerability of Disabled Children**

Disabled children are particularly vulnerable and at greater risk of all forms of abuse, including abuse whilst being cared for in institutions.  The presence of multiple disabilities increases the risk of both abuse and neglect.  Disabled children have the same rights to protection as any other child.  People caring for and working with disabled children need to be alert to the signs and symptoms of abuse.

Disabled children must be responded to as individuals with their own specific needs, feelings, thoughts and opinions.

Disabled children may be especially vulnerable to abuse for a number of reasons:

* An increased likelihood that the child is socially isolated with fewer outside contacts than other children
* A need for practical assistance in daily living, including intimate care from what may be a number of carers, which may increase the risk of exposure to abusive behaviour and make it more difficult to set and maintain physical boundaries
* Physical dependency with consequent reduction in ability to be able to resist or avoid abuse
* Communication or learning difficulties preventing disclosure or making disclosure more difficult
* Carers and staff lacking the ability to communicate adequately with the child
* A lack of continuity in care leading to an increased risk that behavioural changes may go unnoticed
* Lack of access to ‘keep safe’ strategies available to others
* Parents’/carers’ own needs and ways of coping may conflict with the needs of the child
* The child/carers being inhibited about complaining for fear of losing services
* The child being especially vulnerable to bullying, intimidation or abuse by their peers
* Some sex offenders may target disabled children in the belief that they are less likely to be detected
* Over-identification with the needs of parents/carers that can lead to a professional reluctance to make judgements about concerning aspects of parenting