

How can child abuse and neglect be recognised?



- Behavioural or physical signs which assist in recognising child abuse are known as indicators. A single indicator can be as important an indicator as the presence of several indicators. A child's behaviour is likely to be affected if he/she is under stress. There can be many causes of stress, including child abuse, and it is important to find out specifically what is causing the stress.

Physical Abuse

Physical indicators include:

- Bruises, burns, sprains, dislocations, bites, cuts
- Fractured bones, especially in an infant where a fracture is unlikely to occur accidentally
- Poisoning
- Internal injuries

Possible behavioural indicators include:

- Showing wariness or distrust of adults
- Wearing long sleeved clothes on hot days (to hide bruising or other injury)
- Demonstrating fear of parents and of going home
- Becoming fearful when other children cry or shout
- Being excessively friendly to strangers
- Being very passive and compliant

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is not usually identified through physical indicators. Often the first sign is when a child tells someone they trust that they have been sexually abused. However the presence of sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, or vaginal or anal bleeding or discharge may indicate sexual abuse.

One or more of these behavioural indicators may be present:

- Child telling someone that sexual abuse has occurred
- Complaining of headaches or stomach pains
- Experiencing problems with schoolwork
- Displaying sexual behaviour or knowledge which is unusual for the child's age
- Showing behaviour such as frequent rocking, sucking and biting
- Experiencing difficulties in sleeping
- Having difficulties in relating to adults and peers

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Emotional Abuse

There are few physical indicators, although emotional abuse may cause delays in emotional, mental, or even physical development.

Possible behavioural indicators include:

- Displaying low self esteem
- Tending to be withdrawn, passive, tearful
- Displaying aggressive or demanding behaviour
- Being highly anxious
- Showing delayed speech
- Acting like a much younger child, eg. soiling, wetting pants
- Displaying difficulties in relating to adults and peers

Neglect

Physical indicators include:

- Frequent hunger
- Malnutrition
- Poor hygiene
- Inappropriate clothing, eg. Summer clothes in winter
- Left unsupervised for long periods
- Medical needs not attended to
- Abandoned by parents

Possible behavioural indicators include:

- stealing food
- staying at school outside school hours
- often being tired, falling asleep in class
- abusing alcohol or drugs
- displaying aggressive behaviour
- not getting on well with peers

The presence of indicators such as those described may alert us to the possibility that a child is being abused. It is important that anyone who has concerns that a child or young person is in need of protection contacts a local Child Protection Service for assistance and advice.

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/children,-families-and-young-people/child-protection/about-child-abuse/what-is-child-abuse/how-can-abuse-and-neglect-be-recognised?>

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