

Indicators of Abuse

Safeguarding Children and Young People

Often Children and Young People will not be able to speak about abuse and your concern for them will be based on observations of physical and behavioural signs or indicators of harm in the Children and those around them. These indicators will often reflect the impact abuse is having on the Child.

Indicators of Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse/psychological abuse may cause delays, such as those below, in physical, emotional or cognitive development.

- Delays in physical development
- Failure to thrive
- Speech disorders

Behavioural Indicators of Emotional Abuse

- Stealing food
- Staying at school or other activities outside hours and not wanting to go home
- Lacking trust in other people
- Being reluctant to attend an activity at a particular club or organisation
- Being tired, lethargic, falling asleep at inappropriate times
- Abusing alcohol or drugs
- Exhibiting aggressive behaviour
- Having poor peer relationships
- Being indiscriminate with affection
- Lacking social skills
- Exhibiting distress, e.g., frequent crying or apathy
- Demonstrating fear of parent, caregiver or other adult
- Exhibiting attention-seeking or risk-taking behaviour

Indicators of Neglect

When a Child has been neglected, you may notice the following signs.

- Frequent hunger or malnutrition
- Poor hygiene
- Inappropriate clothing
- Unsupervised for long periods of time
- Lack of proper medical attention
- Experience of abandonment by parents/carers
- Failure to thrive

Behavioural Indicators of Neglect

- Stealing food
- Spending time at school or other external activities beyond the usual hours
- Being reluctant to attend an activity at a particular club or organisation
- Being tired or falling asleep at inappropriate times
- Abusing alcohol or drugs
- Exhibiting aggressive behaviour
- Having poor peer relationships
- Being indiscriminate with affection
- Desiring adult affection
- Exhibiting poor emotional response/lack of expression or enthusiasm
- Exhibiting anxiety about being left alone
- Exhibiting frequent rocking and sucking behaviour

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Indicators of Physical Abuse	Behavioural Indicators of Physical Abuse
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bruises, burns, sprains, bite marks, cuts, welts, scratches• Fractured bones• Poisoning• Internal injuries• Shaking injuries• Strangulation marks• Ingestion of alcohol and drugs• Dislocations• Head injuries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expressing little or no emotion when hurt• Offering unlikely explanations for injuries• Wearing long-sleeved clothes on hot days (possibly to hide bruising or other injuries marking the body)• Demonstrating fear of particular caregivers, other adults or children• Demonstrating a fear of their parents or a fear of going home• Being fearful when other children cry or shout• Being excessively friendly to strangers• Being passive and compliant• Being nervous, hyperactive, aggressive, disruptive• Telling someone that physical harm has occurred

Indicators of Sexual Abuse	Behavioural Indicators of Sexual Abuse
<p>Many of the physical indicators of sexual abuse, such as those below, are identifiable only via a medical examination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sexually transmitted diseases• Semen in the vagina• Vaginal or anal injury or scarring• Injury to the penis or scrotum• Abrasions, tears and bruises to the vagina or anus• Chronic urinary tract infections or difficulty urinating• Bleeding from the anus or vagina <p>Often the first indicator the Child gives is when they tell a person whom they trust that they have been sexually abused.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exhibiting persistent and age-inappropriate sexual activity• Exhibiting sexual aggression towards younger more naïve children• Offering sexual invitations or gestures to older people• Exhibiting sexual interaction involving animals or toys• Exhibiting sexual promiscuity or prostitution• Exhibiting regressive behaviour, such as bedwetting and speech loss• Exhibiting challenging and aggressive behaviour• Being fearful of people of a particular type or gender• Exhibiting suicidal and self-harm behaviour including self-mutilation, drug or alcohol abuse• Exhibiting risk-taking behaviour such as lighting fires• Exhibiting cruelty to animals• Being involved in criminal activity• Exhibiting frequent rocking, sucking and biting behaviour