

Fact sheet – possible indicators of abuse

This information is provided to assist with learning and should not be taken as legal advice.

Physical Abuse: The child has suffered or is at significant risk of suffering serious physical trauma or inflicted injury due to the actions of their caregiver. An injury is considered 'inflicted' if it was alleged to be caused wilfully or as a result of punishment.

Type of abuse	Definition	Possible physical indicators	Possible behavioural indicators
<p>Physical abuse</p>	<p>The child has suffered or is at significant risk of suffering serious physical trauma or inflicted injury due to the actions of their caregiver</p> <p>Some Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threat to kill/harm • Kick, punch (incl use of objects) and frequency and force was significant enough that injury was likely. • Shaking (particularly young babies) • Administration or misuse of alcohol or drugs • Fabricated or induced illness • Exposure to extreme temperatures for time that will cause serious harm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bite marks • Bruises • Burns • Broken bones • Hair missing in tufts • Arms and legs covered by clothing in warm weather • Lacerations and abrasions (especially to the eyes, lips, gums and mouth) • Missing or loosened teeth • Welts • Female genital mutilation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overly compliant, shy, withdrawn, passive • Uncommunicative • Regression • Fear of parent/carer or relative • Avoidance of physical contact • Unexplained or unlikely explanation of injury • Little or no emotion when hurt • Disclosure directly or indirectly through drawings, play or writing • Drug or alcohol abuse • Non-suicidal self-injury • Suicidal ideation • Attempted suicide • School attendance issues

Emotional abuse is the sustained, repetitive, inappropriate ill-treatment of a child or young person through behaviours including threatening, belittling, humiliating, intimidation, controlling, blaming, verbal abuse, bullying, neglecting, ignoring, misleading, isolation, encouragement to engage in inappropriate behaviour and prevention of contact with services or support networks.

Type of abuse	Definition	Possible physical indicators	Possible behavioural indicators
<p>Emotional abuse</p>	<p>Emotional abuse : The child’s social, emotional, or cognitive development is impaired or seriously at risk as a direct result of persistent caregiver behaviour or attitude towards the child, whereby the child’s self-esteem and social competence are undermined or eroded over time.</p> <p>Emotional abuse includes psychological abuse and exposure to family violence.</p> <p>Some examples are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • violence • terrorising • parental alienation • exploiting or corrupting behaviour • parent or carer isolates the child or young person or denies emotional responsiveness • hostility • rejection or withdrawal of love; • Degrading the child’s worth, including frequent verbal putdowns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eating disorder • Lethargy or fatigue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessively compliant or passive • Excessively shy or withdrawn • Excessively neat or clean • Wetting, soiling, smearing • Low self-esteem • Poor peer relationships • Aggressive or delinquent behaviour • Reluctance to go home • Lack of trust • Highly anxious • Fearful when approached by an unknown person • Disclosure directly or indirectly through drawings, play or writing • Drug or alcohol abuse • Non-suicidal self-injury • Suicidal ideation • Attempted suicide • School attendance issues

Domestic and family violence refers to violence, abuse and intimate between people who are in an intimate relationship causing fear, physical and/or psychological

A held Child in arms, or Child or Young Person in close enough proximity to be hurt during the incident, including bruising, cuts or burns, or other more severe injuries.

Type of abuse	Definition	Possible physical indicators	Possible behavioural indicators
Domestic and Family violence	<p>Perpetrator Behaviour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • killing or attempting to kill a household member ,use a weapon or display a weapon in a threatening manner • sexual assault, fractures, internal injuries, disfigurement, burns, death and/or any injury that may require hospitalisation. • seriously threatening to harm a CYP, other adult or self (including threats to kidnap and hold hostage). • used excessive discipline and punishment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Injuries which are excused as 'accidents' • Easily startled • Lethargy • Wetting, soiling, smearing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in personal behaviours, e.g. an outgoing student becomes withdrawn • Concentration difficulties • Highly anxious • Constant and abrupt absences from school • A fear of the parent • An extreme fear of conflict • Tendencies towards isolation and avoidance of friends and family • Sudden anger or violent outbursts • Hyper-vigilance • Disclosure directly or indirectly through drawings, play or writing • Drug or alcohol abuse • Non-suicidal self-injury • Suicidal ideation • Attempted suicide • School attendance issues

Most child abuse or neglect is not identified based on a single event or indicator. Indicators usually occur in clusters and in some cases there may be no indicators of abuse occurring. The following indicators may lead to a concern that a child is being subjected to abuse. Indicators should be considered in the context of the child's age, capabilities, medical and developmental history.

Type of abuse	Definition	Possible physical indicators	Possible behavioural indicators
Neglect	<p>Neglect is characterised by serious, ongoing failure to provide for a child's basic needs, to the extent that the child is not receiving the care and supervision necessary to protect them from harm, has suffered serious physical injury or illness, or there is risk of serious harm to the child's wellbeing and development</p> <p>Physical neglect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no safe place to stay, or current sleeping arrangements pose serious danger or risk • hygiene significantly compromised to the extent that physical health is compromised or at risk of being compromised • food/ fluids – inappropriate, withholding or insufficient. <p>Medical neglect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • medical illnesses, disability, injury or mental health condition in a CYP being left unattended/ unaddressed or treated contrary to medical guidance/ treatment. <p>Supervisory neglect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • child or young person is left alone for an inappropriate length of time, or the quality of interaction is not sufficient for their safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor hygiene • Dirty and unwashed • Lack of adequate or suitable clothing • Lack of medical or dental care • Development delays • Untreated physical or medical problems, e.g. sores, boils or lice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always attends school even when sick • Frequent lateness or absence, early arrival at school or reluctant to leave • Falling asleep in school, constant fatigue • Dull, apathetic appearance • Steals, hoards or begs for food • Consistently hungry • Engages in vandalism • Frequent illness, minor infections or sores • Disclosure directly or indirectly through drawings, play or writing • Drug or alcohol abuse • Non-suicidal self-injury • Suicidal ideation • Attempted suicide • School attendance issues

Sexual Abuse is defined as any type of sexual behaviour involving a child where the child has less power or there is a significant disparity in the developmental function or maturity of the child and another person involved in the behaviour.

Child sexual abuse includes any type of sexual behaviour involving a child where:

Type of abuse	Definition	Possible physical indicators	Possible behavioural indicators
<p>Sexual abuse</p>	<p>Sexual abuse, in relation to a child, includes sexual behaviour in circumstances where</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the child is the subject of bribery, coercion, a threat, exploitation or violence; or the child has less power than another person involved in the behaviour; or there is a significant disparity in the developmental function or maturity of the child and another person involved in the behaviour. <p>Some examples are: inappropriate or unwanted touching, exposure to sexual acts or pornographic materials and sexual assault.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bruises or bleeding from vaginal or anal regions Blood stained clothing Pregnancy Signs of pain, itching or discomfort in the anal or genital area Urinary tract infections Wetting, soiling, smearing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sexual behaviour or knowledge of sexual matters inappropriate to age or development Sexual behaviour that is harmful to self or others Disclosure of involvement in sexual activity directly to an adult, indirectly to a friend or in a disguised way, e.g. "I know a person who..." Decline in school performance Poor attention or school refusal Regression to infantile behaviour, e.g. thumb-sucking, rocking Unexplained fears Anxiety Sadness Running away from home Resistance to having contact with or fear of a parent/carer/relative Eating disorder Volatile substance use Criminal sexual behaviour Anger and defiance Deliberate cruelty to animals Helplessness Aggression Social withdrawal or isolation Disclosure directly or indirectly through drawings, play or writing Drug or alcohol abuse Non-suicidal self-injury Suicidal ideation Attempted suicide School attendance issues

References

Briggs, F. (2012) *Child Protection, The essential guide for teachers and other professionals who work with children*
www.dcp.wa.gov.au/ChildProtection/ChildAbuseAndNeglect/Pages/Childabuseandneglect.aspx

Contacts

To report a suspected case of child abuse or neglect call the child abuse report line (CARL): 13 14 78. The report line is available 24 hours a day <https://www.childprotection.sa.gov.au/reporting-child-abuse/report-child-abuse-or-neglect>.

The lists should be used as a guide only to help determine if your suspicions of abuse are well-founded, and should be [reported to the child abuse report line](#).

Keep a record of any observations by using the [concerns checklist](#). Information recorded from the checklist greatly

enhances the quality of any subsequent reports to the child abuse report line.