TYPES OF INDICATORS OF MALTREATMENT and INDICATORS

These are three types of indicators that provide clues to help tune in to needs or danger.

A. Physical indicators
   Visible signs

B. Behavior indicators
   A typically happy child becomes angry, quiet, misbehaving

C. Environmental indicators
   Adult guardian(s) view a child as different or difficult to manage
   Adult(s) have unrealistic expectations of a child
   Adult(s) are unaware of age appropriate behavior
   Social isolation of a family
   Severe personal problems such as drug addiction, alcoholism or mental illness
   Family crises of unemployment, ill health, or death

Physical Indicators of Physical Abuse
Bruises, Welts, Lacerations
   In unusual patterns, or distinctive shapes
   In clusters
   On the face - especially on an infant
   On the face, buttocks back or thighs
   In various stages of healing
   Of gum tissue – caused by forced feeding
   On external genitals

Burns
   Immersion burns, such as: “stocking burns," “glove burns," or doughnut-shaped burns on the buttocks
   Cigarette-type burns: especially on the palms of hands, soles of feet or genitals
   Friction of tether burns: on wrists, ankles or neck, possible rope burns from confinement.
   Dry burns: such as those caused by an iron, radiator grates or stove burners

Fractures, Dislocations, Injuries
   Spiral fractures
   Stiff, swollen, enlarged joints
   Multiple fractures
   Unexplained fractures or dislocations
   Fractures in various stages of healing
   Absence of hair
   Hemorrhaging beneath scalp caused by pulling hair
   Nasal or jaw fractures
   Abdominal injuries

Behavior Indicators of Physical Abuse
The behavioral indicators of physical abuse are varied and are influenced by the:
   Severity and frequency of the abuse
Age of the child at the onset of abuse
Nature of the child’s relationship to the abuser
Availability of supportive persons, and
The child’s genetic endowment for coping

A child who is abused at an early age, frequently and severely, may exhibit some or all of these behavior characteristics:
- Has unusually neat eating habits
- Is overly compliant to avoid confrontation
- Lacks curiosity
- Rarely exhibits enjoyment
- Is fearful of physical contact
- May appear autistic
- Is excessively self-controlled – cries little
- Is under-developed for age/stage, due to efforts being directed to self-protection.

An older child, who is less severely, or less often abused, may exhibit these behaviors:
- Is timid; easily frightened
- Has psychosomatic complaints
- Craves affection; indiscriminate attachment to strangers
- Protects adults and affirms love for abusing adult(s)
- Experiences language delay
- Has difficulty in school in spite of normal ability
- Has sporadic temper tantrums
- Assumes role of parent; or is extremely immature in parent/child interactions

A child who is mildly, infrequently or inconsistently abused at an older age, may exhibit these characteristics:
- Hurts other children
- Is manipulative
- Shows extreme aggressiveness
- Is demanding and has temper tantrums
- Is hyperactive and has a short attention span
- Shows lag in development
- May seem accident prone or clumsy

Other overall behavioral indicators of physical abuse, may include, the child:
- Requests punishment
- Punishes other children
- Is afraid to go home
- Is afraid of adults
- Exhibits behavior extremes or drastic behavior changes
- Reports injuries that seem unbelievable
- Is extremely aggressive or withdrawn
- Is uncomfortable when other children cry
- Has poor self-concept
- Is self-mutilating

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Physical Indicators of Emotional Abuse
Eating disorders
Nightmares or restlessness
Wets the bed
Speech disorders
Fails to thrive
Exhibits developmental lags physically, emotionally and/or mentally
Hyperactive

Behavior Indicators of Emotional Abuse
Rocking behavior
Frequently bangs head
Poor peer relations; seeks adult contact
Overly eager to please; unrealistic goal setting
Views abuse as being warranted; or feels responsible for abuse
Exhibits noticeable change in behavior
Excessively anxious; impatient
Depressed; apathetic; passive; withdrawn
Exhibits aggressive or bizarre behavior; even fits of screaming
Exhibits inconsistent behavior
Runs away from home; attempts suicide
Low self-esteem; self-deprecation; lacks self confidence
Sabotages personal chances of success
Unable or unwilling to express feelings, needs or problems

NEGLECT
Neglect is, the consistent failure by a parent or caretaker to provide a child (under 18) with appropriate care, support, attention or affection. Most reported neglect cases involve lack of proper food, shelter, clothing, medical care, education opportunities, protection and supervision. Some neglect occurs as a result of ignorance. Other forms of neglect involve deliberate maltreatment of a minor.

Physical Indicators of Neglect
Inadequate supervision (abandonment; unattended)
Inadequate clothing for weather conditions
Poor hygiene (frequently dirty; scaly skin)
Lack of necessary medical or dental care (untreated illness or injury)
Inadequate nutrition (hungry)
Lack of safe, warm, sanitary shelter
Engages in dangerous behavior due to lack of supervision
Abnormal height to weight ratio
Chronically tired or listless
Appears to be overworked or exploited

Behavioral Indicators of Neglect
Failure to thrive – especially among infants
Poor attendance
Chronic lateness
Squinting
Poor learning
Steals or begs for food. Child may collect and save food.
Comes early and stays late at events
Lethargic behavior
Uses drugs or alcohol
Engages in sexual misconduct, such as acting out or even prostitution
Runs away from home, attempts suicide
Extremely dependent or detached
Delinquent behavior, such as vandalism or stealing
Assumes adult responsibilities at home
States frequent absence of parent/guardian

Possible Environmental Circumstances of Neglect
- A large family with marital disruption
- Long term parental illness
- Indifferent parental attitude
- Situational stress, such as unemployment
- Lack of materials resources

Possible Behaviors of Neglectful Guardians
- Apathetic
- Frequently unkempt
- Craving excitement or change
- Desire to be rid of the demands of a child
- Lack of interest in the child’s activity
- Low acceptance of child’s dependency needs
- Lacking parental skills
- Little planning or organization of care of child

Neglectful parents frequently were victims of the same type of parenting that they now provide for their children.

SEXUAL ABUSE
Sexual abuse is exploitation of a child for the sexual gratification of another person. Incest is sexual abuse within a family. Sexual abuse is difficult to detect outside the clinical setting.

Physical Indicators of Sexual Abuse
Physical evidence of sexual abuse, if present at all, tends to be temporary. The physical trauma is not exposed. There is a general lack of awareness of the prevalence of child sexual abuse and lack of confidence in detecting it.
- Pain or irritation of genitals.
- Bruises, swelling or bleeding in genital or anal region
- Sexually transmitted disease
- Torn, bloody and/or stained underclothing
- Is pregnant
- Unexplained infections (sore throat, yeast or urinary infections)
- Vaginal or penile discharge
- Wets beds

Behavior Indicators of Sexual Abuse
The victim is usually reluctant to reveal the abuse. These behavioral indicators are frequently the best or only signs you may have.
- Behavior extremes
Avoids dressing or changing clothes in front of others
Wears lots of clothing, especially to bed
Withdrawn; isolated; fearful; anxious; self-mutilating
Reluctance to participate in recreational activity
Regression (may appear mentally disabled)
Inappropriate understanding of sex for age
Reluctance to be alone with a particular person
Pre-occupation with sexual organs of self, parents or other children
Persistent and inappropriate sex play with peers or toys
Fear of touch; self-consciousness
Sexual promiscuity; seductive behavior
Obsessively clean
Psychosomatic complaints (headaches, backache)
Delinquent or aggressive behavior
Engages in fantasy or infantile behavior
Poor peer relationships
Either avoids or seeks out adults

**Environmental Indicators**
Prolonged absence of one parent
Overcrowding of living conditions
Alcoholism
Social and/or geographical isolation
Inter-generational pattern of incest
Parental characteristics such as extreme protection of child, jealousy of child, refusing to allow child social contact, distrusting child, accusing child of sexual promiscuity.

**Information Provided or Adapted from:**
*For Their Sake*, Becca Cowan Johnson
*It Shouldn't Hurt to be a Child*, North Dakota Department of Human Services
*Identifying Possible Signs of Child Abuse*, Ohio Extension Service