

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-depreciation; 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 material 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