

POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical Indicators

- any injury to an infant who is not yet mobile, especially head/facial injuries
- injuries to a toddler or older child for which there is no explanation, the explanation does not fit with the injuries, or the story keeps changing
- injuries at different stages of healing
- injuries that have a pattern or look like they may have been caused by an object (e.g., hand, stick, buckle, stove element), and
- bruising in unusual places such as ears, trunk, neck or buttocks

Behavioural Indicators

- afraid or reluctant to go home, or runs away
- shows unusual aggression, rages or tantrums
- flinches when touched
- has changes in school performance and attendance
- withdraws from family, friends and activities previously enjoyed
- poor self-esteem (e.g., describes self as bad, feels punishment is deserved, is very withdrawn), and
- suicidal thoughts or self-destructive behaviour (e.g., self-mutilation, suicide attempt, extreme risk-taking behaviour)

POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Physical Indicators

- unexplained or persistent pain, bleeding or unusual discharge in the genital or anal area
- pregnancy, and
- sexually transmitted diseases

Behavioural Indicators

- engages in age-inappropriate sexual play or exhibits age-inappropriate
- sexual knowledge (e.g., through drawing or play)
- forces or coerces another child to engage in sexual play
- inserts objects into vagina or rectum
- directs sexually intrusive behaviour to adults
- has unexplained gifts, new clothes or money
- has changes in school performance and attendance
- is secretive about "new" friends, activities, phone calls or Internet use
- has unexplained developmental setbacks (e.g., was toilet trained but reverts back)
- is involved in sexually exploitive activities, such as performing sex acts for money
- is involved in behaviours such as misuse of drugs or alcohol, stealing,
- fire-setting, and
- flinches when touched

POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF EMOTIONAL HARM

Physical Indicators

- bed wetting and/or frequent diarrhea, and
- frequent psychosomatic complaints, headaches, nausea, abdominal pains

Behavioural Indicators

- mental or emotional development lags
- isolated and has no friends or complains of social isolation
- behaviours inappropriate for age
- fear of failure, overly high standards, reluctant to play
- fears consequences of actions, often leading to lying
- extreme withdrawal or aggressiveness, mood swings
- overly compliant, too well-mannered
- excessive neatness and cleanliness
- extreme attention-seeking behaviours
- poor peer relationships
- severe depression, may be suicidal
- runaway attempts
- violence is a subject for art or writing
- forbidden contact with other children
- shows little anxiety towards strangers, and
- unusual severe anxiety or worries

POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF NEGLECT

Physical Indicators

- injuries where medical care has been unusually delayed or avoided
- injuries resulting from a lack of supervision
- medical or dental needs that are consistently unattended to
- “failure to thrive” in a child where no medical reason has been found
- (see table below for further information on failure to thrive)
- clothing consistently inadequate for weather conditions
- persistent hunger
- poor or inadequate nutrition, and
- poor personal hygiene

Behavioural Indicators

- forages for, hoards or steals food
- developmental delay or setbacks related to a lack of stimulation
- poor school attendance
- inappropriately takes on a caregiver role for a parent or siblings
- tired or unable to concentrate at school
- appears sad or has flat affect
- reluctant to go home; speaks of being or appears to be left alone at home a lot, unsupervised
- is involved in behaviours such as misuse of drugs or alcohol, stealing, fire-setting and
- does not respond to affection or stimulation

POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF FAILURE TO THRIVE

A child who has stopped growing and/or has experienced significant weight loss may be suffering from “failure to thrive” syndrome. Medical assessment is necessary to determine whether the syndrome is organic or non-organic in origin.

Physical Indicators

- appears pale, emaciated, has “sunken cheeks”
- body fat ratio is extremely low (e.g. wrinkled buttocks)
- skin may feel like parchment paper as a result of dehydration, and
- significant developmental milestones have not been attained within their
- age range (e.g., cannot hold head up at six months of age, cannot walk
- at 18 months)

Behavioural Indicators

- appears lethargic and undemanding (e.g., cries very little)
- uninterested in environment or surroundings, and
- displays little or no movement (e.g., lies in crib motionless)

Remember: You should report to a child welfare worker any time you have reason to believe a child is, or may be, at risk for abuse or neglect – and the parent is unwilling or unable to protect the child. Reason to believe simply means that, based on what you have seen or information you have received, you believe a child may be at risk