



Department for
Community Development

How do I recognise
when a child is
at risk of abuse
or neglect.



Physical abuse

Physical abuse occurs when a child or young person is deliberately hurt or is at serious risk of being physically hurt, by the actions of their parents or carers. This can be the result of actions such as punching, kicking, shaking or throwing, scalding/burning or strangling. It can also be the result of repeated excessive physical discipline. The injuries are not considered accidental.



Possible indicators of physical abuse

- broken bones or unexplained bruises, burns, or welts in various stages of healing
- the child or young person is unable to explain an injury, or explanations given are inconsistent, vague, bizarre or changing
- direct admissions from the parents that they are concerned that they might harm their child
- family history of violence
- marked delay between injury and obtaining medical assistance
- parents who show little concern about the welfare of their child or the treatment and care of the injury
- repeated presentations of the child to health services with injuries, ingestions or minor complaints (this could also be an indicator of Munchausen's by proxy, a rare expression of physical and emotional abuse)
- the child or young person is unusually frightened of a parent or carer, or is afraid to go home
- the child or young person reports intentional injury by their parent or caretaker
- arms and legs are kept covered by inappropriate clothing in warm conditions
- ingestion of poisonous substances including alcohol or drugs
- avoidance of physical contact by the child (particularly with a parent or carer).

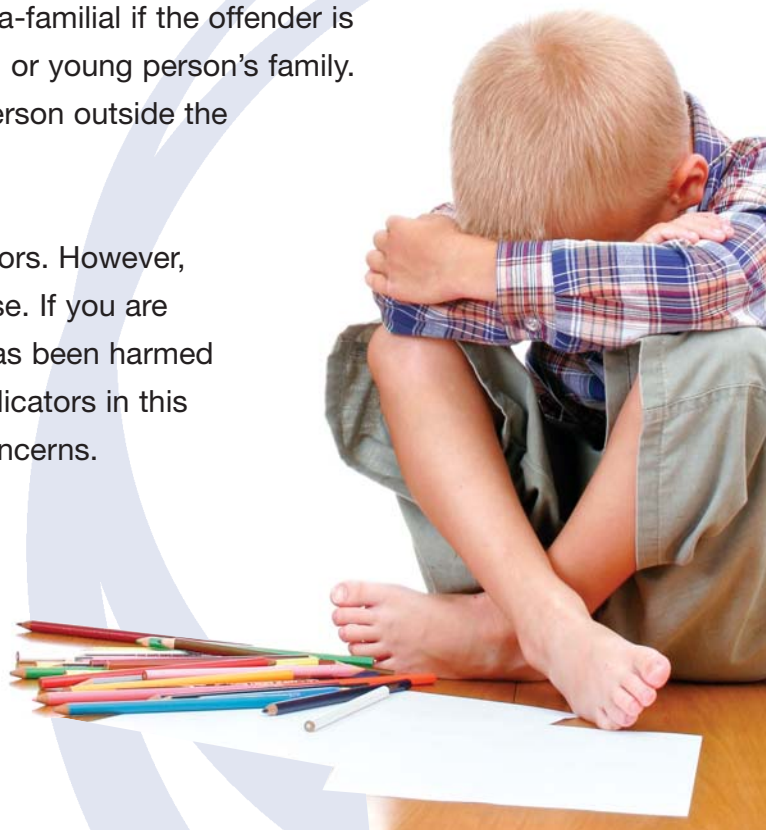
How do I recognise when a child is at risk of abuse or neglect.

Child abuse and neglect are broadly defined within four categories:

- physical
- sexual
- psychological/emotional
- neglect

These categories can exist independently but commonly occur in combination with others. The abuse is intra-familial if the offender is a parent, guardian, or member of the child or young person's family. Extra-familial abuse is perpetrated by a person outside the immediate family.

Each form of abuse has a range of indicators. However, one sign on its own may not suggest abuse. If you are concerned that a child or young person has been harmed or is at risk of being harmed, the list of indicators in this brochure may assist you to clarify your concerns.



Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves the exposure of children and young people to inappropriate sexual activity by either forcing them to be involved in sexual acts (masturbation, fondling, oral sex or penetrative sex); or witnessing the sexual activity of others, either by reading or viewing pornographic material or through direct observation.

Possible indicators of sexual abuse

- sexualised behaviours inappropriate to their age (including sexually touching other children and themselves)
- knowledge of sexual behaviour inappropriate to their years
- disclosure of abuse either directly or indirectly through drawings, play or writing that describes abuse
- pain or bleeding in the anal or genital area with redness or swelling
- fear of being alone with a particular person
- child or young person implies that he/she is required to keep secrets
- presence of sexually transmitted disease
- sudden unexplained fears
- enuresis and/or encopresis (bedwetting and bed soiling).

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse accompanies all forms of abuse/neglect but can exist on its own as a specific type of abuse. Emotional abuse is harm caused by behaviours such as severe verbal abuse, continual rejection, use of physical or social isolation, threats of abuse, harassment, frightening or bullying actions.

Possible indicators of emotional abuse

- the parent or guardian constantly criticises, threatens, belittles, insults, or rejects the child or young person with no evidence of love, support, or guidance
- the child/young person exhibits extremes in behaviour from overly aggressive to overly passive
- delayed physical, emotional, or intellectual development
- compulsive lying and stealing
- high levels of anxiety
- lack of trust in people
- feelings of worthlessness about life and themselves
- eating hungrily or hardly at all
- uncharacteristic seeking of attention or affection
- reluctance to go home
- rocking, sucking thumbs or self harming behaviour
- fearfulness when approached by a person known to them.



Neglect

Neglect is the failure to provide a level of care that meets a child or young person's developmental, emotional and physical needs. It also includes the failure to provide adequate medical, therapeutic or remedial treatment.

Possible indicators of neglect

- signs of malnutrition, begging, stealing or hoarding food
- poor hygiene: matted hair, dirty skin, or severe body odour
- unattended physical or medical problems
- the child or young person states that no one is home to provide care (inadequate supervision, failure to ensure safety)
- child or young person appears constantly tired
- frequent lateness to school or absence from school
- inappropriate clothing, especially inadequate clothing in winter
- alcohol and/or drug abuse present in the household
 - frequent illness, low grade infections or sores
 - hunger.



Family and domestic violence is strongly associated with child abuse and neglect. In families where domestic violence occurs, there is an increased risk that basic childhood needs will not be met including the need for care and protection.

Witnessing violence between parents, or being involved in a violent act between adults in the home, can have a serious impact on the emotional well being and development of children and young people. It can impact on self image, responses to other people and ability to form healthy relationships as adults. It denies a sense of security and safety to children and young people, teaches them that violence is a solution to problems and may lead to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Family and domestic violence fits within the definitions of child abuse when it is clear that the child or young person's physical, emotional and psychological development is affected.

If you are concerned about the wellbeing and/or safety of a child or young person and can identify a cluster of indicators in relation to the child, you have an obligation to consult with the Department for Community Development or some other experienced professional or agency. When their safety is at risk children and young people rely on responsible adults to act protectively on their behalf. They cannot protect themselves.

Contact details for local DCD offices and other agencies can be found on the back of this brochure.

Services and organisations which can provide help, advice and support

Department for Community Development

(Refer to the White Pages or the website at www.community.wa.gov.au for contact details of the local office)

Parenting Line

9272 1466/1800 654 432

Family Helpline

9223 1100/1800 643 000

Men's Domestic Violence Helpline

9223 1199/1800 000 599

Women's Domestic Violence Helpline

9223 1188/1800 007 339

Child Health and Community Health Services

Refer to the White Pages for contact details of local Child Health Centres

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

1800 220 400

(24-hour mental health advice line)

Princess Margaret Hospital

9340 8222

State Child Development Centre

9481 2203

Disability Services Commission

9426 9200/1800 998 214

Kids Helpline

1800 551 800

Sexual Assault Resource Centre Counselling line

9340 1899/1800 199 888

Concerns for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people can be reported to the following agencies

Department for Community Development

(Refer to the White Pages or the website at www.community.wa.gov.au for contact details of the local office)

- Child Abuse Services WA
9223 1111/1800 199 008
- Crisis Care
9223 1111/1800 199 008 (24 hour telephone service for people in crisis and needing urgent help)

Western Australian Police

- 131 444 (General Enquiries and Police Attendance)
- 000 (Life threatening emergencies)



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