

Child Safeguarding Indicators of Abuse

The following are indicators and do not cover every situation.

This list does not mean the child is suffering abuse but may indicate you need to share information with your Child Safeguarding Representative (CSR). It is essential to be able to recognise indicators in both the child or young person and the adult who may be abusing them. Sometimes it is the behaviour and attitude of an adult towards children and young people that alerts you.

Emotional abuse.

Child indicators:

- overly compliant and apologetic
- looks worried and anxious
- fear of making mistakes, especially if it only happens in the presence of a particular person
- difficulty developing relationships, including poor peer relationships
- demonstrating fear of a parent, caregiver or adult
- reluctance to attend an activity at a particular club or organisation
- inability to cope with praise
- delayed development or regression with no apparent cause
- aggressive behaviour (active or passive)
- attention seeking or risk-taking behaviour
- self-critical
- depression, regularly frightened, anxious and nervous
- tired, lethargic, falling asleep at inappropriate times
- self-soothing habits – hair twisting, sucking, biting, rocking
- clingy, possessive and attention-seeking
- indiscriminate attachment to adults – strong attention, affection seeking or a severe lack of attachment to their own parent/ caregiver
- seeks affection and comfort from virtual strangers
- stealing (particularly food) or destroying property

- reluctant or unable to express views when asked
- hanging around outside of hours and not wanting to go home
- developmental delay with an apparent physical cause
- depression, anxiety, withdrawal or aggression
- self-harm, suicidal thoughts or intention, alcohol and drug abuse
- extreme attention-seeking behaviours or extreme inhibition
- running away from home
- nightmares, poor sleeping patterns
- anti-social behaviours
- lack of self-esteem
- obsessive behaviours
- eating disorders

Adult indicators:

- labels the child as inferior, belittles or publicly humiliates the child
- treats the child differently from siblings or peers in ways that suggest dislike or irritation of the child
- considers it amusing to frighten the child
- lacks empathy for the child
- refuses to help the child
- threatens the child with physical harm or punishment in front of others
- exposure to criminal behaviour
- withholds physical and verbal affection
- isolates the child
- has unrealistic expectations of the child
- inappropriately involves the child in adult problems
- exposes child seeing or hearing, situations of arguing and violence in the home.

Neglect.

Child Indicators:

- dressed inappropriately for the season or the weather
- lack of food, kit or equipment
- often dirty and unwashed
- severe or persistent skin disorders
- inadequately supervised or left unattended frequently or for long periods
- left alone or in the care of an inappropriate adult
- does not receive adequate or timely health care
- underweight or overweight
- lacks adequate shelter
- failure to thrive with no medical reason
- stealing/ hoarding of food
- inappropriately dressed - dirty, not the right clothes to keep dry or warm.
- unsupervised – hanging around
- lack of routine in the household – mealtimes and bedtimes
- falling behind in education and sport
- indiscriminate attachment to adults – strong attention, affection seeking or a severe lack of attachment to their own parent/ caregiver
- tired or falling asleep at inappropriate times
- abuse of alcohol or drugs
- aggressive or destructive behaviour
- poor peer relationships, having few friends
- dulled emotional response or lack of expression or enthusiasm
- low self-esteem
- anxiety
- self-soothing behaviour such as rocking and sucking
- running away
- developmental lags with no apparent cause.

Adult indicators:

- puts own need ahead of child's
- fails to provide for child's basic needs
- demonstrates little or no interest in the child's life - does not attend sport and recreational activities or social events
- leaves the child alone or inappropriately supervised

- drug and alcohol misuse
- low mood
- seeks help but fails to carry through with help offered
- late to drop off and collect – may fail to collect the child
- excuses and promises with no improvement in the care of the child.

Physical abuse.

Child indicators.

Especially when unexplained, inconsistent with explanation given or the story changes.

- bruises, marks, cuts and abrasions
- burns
- repeated illnesses with no known cause
- blackeyes
- fractures and dislocations
- multiple, bruises, wounds or fractures at different stages of healing
- injuries or fractures in very young children, especially those not yet mobile
- inconsistent or vague explanations regarding injuries
- makes excuses for injury or story changes
- repeatedly injured
- injured but not receiving timely health care • wary of adults or a particular person
- speaks aggressively to others
- fear and crying
- cringing or flinching if touches unexpectedly
- overly compliant and eager to please
- dresses to hide bruising or injuries
- runs away from home or is afraid to go home
- may regress (e.g. bed-wetting)
- general sadness
- violent to other children or cruel to animals.

Adult indicators:

- inconsistent or vague explanations regarding injuries
- threatens or hits the child in front of others
- speaks aggressively to or about the child
- reacts aggressively to questions about a child's injury or well-being
- makes you feel scared or frightened when you enquire about the child's well-being
- appears unconcerned about child's well-being
- states the child is prone to injuries or lies about how they occur
- delays in seeking medical attention
- may take the child to multiple medical appointments and seek medical treatment without an obvious need
- lacks empathy
- is cruel taking delight in overly rough play or taunting the child
- harsh parenting style who supports physical punishment.

Sexual abuse.

Child indicators:

- unusual discharge, or excessive itching or pain in the genital or anal area
- stained or bloody underwear
- any injury, soreness or bleeding in the genital or anal area
- blood in urine or stools
- sexually transmitted infections
- pregnancy
- urinary tract infections
- discomfort in sitting or walking
- age or developmentally inappropriate sexual play, knowledge or language
- refuses to go home, or to a specific person's home, for no apparent reason
- running away from home or going missing
- fear of a person, place, sound or smell
- mood swings or changes in temperament
- secrecy
- exchanging sexualised messages or images
- unexplained gifts, possessions or money that can't be accounted for
- depression, anxiety, withdrawal or aggression
- self-harm, suicidal thought or intention, alcohol and drug abuse
- overly compliant

- extreme attention-seeking behaviors or extreme inhibition
- dresses inappropriately to hide bruising or injuries
- eating disorders
- compulsive behaviors.

Adult indicators:

- favours a particular child
- insists on physical affection
- rough play or tickling games
- invades the child's privacy (e.g. during dressing, in the bathroom)
- manipulates situations to gain time alone with a child or children, for example, offering to babysit, extra coaching or tutoring
- overly interested in a child's sexual development
- prefers to spend time with children and young people rather than adults or people of a similar age.

Intimate partner violence.

Child indicators:

- injuries consistent with physical abuse
- absenteeism from school
- worried and anxious in general or about a parent or siblings
- bullying or aggressive behaviour
- complaints of headaches or stomach ache with no apparent medical reason
- talking or describing violent behaviours
- bullying, aggressive behaviour
- disclosures of violent or emotionally abusive situations
- threats or cruelty to animals.
- substance misuse
- very distressed when witnessing violence
- severely shy, low self-esteem
- argumentative and aggressive
- difficulty concentrating.

Adult victim indicators:

- physical injuries
- depression or anxiety
- inconsistent explanations for injuries
- fearful
- submissive
- protective of abuser.

Perpetrator indicators:

- isolates and controls partner and children
- threatens, criticises, intimidates, uses aggressive and physical abuse towards partner and children
- minimises and denies own behaviour, or blames the victim for the perpetrator's own behaviour
- stalking victim
- manipulating a person by forcing them to question their thoughts, memories, and events, making them question their own sanity.

Bullying.

Child indicators:

- physical injuries such as unexplained bruises
- problems with eating or sleeping, for example, nightmares, wetting the bed, etc
- self-harm
- belongings getting lost or damaged
- loses interest in school or activity
- not doing as well at school
- being afraid to go to school or activity
- few friendships, not being accepted by their peers
- no longer wants to participate in activities once enjoyed
- asking for, or stealing, money (to give to a bully)
- suddenly changes in behaviour
- thoughts about suicide
- substance misuse.

Cyberbullying.

Child indicators:

- spends a significant amount of time on the computer, and is unwilling to talk about
- seems upset, highly irritable or emotional after being on the computer, or after reading their text messages or email, etc
- frightened of going to school or activity
- constantly checking social media or worrying about comments
- defensive and upset when you ask about social media use
- sudden withdrawal from technology or a sudden change in computer or phone usage including suddenly stops using the computer
- become anxious about phone messages
- suddenly changes friends.