

## DEFINITIONS, SIGNS, AND SYMPTOMS

# — Child Abuse and Neglect

*Goal: Increased understanding and awareness of child abuse and neglect*

## DEFINITIONS

### Physical Abuse

- An injury or pattern of injuries that happen to a child that is not accidental. Injuries may include beatings, burns, bruises, bites, welts, strangulation, broken bones, or death

### Neglect

- Occurs when adults responsible for the well-being of a child fail to provide for or protect the child.
- May include not giving food, clothing, or shelter; failing to keep children clean; lack of supervision; and withholding medical care

### Emotional Abuse

- Any chronic and persistent act by an adult that endangers the mental health or emotional development of a child including rejecting; ignoring; terrorizing; corrupting; constantly criticizing; making mean remarks; insulting; and giving little or no love, guidance, or support

### Sexual Abuse

- Sexual assault or sexual exploitation of children
- May consist of numerous acts over a long period or a single incident
- Children can be victimized from infancy through adolescence
- Includes rape, incest, sodomy, fondling, exposing oneself, oral copulation, penetration of the genital or anal openings, as well as forcing children to view or appear in pornography
- The perpetrator keeps the child from disclosing through intimidation, threats, and rewards



## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS: PHYSICAL ABUSE

### Physical Abuse Behavioral Indicators

- Is wary of adults
- Is either extremely aggressive or withdrawn
- Is dependent and indiscriminate in his or her attachments
- Is uncomfortable when other children cry
- Generally controls his or her own crying
- Exhibits a drastic behavior change when not with parents or caregiver
- Is manipulative
- Has poor self-concept

- Exhibits delinquent behavior, such as running away from home
- Uses or abuses alcohol or other drugs
- Is self-mutilating

- Is frightened of parents, going home
- Is overprotective of or responsible for parents
- Exhibits suicidal gestures or attempts suicide
- Has behavior problems at school

### Physical Abuse Physical Indicators

- Has unexplained\* bruises or welts, often clustered or in a pattern
- Has unexplained\* or unusual burns (cigarettes, doughnut shaped, immersion lines, object patterned)

- Has unexplained\* bite marks
- Has unexplained\* fractures or dislocations
- Has unexplained\* abrasions or lacerations
- Wets the bed

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS: NEGLECT

### Neglect Behavioral Indicators

- Is truant or tardy to school often or arrives early and stays late
- Beggars or steals food
- Attempts suicide
- Uses or abuses alcohol or other drugs
- Is extremely dependent or detached

- Engages in delinquent behavior, such as prostitution or stealing
- Appears to be exhausted
- States frequent or continual absence of parent or guardian

### Neglect Physical Indicators

- Is frequently dirty, unwashed, hungry, or inappropriately dressed
- Engages in dangerous activities (possibly because he or she generally is unsupervised)

- Is tired and listless
- Has unattended physical problems
- May appear overworked or exploited

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS: EMOTIONAL ABUSE

### Emotional Abuse Behavioral Indicators

- Is overeager to please
- Seeks out adult contact
- Views abuse as being warranted
- Exhibits changes in behavior
- Is excessively anxious
- Is depressed
- Is unwilling to discuss problems
- Exhibits aggressive or bizarre behavior
- Is withdrawn
- Is apathetic
- Is passive
- Has unprovoked fits of yelling or screaming
- Exhibits inconsistent behavior at home and school
- Runs away from home

- Attempts suicide
- Has low self-esteem
- Exhibits a gradual impairment of health or personality
- Has difficulty sustaining relationships
- Has unrealistic goal setting
- Is impatient
- Is unable to communicate or express his or her feelings, needs, or desires
- Sabotages his or her chances of success
- Lacks self-confidence
- Is self-deprecating and has a negative self-image

- Feels responsible for the abuser

### Emotional Abuse Physical Indicators

- Has a sleep disorder (nightmares or restlessness)
- Wets the bed
- Is hyperactive
- Exhibits developmental lags (stunting his or her physical, emotional, or mental growth)
- Exhibits eating disorders

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS: SEXUAL ABUSE

### Sexual Abuse Behavioral Indicators

- Is reluctant to change clothes in front of others
- Is withdrawn
- Has poor peer relationships
- Is pseudo-mature
- Is manipulative
- Exhibits unusual sexual behavior or knowledge beyond what is common for his or her developmental stage
- Either avoids or seeks out adults
- Is self-conscious
- Has problems with authority and rules
- Exhibits eating disorders
- Is self-mutilating
- Is obsessively clean
- Uses or abuses alcohol or other drugs
- Has school difficulties
- Exhibits delinquent behavior, such as running away from home
- Exhibits extreme compliance or defiance
- Is fearful or anxious
- Exhibits suicidal gestures or attempts suicide
- Is promiscuous
- Engages in fantasy or infantile behavior
- Is unwilling to participate in sports activities

### Sexual Abuse Physical Indicators

- Has pain or itching in the genital area
- Has bruises or bleeding in the genital area
- Has venereal disease
- Has swollen private parts
- Has difficulty walking or sitting
- Has torn, bloody, or stained underclothing
- Experiences pain when urinating
- Is pregnant
- Has vaginal or penile discharge
- Wets the bed

## FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

- Extreme paternal dominance, restrictiveness, or overprotectiveness
- Family isolated from community and support systems
- Marked role reversal between mother and child
- History of sexual abuse for either parent
- Substance abuse by either parent or by children
- Other types of violence in the home
- Absent spouse (through chronic illness, depression, divorce, or separation)
- Severe overcrowding
- Complaints about a “seductive” child
- Extreme objection to implementation of child sexual abuse curriculum

Note: These indicators can also suggest emotional dysfunctions that merit investigation for having emotional problems or being the victim of abuse.