

Appendix B

Signs and symptoms associated with child abuse and neglect

The signs, symptoms, and history described below are not diagnostic of abuse. However in certain situations, contexts and combinations they will raise the practitioner's suspicion of abuse. It is better to refer on suspicion. If you wait for proof, serious harm can occur.

History

- History inconsistent with the injury presented.
- Past abuse or family violence.
- Exposure to family violence, pornography, alcohol or drug abuse.
- Isolation and lack of support.
- Mental illness, including post-natal depression.
- Inappropriate or inconsistent discipline (especially thrashings or any physical punishment of babies).
- Neglecting the child.
- Delay in seeking help.
- Disclosure by the child.
- Severe social stress.
- Parent/s abused as child/children.
- Unrealistic expectations of child.
- Terrorising, humiliating, or oppressing.
- Promoting excessive dependency in the child.
- Actively avoiding seeking care or shopping around for care (frequent changes of address).

Physical Signs

- Multiple injuries, especially of different ages: bruises, welts, cuts, abrasions.
- Scalds and burns, especially in unusual distributions such as glove and sock patterns.
- Pregnancy.
- Genital injuries.
- Sexually transmitted diseases.
- Patterned bruising.
- Unexplained failure to thrive (FTT).
- Poor hygiene.
- Dehydration or malnutrition.
- Fractures, especially in infants or in specific patterns.
- Poisoning, especially if recurrent.
- Apnoeic spells, especially if recurrent.

Behavioural and developmental signs

- Aggression.
- Anxiety and regression.
- Obsessions.
- Overly responsible behaviour.
- Frozen watchfulness.
- Sexualised behaviour.
- Fear.
- Sadness.
- Defiance.
- Self-mutilation.
- Suicidal thoughts/plans.
- Withdrawal from family.
- Substance abuse.
- Overall developmental delay, especially if also FTT.
- Patchy or specific delay: motor, emotional, speech and language, social, cognitive, vision and hearing.