

Appendix 2

HOW TO RECOGNISE ABUSE

When considering whether there is evidence to suggest a child or young person has been abused there are a number of possible indicators (listed below). It is important to know how to recognise abuse, and the following definitions should be taken into account in any organisation policies and procedures. However, there *may* be other explanations, so it is important not to jump to conclusions but rather seek advice. There may also be no signs or symptoms; this does not mean that a report of abuse is false.

Signs Suggesting Physical Abuse¹

- Any injuries not consistent with the explanation given for them
- Injuries that occur to the body in places which are not normally exposed to falls, rough games, etc
- Injuries that have not received medical attention
- Physical signs of neglect (see below)
- Reluctance to change for, or participate in, games or swimming
- Repeated urinary infections or unexplained tummy pains
- Bruises, bites, burns, fractures etc that do not have an accidental explanation*
- Cuts/scratches/substance abuse*
- Changes in routine

Signs Suggesting Emotional Abuse²

- Changes or regression in mood or behaviour, particularly where a child withdraws or becomes clingy. Also depression/aggression, extreme anxiety.
- Nervousness, frozen watchfulness
- Obsessions or phobias
- Sudden under-achievement or lack of concentration
- Inappropriate relationships with peers and/or adults
- Attention-seeking behaviour
- Persistent tiredness
- Running away/stealing/lying

Signs Suggesting Abuse by Neglect

Obviously, a clear distinction needs to be made between children in need of protection due to poverty, conflict or crisis and specific acts of maltreatment towards a child or children.

- Under nourishment, failure to grow
- Constant hunger, stealing or gorging food
- Untreated illnesses
- Inadequate care

Indicators of Possible Sexual Abuse³

- Any allegations made by a child concerning sexual abuse
- Child with excessive preoccupation with sexual matters and detailed knowledge of adult sexual behaviour, or who regularly engages in age-inappropriate sexual play
- Sexual activity through words, play or drawing
- Child who is sexually provocative or seductive with adults
- Inappropriate bed-sharing arrangements at home
- Severe sleep disturbances with fears, phobias, vivid dreams or nightmares, sometimes with overt or veiled sexual connotations
- Eating disorders - anorexia, bulimia*
- Bed wetting and soiling

^{1,2,3} Adapted from *Safe and Secure*, produced by Thirtyone:eight - <https://thirtyoneeight.org>

* These signs may indicate the possibility that a child or young person is self-harming, mostly by cutting, burning, self-poisoning.