**Indicators of Abuse and Neglect**

There are many indicators of harm to children. Behavioural or physical signs which assist in recognising harm to children are known as indicators. The following is a guide only. One indicator on its own may not imply abuse or neglect. However a single indicator can be as important as the presence of several indicators. Each indicator needs to be considered in the context of other indicators and the child’s circumstances. A child's behaviour is likely to be affected if he/she is under stress. There can be many causes of stress and it is important to find out specifically what is causing the stress. Abuse and neglect can be single incidents or ongoing, and may be intentional or unintentional.

**General indicators of abuse and neglect**

* marked delay between injury and seeking medical assistance
* history of injury
* the child gives some indication that the injury did not occur as stated
* the child tells you someone has hurt him/her
* the child tells you about someone he/she knows who has been hurt
* someone (relative, friend, acquaintance, sibling) tells you that the child may have been abused.

**Neglect**

Child neglect is the continued failure by a parent or caregiver to provide a child with the basic things needed for his or her proper growth and development, such as food, clothing, shelter, medical and dental care and adequate supervision. Some examples are:

* inability to respond emotionally to the child
* child abandonment
* depriving or withholding physical contact
* failure to provide psychological nurturing
* treating one child differently to the others

**Indicators of Neglect in children**

* poor standard of hygiene leading to social isolation
* scavenging or stealing food
* extreme longing for adult affection
* lacking a sense of genuine interaction with others
* acute separation anxiety
* self comforting behaviours, e.g. rocking, sucking
* delay in development milestones
* untreated physical problems

 **Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse is a non-accidental injury or patter of injuries to a child caused by a parent, caregiver or other person. Educators will be particularly aware of looking for possible physical abuse if parents or caregivers:

* make direct admissions from parents about fear of hurting their children
* have a family history of violence
* have a history of their own maltreatment as a child
* make repeated visits for medical assistance

**Indicators of Physical Abuse in children**

* facial, head and neck bruising
* lacerations and welts
* explanations are not consistent with injury
* bruising or marks that may show the shape of an object
* bite marks or scratches
* multiple injuries or bruises
* ingestion of poisonous substances, alcohol or drugs
* sprains, twists, dislocations
* bone fractures
* burns and scalds

**Emotional Abuse**

Emotional abuse occurs when an adult harms a child’s development by repeatedly treating and speaking to a child in ways that damage the child’s ability to feel and express their feelings. Some examples are:

* constant criticism, belittling, teasing of a child or ignoring or withholding praise and affection
* excessive or unreasonable demands
* persistent hostility, severe verbal abuse, rejection and scape-goating
* belief that a particular child is bad or “evil”
* using inappropriate physical or social isolation as punishment
* exposure to domestic violence

**Indicators of emotional abuse in children**

* feeling of worthlessness about them
* inability to value others
* lack of trust in people and expectations
* extreme attention seeking behaviours
* other behavioural disorders (disruptiveness, aggressiveness, bullying)

**Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse is when someone involves a child in a sexual activity by using their power over them or taking advantage of their trust. Often children are bribed or threatened physically and psychologically to make them participate in the activity. Educators will be particularly aware of looking for possible sexual abuse if parents or caregivers are suspected of or charged with child sexual abuse or display inappropriate jealousy regarding age appropriate development of independence from the family. Sexual abuse includes:

* exposing the child to sexual behaviours of others
* coercing the child to engage in sexual behaviour with other children
* verbal threats of sexual abuse
* exposing the child to pornography

**Indicators of Sexual Abuse in children**

* they describe sexual acts
* direct or indirect disclosures
* age inappropriate behaviour and/or persistent sexual behaviour
* self destructive behaviour
* regression in development achievements
* child being in contact with a suspected or know perpetrator of sexual assault
* bleeding from the vagina or anus
* injuries such as tears to the genitalia

**Psychological Abuse**

Psychological harm occurs where the behaviour of the parent or caregiver damages the confidence and self esteem of the child, resulting in serious emotional deprivation or trauma. In general it is the frequency and duration of this behaviour that causes harm. Some examples are:

* excessive criticism
* withholding affection
* exposure to domestic violence
* intimidation or threatening behaviour.

**Indicators of psychological abuse in children include:**

* constant feelings of worthlessness
* unable to value others
* lack of trust in people
* lack of people skills necessary for daily functioning
* extreme attention seeking behaviour
* extremely eager to please or obey adults
* takes extreme risks, is markedly disruptive, bullying or aggressive
* suicide threats
* running away from home

**Indicators of Domestic Violence in children**

* show aggressive behaviour
* develop phobias & insomnia
* experience anxiety
* show systems of depression
* have diminished self esteem
* demonstrate poor academic performance and problem solving skills
* have reduced social competence skills including low levels of empathy
* show emotional distress
* have physical complaints