

Signs and Symptoms of Abuse

The following behavioural signs may or may not be indications that abuse has taken place, but the possibility should be considered:

Physical signs of abuse

- Any injuries not consistent with the explanation given for them.
- Injuries which occur to the body in places which are not normally exposed to falls,
- Rough games etc.
- Injuries which have not received medical attention.
- Neglect - under nourishment, failure to grow, constant hunger, stealing or gorging food, untreated illnesses, inadequate care, etc.
- Bruises, burns, bites, fractures etc. which do not have an accidental explanation.
- Female circumcision (which is illegal in the United Kingdom)

Emotional signs of abuse

- Changes or regression in mood or behaviour, particularly where a child withdraws or becomes clingy.
- Depression/extreme anxiety.
- Nervousness, "frozen watchfulness".
- Obsessions or phobias.
- Sudden under achievement or extreme lack of concentration.
- Over-readiness to relate to strangers.
- Excessive attention seeking behaviour.
- Persistent tiredness.
- Low self-esteem.
- Unduly aggressive behaviour.

Signs of possible sexual abuse

- Any allegations made by a child concerning sexual abuse.
- Child with excessive preoccupation with sexual matters and detailed knowledge of adult sexual behaviour.
- Sexual activity through words, play or drawing.
- Child who is sexually provocative or seductive with adults.
- Severe sleep disturbances with fears, phobias, vivid dreams or nightmares, sometimes with overt or veiled sexual connotations.
- Sexualised play with other children.
- Recurrent urinary tract infections.
- Self-harm or mutilation.

The above list is based in large part on guidance issued by the Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS).