



**Fact Sheet 4 February 2007**

**Risk factors and indicators for physical abuse\***

This fact sheet contains information that may assist in the formation of a reasonable suspicion of child abuse and neglect.

**Indicators in children/young people of physical abuse may include:**

- Facial, head and neck bruising
- Ruptured internal organs without a history of trauma
- Fractures of bones, especially in children under 3 years
- Lacerations and welts from excessive discipline or physical assault
- Burns/scalds
- Ingestion of poisonous substances, alcohol or other harmful drugs
- Other bruising and marks which may show the shape of the object that caused it (eg. a hand print, buckle)
- Bite marks and scratches where the bruise may show teeth patterns
- Multiple injuries or bruises
- Head injuries where the child may have drowsiness, vomiting, fitting, retinal haemorrhages, suggesting the possibility of the child having been shaken
- Dislocations, sprains, twisting injuries or symptoms
- Explanation offered by the child or young person that is not consistent with the injury

**Risk factors and indicators of physical abuse of children in parents or carers may include:**

- Direct admissions by parents or carers that they fear they may injure or have injured the child.

- Family history of violence, including previous harm to the children
- History of their own maltreatment as a child
- Repeated presentation of the child to health or other services with injuries
- Ingestion of harmful substances or other minor complaints
- Marked delay between injury and seeking appropriate medical assistance
- Parental history of injury inconsistent with child's developmental stage and physical condition
- Parental history of injury is vague, bizarre or variable
- History of domestic/family violence

(Source: NSW Health Child Protection and Procedures Manual, 1997)

(\*This framework is a guide for practice and is not considered to be comprehensive of all harm, behaviours or presentations that may give rise to concern or suspicion of abuse/harm or neglect. Each indicator needs to be considered in the context of the child/young person's circumstances. Further harm/abuse and neglect can occur in the absence of a demonstrable 'risk factor'.)

**Further information:**

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