



Fact Sheet 6

May, 2007

Risk factors and indicators for sexual abuse*

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

Indicators in children of sexual abuse may include:

- Descriptions of sexual acts
- Direct or indirect disclosures
- Age-inappropriate behaviour and/or persistent sexualised behaviour
- Self-destructive behaviours: drug dependence, suicide attempts, self-harming
- Persistent running away from home
- Poor concentration at school
- Anorexia or over-eating/bulimia
- Going to bed fully clothed
- Regression in developmental achievements in younger children
- Child being in contact with a known suspected perpetrator of sexual assault
- Unexplained accumulation of money or gifts
- Bleeding from the vagina, external genitalia or anus
- Sexually transmissible infections**
- Adolescent pregnancy
- Trauma to buttocks, breasts, genitals, lower abdomen or thighs

(**Presence of an STI alone should not be interpreted as an indicator of sexual abuse. Consideration must be given to factors such as reliability of test methodology, age factors such as possible neonatal transmission or consensual sex, and other factors).

Risk factors and indicators of neglect of children in parents/carers may include:

- Intentional exposure of child or young person to sexual behaviour of others
- Committed or suspected of child sexual assault
- Coercing child to engage in sexual behaviour with other children
- Verbal threats of sexual abuse
- Exposing child or young person to prostitution or child pornography or using a child for pornographic purposes
- Inappropriate curtailing or jealousy regarding age-appropriate development of independence from the family
- Denial of adolescent pregnancy by family
- Perpetration of spouse abuse or physical abuse of children
- Parental alcohol and drug abuse and psychiatric illness

(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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