



Fact Sheet 8

May, 2007

Risk factors and indicators for harm in children 0-2 years*

This fact sheet contains information that may assist in the formation of a reasonable suspicion of child abuse/harm and neglect. Though children this young do not attend our schools, information concerning siblings could be helpful in assessing risk to all children in the family.

Developmental issues:

- High dependency on others to meet even basic needs, eg cannot seek food for themselves
- Limited mobility

Risk factors in children 0-2 years may include:

- Low birth weight
- Pre-maturity
- Prenatal brain damage
- Difficult temperament
- Significant chronic conditions including disability
- Repeat exposure to safety hazards
- Insecure attachment
- Early onset hyperactivity/disruptive behaviour
- Feeding or sleep difficulties

Risk factors in the family may include:

- Maternal/paternal mental health disorder
- Maternal/paternal depression, loss
- Coercive parenting practice/family/lifestyle
- Family violence
- Parental criminality
- First time parent and/or very young parents
- Isolated single carer
- High marital conflict associated with instability
- Deprivation (social and environmental)
- Financial stress
- Location disadvantage

Physical indicators:

- Human bite marks, multiple bruises of different ages, bruising of any part of a baby, pinch marks
- Shaken baby syndrome (SBS), may present as serious head/eye/brain injury, may have grip marks particularly on

shoulder area, chronic sub-dural haematomas

- Thermal injury, may present as glove burns, cigarette burns, scalds from immersion in very hot water, particularly feet, buttocks and hands
- Fractures, all fractures in the first year of life must be viewed with suspicion, particularly limbs, skull and ribs and multiple fractures at different stages of healing (only identified by x-rays of whole skeleton)

Sexual abuse:

(especially from genital fondling and oral intercourse)

- Genital injury
- Petechiae at back of throat (Petechiae are pinpoint-sized haemorrhages of small capillaries in the skin or mucous membranes)

Emotional abuse:

- Behaviour problems
- Associated neglect and failure to thrive with developmental delays
- Significant relationship issues between parent and child/family
- Poor attachment

Neglect-emotional, physical, medical:

- Failure to thrive/inadequate nutrition
- Factitious illness diagnosis/Munchhausen syndrome by proxy (repeated symptomatology)

(*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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