



Unlocking the Learning

M3.1 Recognizing and Responding to Signs of Child Abuse and Neglect

In family child care settings, recognizing potential signs of child abuse or neglect is crucial for ensuring the well-being of the children under your care. It's essential to approach this sensitive issue with caution, acknowledging the diversity in child-rearing philosophies and practices among families and cultures. Trust your instincts, but remain mindful of biases, and observe the situation closely without overreacting.



Common Indicators of Abuse:

Certain behavioral and physical indicators may suggest the possibility of abuse, regardless of its type. Pay attention if a child:

- Shows signs of failure to thrive, especially if an infant or toddler.
- Exhibits anxiety, depression, or unhappiness.
- Displays poor peer relationships.
- Demonstrates extremes of behavior, swinging between passive and aggressive states.
- Frequently stays absent from child care.
- Appears over-anxious to please, lacks trust, and avoids physical contact with familiar adults.

Physical Abuse Indicators:

In cases of physical abuse, watch for:

- Bruises, welts, or abrasions, particularly on the head or face.
- Burns, especially in patterns, small circular burns, or rope burns.
- Fractures or dislocations, especially in children under two.
- Delays in seeking medical attention.
- Symptoms of shaken baby syndrome, ranging from irritability to seizures or unconsciousness.

Neglect Indicators:

Neglect can be identified by observing a child's overall emotional and physical well-being. Signs of neglect include:

- Inadequate clothing for the weather.
- Hunger, listlessness, and fatigue.
- Lack of proper supervision or risky child care arrangements.
- Irregular school attendance.

Sexual Abuse Indicators:

Sexual abuse may show physical signs or manifest in behavioral changes, such as:

- Bruising or injuries to the genital area.
- Inappropriate knowledge of sexual behavior for the child's age.
- Acting out sexual behavior during play.
- Venereal disease, anxiety, depression, or self-mutilation.
- Drug abuse, running away, promiscuity, or suicidal behaviors.



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Emotional Abuse Indicators:

Emotional abuse negatively impacts a child's self-image and may accompany other forms of abuse.

Watch for:

- Sleep disturbances and physical complaints without medical basis.
- Inappropriate behavior for age, either acting younger or older.
- Aggressive or overly compliant behavior.
- Low self-esteem, depression, or suicide attempts.



Indicators in the Abusing Adult:

Adults engaging in abuse may exhibit:

- Loneliness, isolation, and a perceived burden in caring for the child.
- Lack of enjoyment in parenting.
- Hostility or indifference when discussing concerns about the child.
- Unrealistic expectations and authoritarian methods of control.
- History of being a victim of abuse, substance misuse, family stress, or unemployment.



If you suspect abuse, document your observations, conversations, and any relevant information. Remember, your responsibility is to report concerns so that professionals can assess or investigate the situation. If in doubt, prioritize the child's safety and well-being.

For information on where to report suspected abuse or neglect in your province/territory see here:



<https://cwrp.caprovincial-and-territorial-assistance>

If a child is in immediate danger, call 911.