Signs of child abuse and neglect

**Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities including non-contact activities.

**Key features**

There are few physical signs, more likely to be emotional and behavioural factors.

- Aggression
- Withdrawn
- Self-harming, including eating disorders
- Drawings of sexually explicit behaviours
- Promiscuity/precociousness
- Inappropriate sexualised conduct
- Sexually explicit behaviour
- Reluctance to remove clothing for swimming or PE

Sexual abuse can be very difficult to recognise and reporting sexual abuse can be an extremely traumatic experience for a child. Whilst the media often focuses on ‘stranger danger’, studies indicate that between 80 and 90% of cases involve a known adult.

The internet has increased the risk of non-contact sexual abuse and children must be alert to these dangers when online.

**Neglect**

Neglect is the failure to meet a child's physical and or psychological needs.

**Key features**

- Inadequate clothing for the child's size, weather or time of year
- Underweight for age
- Frequent school absences
- Poor health
- Emotionally needy
- Persistently dirty with a body odour

**High Risk Factors**

- Families with complex needs
- Parental substance use
- Poor parental mental health
- Parents with learning difficulties
- Children with disabilities
- Families with past history of childhood abuse

**Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse involves any action that causes physical harm to a child including fabricating the symptoms of or deliberately inducing illnesses.

**Key features**

- Bruising of various ages
- Bite marks
- Burns and scalds
- Fractures in non-mobile children
- Injuries in unusual areas or with well-defined edges
- Old injuries or scars
- Refusal to discuss injuries
- Inconsistent explanations
- Talk of punishment which seems excessive
- Arms and legs kept covered
- Reluctance to remove clothing for swimming or PE
- The parents are uninterested or undisturbed by an accident or injury

**Emotional Abuse**

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child.

**Key features**

- Development delay.
- Abnormal attachment to parent/carer.
- Low self-esteem.
- Lack of confidence.
- Inappropriate emotional response.

**Further Information**

The statutory guidance for schools is set out in the following documents:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education (2016)
- What to do if you're worried a child is being abused (2015) (non-statutory)

To book safeguarding training or consultancy visit our website at: 
www.safeguardingsinschools.co.uk or telephone 01223 929269

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