

POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF CHILD ABUSE & OF EXPOSURE TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

HOW TO DOCUMENT INDICATORS OF CHILD ABUSE

When documenting any indicators of child abuse or family violence remember to:

- record the information as soon as possible, including dates and times document the facts without personal judgements, opinions, conclusions, or medical/emotional diagnosis
- give a clear description of the situation, what was actually seen or heard, and not what you think might be happening
- include what you did or said and why describe any gestures made by a child (e.g., hitting motions, sound effects)
- record the words used by a child/parent, even if they are “slang” (especially terms for body parts or sexual behavior)
- include anything that someone else has said that might be important
- describe the size, color and shape of any injury (for example, bruises, marks, burns)
- hand write your own documentation in your own words, using pen
- cross out and initial any mistakes and continue documenting – do not use white-out
- document suspicions of abuse in a separate record
- include the name and phone number of the individual you spoke with at a child protection agency and/or police service, and any advice/direction given
- make sure the entry is complete, then sign and date it
- start a new entry if, at a later date, there is new information or further suspicions of abuse

Your first recording of the facts is your documentation:

- do not make a rough draft and then write it over in good;
- do not go back and change any of your original notes; and
- do not shred documentation.

INDICATORS OF CHILD ABUSE

- Indicators are the signs, symptoms or clues which may mean that a child has been abused or may be at risk for abuse.
- Indicators do not prove that a child has been abused. They are clues that should warn people that a child may need help.
- Indicators may be seen in the child's physical health or behaviour, as well as those of the child's caregivers.
- Adults who abuse children may show certain behaviours and attitudes that make other people worry if they should be caring for children.

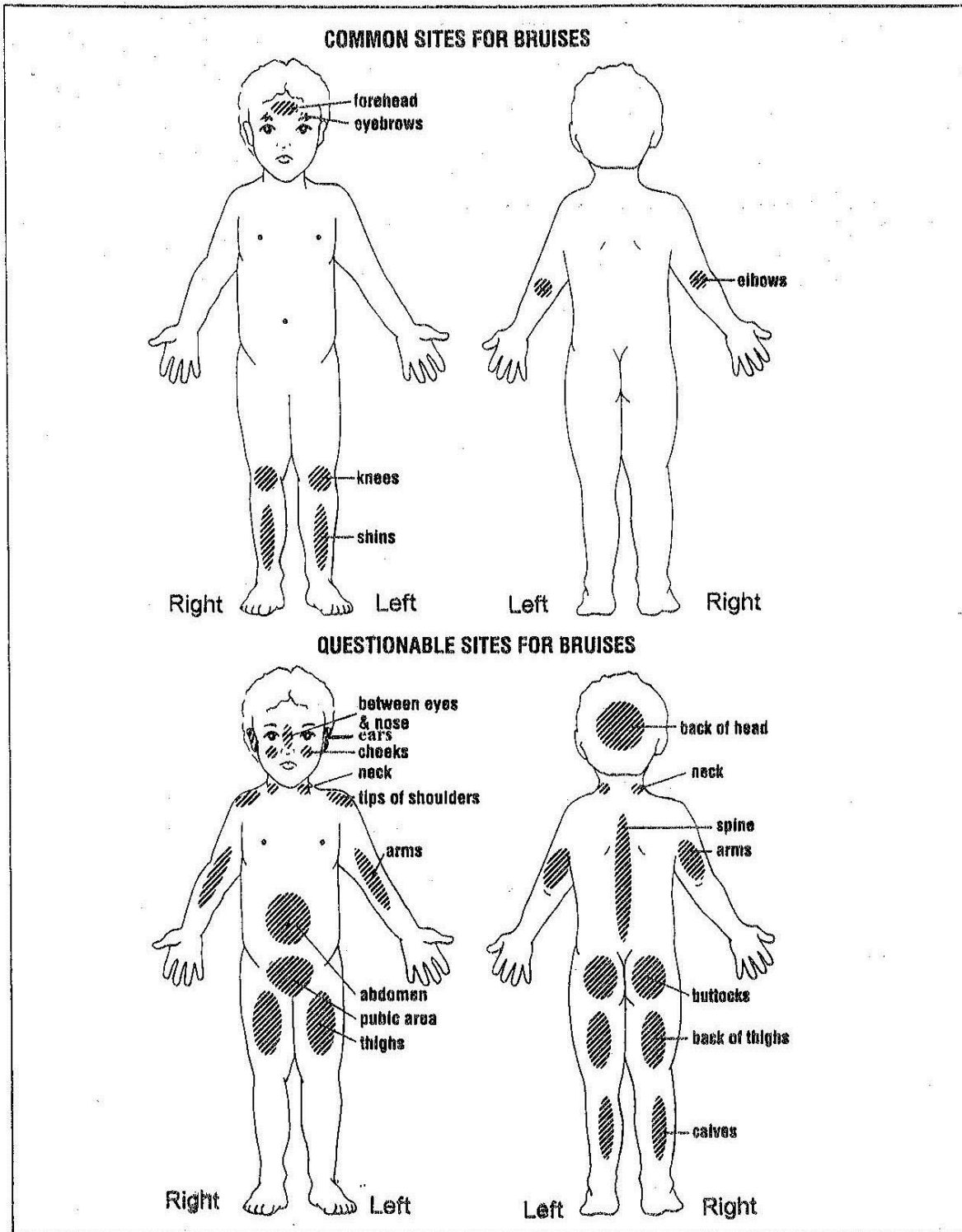
POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF NEGLECT

PHYSICAL INDICATORS IN CHILDREN	BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS IN CHILDREN	BEHAVIOURS OBSERVED IN ADULTS WHO NEGLECT CHILDREN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ an infant or young child may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – not be growing as expected – be losing weight – have a “wrinkly old face” – look pale – not be eating well ○ not dressed properly for the weather ○ dirty or unwashed ○ bad diaper rash or other skin problems ○ always hungry ○ lack of medical and/or dental care ○ signs of deprivation that improve with a more nurturing environment (e.g., hunger, diaper rash) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ does not show skills as expected ○ appears to have little energy ○ cries very little ○ does not play with toys or notice people ○ does not seem to care for anyone in particular ○ may be very demanding of affection or attention from others ○ older children may steal food, drink alcohol or take drugs, break the law ○ takes care of a lot of his/her needs on his/her own ○ has a lot of adult responsibility at home ○ discloses neglect (e.g., says there is no one at home) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ does not provide for the child’s basic needs ○ has a disorganized home life, with few regular routines (e.g., always brings the child very early, picks the child up very late) ○ does not supervise the child properly (e.g., leaves the child alone, in a dangerous place, or with someone who cannot look after the child safely) ○ indicates that the child is hard to care for, hard to feed, describes the child as demanding ○ may say that the child was or is unwanted ○ may ignore the child who is trying to be loving ○ has difficulty dealing with personal problems and needs ○ is more concerned with own self than the child ○ is not very interested in the child’s life (e.g., fails to use services offered or to keep child’s appointments, does not do anything about concerns that are discussed)

POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE

PHYSICAL INDICATORS IN CHILDREN	BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS IN CHILDREN	BEHAVIOURS OBSERVED IN ADULTS WHO ABUSE CHILDREN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ see diagram for questionable injuries ○ bruises in the same area of the body ○ bruises in the shape of an object (e.g., spoon, hand/fingerprints, belt) ○ burns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – from a cigarette – in a pattern that looks like an object (e.g., iron) ○ wears clothes to cover up injury, even in warm weather ○ patches of hair missing ○ signs of possible head injury: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – swelling and pain – nausea or vomiting – feeling dizzy – bleeding from the scalp or nose ○ signs of possible injury to arms and legs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – pain – sensitive to touch – cannot move properly – limping ○ breathing causes pain ○ difficulty raising arms ○ human bite marks ○ cuts and scrapes inconsistent with normal play ○ signs of female genital mutilation (e.g., trouble going to the bathroom) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ cannot remember how injuries happened ○ the explanation of what happened does not match the injury ○ refuses or is afraid to talk about injuries ○ is afraid of adults or of a particular person ○ does not want to be touched ○ may be very: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – aggressive – unhappy – withdrawn – obedient and wanting to please – uncooperative ○ is afraid to go home ○ runs away ○ is away a lot and when comes back there are signs of a healing injury ○ does not show skills as expected ○ does not get along well with other children ○ tries to hurt him/herself (e.g., cutting oneself, suicide) ○ discloses abuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ does not give the same explanation as the child about how the injury happened ○ says that the child seems to have a lot of accidents ○ severely punishes the child cannot control anger and frustration ○ expects too much from the child ○ talks about having problems dealing with the child ○ talks about the child as being bad, different or “the cause of my problems” ○ does not show love toward the child ○ does not go to the doctor right away to have injury checked ○ has little or no help caring for the child

CHILDREN'S BRUISES



(Source: Rimer & Prager, *Reaching Out: Working Together to Identify and Respond to Child Victims of Abuse*, 1998)

POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

PHYSICAL INDICATORS IN CHILDREN	BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS IN CHILDREN	BEHAVIOURS OBSERVED IN ADULTS WHO ABUSE CHILDREN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ a lot of itching or pain in the throat, genital or anal area ○ a smell or discharge from the genital area ○ underwear that is bloody ○ pain when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – trying to go to the bathroom – sitting down – walking – swallowing ○ blood in urine or stool ○ injury to the breasts or genital area: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – redness – bruising – cuts – swelling ○ pregnancy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ copying the sexual behaviour of adults ○ knowing more about sex than expected ○ details of sex in the child's drawings/writing ○ sexual actions with other children or adults that are inappropriate ○ fears or refuses to go to a parent, relative, or friend for no clear reason ○ does not trust others ○ changes in personality that do not make sense (e.g., happy child becomes withdrawn) ○ problems or change in sleep pattern (e.g., nightmares) ○ very demanding of affection or attention, or clinging ○ goes back to behaving like a young child (e.g., bedwetting, thumb-sucking) ○ refuses to be undressed, or when undressing shows fear ○ tries to hurt oneself (e.g., uses drugs or alcohol, eating disorder, suicide) ○ discloses abuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ may be very protective of the child ○ clings to the child for comfort ○ is often alone with the child ○ may be jealous of the child's relationships with others ○ does not like the child to be with friends unless the parent is present ○ talk about the child being "sexy" touches the child in a sexual way ○ may use drugs or alcohol to feel freer to sexually abuse ○ allows or tries to get the child to participate in sexual behaviour

POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE

PHYSICAL INDICATORS IN CHILDREN	BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS IN CHILDREN	BEHAVIOURS OBSERVED IN ADULTS WHO ABUSE CHILDREN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the child does not develop as expected ○ often complains of nausea, headaches, stomach aches without any obvious reason ○ wets or dirties pants ○ is not given food, clothing and care as good as what the other children get ○ may have unusual appearance (e.g., strange haircuts, dress, decorations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ is unhappy, stressed out, withdrawn, aggressive or angry for long periods of time ○ goes back to behaving like a young child (e.g., toileting problems, thumb-sucking, constant rocking) ○ tries too hard to be good and to get adults to approve ○ tries really hard to get attention ○ tries to hurt oneself (e.g., uses drugs or alcohol, suicide) ○ criticizes oneself a lot ○ does not participate because of fear of failing ○ may expect too much of him/herself so gets frustrated and fails ○ is afraid of what the adult will do if s/he does something the adult does not like ○ runs away ○ has a lot of adult responsibility ○ does not get along well with other children ○ discloses abuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ often rejects, insults or criticizes the child, even in front of others ○ does not touch or speak to the child with love ○ talks about the child as being the cause for problems and things not going as wished ○ talks about or treats the child as being different from other children and family members ○ compares the child to someone who is not liked ○ does not pay attention to the child and refuses to help the child ○ isolates the child; does not allow the child to see others, both inside and outside the family (e.g., locks the child in a closet or room) ○ does not provide a good example for children on how to behave with others (e.g., swears all the time, hits others) ○ lets the child be involved in illegal activities ○ uses the child to make money (e.g., child pornography) ○ lets the child see sex and violence on TV, videos and in magazines ○ terrorizes the child (e.g., threatens to hurt or kill the child or threatens someone or something that is special to the child) ○ forces the child to watch someone special being hurt ○ asks the child to do more than s/he can do

POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF EXPOSURE TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

PHYSICAL INDICATORS IN CHILDREN	BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS IN CHILDREN	BEHAVIOURS OBSERVED IN ADULTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the child does not develop as expected ○ often complains of nausea, headaches, stomach aches without any obvious reason ○ physical harm, whether deliberate or accidental, during or after a violent episode, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ while trying to protect others ○ the result of objects thrown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ may be aggressive and have temper tantrums ○ may show withdrawn, depressed, and nervous behaviours (e.g., clinging, whining, a lot of crying) ○ acts out what has been seen or heard between the partners ○ tries too hard to be good and to get adults to approve ○ afraid of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – someone’s anger – one’s own anger (e.g., killing the abuser) – self or other loved ones being hurt or killed – being left alone and not cared for ○ problems sleeping (e.g., cannot fall asleep, afraid of the dark, does not want to go to bed, nightmares) ○ bed-wetting ○ tries to hurt oneself (e.g., eating disorders, uses drugs or alcohol, suicide) ○ stays around the house to keep watch, or tries not to spend much time at home ○ problems with school (e.g., trouble paying attention, poor marks, misses school a lot) ○ expects a lot of oneself and is afraid to fail and so works very hard and gets good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ abuser has trouble controlling self ○ abuser has trouble talking and getting along with others ○ abuser uses threats and violence (e.g., threatens to hurt, kill or destroy someone or something that is special; cruel to animals) ○ forces the child to watch a parent/partner being hurt ○ abuser is always watching what the partner is doing ○ abuser insults, blames, and criticizes partner in front of others ○ jealous of partner talking or being with others ○ abuser does not allow the child or family to talk with or see others ○ the abused person is not able to care properly for the children because of isolation, depression, trying to survive, or because the abuser does not give enough money ○ holds the belief that men have the power and women have to obey ○ uses drugs or alcohol ○ the abused person seems to be frightened ○ discloses family violence ○ discloses that the abuser assaulted or threw objects at

	<p>marks in school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ takes the job of helping/protecting other family members ○ does not get along well with other children ○ runs away from home ○ cruelty to animals ○ older children may steal, hurt others, join a gang or break the law ○ child may act out sexually ○ child expresses the belief that s/he is responsible for the violence ○ discloses family violence 	<p>someone holding a child</p>
--	---	--------------------------------

(Adapted from: Rimer & Prager, Reaching Out: Working Together to Identify and Respond to Child Victims of Abuse, 1998)