

Grad2Teach Child Protection and Safeguarding course:
Your checklist for spotting vital signs of abuse and neglect

These are the recognised signs that have been exhibited in children experiencing abuse and neglect. If a child is showing one or more of these signs, it neither guarantees nor excludes the possibility that abuse or neglect is happening. Abuse or neglect may also be happening without these signs being noticed. This list is provided to help you to remember what you are looking out for and what concerns need to be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Physical signs of physical abuse

Bruising in areas linked to abuse
Fractures or broken bones, especially in the very young
Burns and scalds, especially with clear edges
Bite marks
Fabricated or induced illness
Breast ironing
Flared temper
Reluctance for parents/carers to be contacted
Showing fear of returning home

Behavioural signs of physical abuse

Flinching when approached
Chronic absenteeism
Reluctance to get undressed
Keeping arms or legs covered
Depression
Over compliance
Aggressive behaviour

Physical signs of sexual abuse

Pain, itching, bruising, or bleeding in genital areas, or anal areas, or the mouth
Pain during urination or bowel movements
Any sexually transmitted infection
Pregnancy
Underwear stained with blood or a discharge
Trouble sleeping
Start or increase in soiling, wetting or bedwetting
Recurrent urinary tract infections without an apparent cause
Stomach pains
Discomfort for the child when walking or sitting down

Behavioural signs of sexual abuse

Self-injury (cutting, burning)
Self-loathing
Inadequate personal hygiene
Drug and alcohol abuse
Sexual promiscuity
Running away from home
Depression, anxiety
Suicide attempts
Fear of intimacy or closeness
Compulsive eating or dieting
New words for private body parts
Mimics sexual behaviours with a toy
Talk of a shared secret or new older friend
Writes, draws, plays or dreams of sexual or frightening images
Fear of certain people or places

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Physical signs of emotional abuse

Speech disorders – stuttering, stammering, slurred speech, delayed speech, baby talk, and aspects of selective mutism
Sleep disorders
Eating disorders
Bed wetting
Self-harming or attempts at suicide
Over affectionate with strangers
Aggression towards other children or animals

Behavioural signs of emotional abuse

Lack of confidence and self-esteem
Difficulties controlling emotions,
Extreme or age- inappropriate behaviour
Difficulties forming and maintaining positive friendships
Persistent running away from home
School absenteeism
Anxiety and withdrawal
Isolation from parents and family, no close bonds
Wanting attention
Trying to make people dislike them
Risky behaviour

Physical signs of neglect

Recurring infections and illness, tiredness
Missed medical appointments
Failure to thrive
Poor personal hygiene/disheveled appearance
Lack of equipment, clothing or footwear
Looking sad, false smile, tearful
Hunger, weight loss, obesity or malnutrition
Lack of muscle tone
Injuries from unsupervised cooking or caring responsibilities
Living in unsuitable environments
Lack of financial provision despite no family financial difficulties

Behavioural signs of neglect

Poor concentration
Poor social and language skills
Anxiety, aggression, volatility, obsessions, and withdrawal
Disorganised attachment patterns
Depression, lack of self-worth, self-harm
Parents/carers permit dangerous behaviour and fail to provide structure
Poor attendance; dropped off and collected late
Onerous caring responsibilities
Reporting being left alone
Difficulties in forming friendships or forming dangerous relationships
Running away from home and school
Criminal or risky activity, drug/alcohol misuse
Begging or stealing food or money, changes in eating habits