

DETECTING & REPORTING ABUSE

All cases of suspected abuse and neglect involving children, geriatric patients, and physically and mentally challenged patients are required by law to be reported.

PHYSICAL ABUSE is the use of physical force that may result in bodily injury, physical pain, or impairment. Signs and symptoms of physical abuse include bruises, black eyes, lacerations, bone fractures, open wounds, burns, sprains, dislocations, internal injuries, bald spots, head trauma, and laboratory findings of medication overdose or under-utilization of prescribed drugs. Behavioral indicators include sudden changes in behavior, fear of a parent or caretaker, antisocial behavior, inconsistent explanations for injuries, and unusual shyness.

SEXUAL ABUSE is non-consensual sexual contact of any kind. Physical indicators include torn, stained, or bloody underclothes, frequent sore throats or urinary infections, somatic complaints, sexually transmitted diseases, and pregnancy. Behavioral indicators include regressive behaviors, promiscuity, disturbed sleep patterns, age-inappropriate interest in sexual matters, wearing extra layers of clothes, and difficulty walking or sitting.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE is more subtle and quite often goes unseen. It is the infliction of anguish, pain, or distress through verbal assaults, harassment, or enforced social isolation. Physical indicators include eating disorders, speech disorders, developmental delays, below normal weight or height, and nervous disorders. Behavioral indicators include habit disorders, cruel behavior, being emotionally upset, and being withdrawn or non-communicative.

NEGLECT is the refusal or failure to provide a person with the necessities of life including, but not limited to, food, shelter, clothing, and the provision of medical care. Physical indicators include poor hygiene, unsuitable clothing, untreated injury or illness, lack of medications, malnutrition, dehydration, and unsafe living conditions. Behavioral indicators include age-inappropriate behaviors and being withdrawn or non-communicative.

REPORTING ALLEGED OR SUSPECTED ABUSE

Physical signs and symptoms and psychological reactions should be included in the documentation of alleged or suspected abuse. Documentation should be factual, objective information rather than opinion. Child abuse or neglect should be reported to Child Protective Services. Elderly abuse, neglect, or exploitation should be reported to Elder Abuse & Protective Services. Domestic violence injuries should be reported to police. The healthcare provider should perform an abuse assessment and discuss a safety plan with the patient.