

CHILD ABUSE

CLUES TO LOOK FOR

There are several clues that educators should look for when considering the possibility of child abuse. One sign alone may not necessarily indicate abuse. If a number are present, it is prudent to consider the possibility of child abuse. The teacher or school worker should suspect abuse if a child –

- is habitually away from school and constantly late
- arrives at school very early and leaves very late because he does not want to go home
- is compliant, shy withdrawn, passive, and uncommunicative (perhaps having internalized his problems of dealing with adults)
- is nervous, hyperactive, aggressive, disruptive, or destructive (perhaps acting out his hurt to secure attention)
- has an unexplained injury – a patch of hair missing, a burn, limp, or bruises
- has an inordinate number of “unexplained” injuries such as bruises on his arms and legs over a period of time
- exhibits an injury that is not adequately explained
- complains about numerous beatings
- complains about mother’s boyfriend “doing things” when the mother is not home
- goes to the bathroom with difficulty
- is inadequately dressed for inclement weather with, for example only a sweater in winter for outer wear
- wears a long sleeved blouse or shirt during the summer months to cover bruises on the arms
- has clothing that is soiled, tattered, or too small
- is dirty and smells or has bad teeth, hair falling out, or lice
- is thin, emaciated, and constantly tired, showing evidence of malnutrition and dehydration
- is usually fearful of other children and adults; or
- has been given inappropriate food, drink, or drugs

Educators should also suspect child abuse if the parents --

- show little concern for their child's problems
- do not respond to the teacher's inquiries and are never present for the teacher's visits or for parents nights
- take an unusual amount of time to seek health care for their child
- do not adequately explain an injury
- give different explanations for the same injury
- continue to complain about irrelevant problems unrelated to the injury
- suggest that the cause of an injury can be attributed to third party
- are reluctant to share information about the child
- respond inappropriately to the seriousness of the problem
- cannot be found
- are using alcohols or drugs
- have no friends, neighbors, or relatives to turn to in crisis
- have unrealistic expectations for the child
- are very strict disciplinarians
- were themselves abused, neglected, or deprived as children
- have taken the child to different doctors, clinics, or hospitals for past injuries (often called "doctor shopping" or "hospital shopping"
- show signs of loss of control or a fear of losing control
- or are unusually antagonistic and hostile when talking about the child's health problems

Such clues can help the educator make an informed decision about reporting. Again, as educators, you are not required or expected to make unilateral investigation but only to report suspected abuse.

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