Abuse and Neglect, Signs and Symptoms

The following are signs and symptoms that may be seen in someone being abused. If you think someone is being abused, get help from a caregiver or professional near you. You may be the only protection that person has against abuse that they can not stop.

PHYSICAL ABUSE is when a person is hit, slapped, beaten, burned, or otherwise physically harmed. Like other forms of abuse, physical abuse usually continues for a long time.

SEXUAL ABUSE is when a person engages in a sexual situation without permission. Sometimes this means direct sexual contact, such as intercourse, other genital contact or touching. But it can also mean that the person is made to watch sexual acts, look at another person's genitals, look at pornography or be part of the production of pornography. Children and the elderly many times are not forced into the sexual situation, but rather they are persuaded, bribed, tricked or coerced .

EMOTIONAL/ MENTAL ABUSE is when a person is regularly threatened, yelled at, humiliated, ignored, blamed or otherwise emotionally mistreated. For example, making fun of a person, calling a person names, and always finding fault are forms of emotional/mental abuse.

NEGLECT is when a child's basic needs are not met. These needs include nutritious food, adequate shelter, clothing, cleanliness, emotional support, love and affection, education, safety, and medical and dental care.

The following are some of the signs and symptoms that may be seen in someone being abused or neglected. If someone you know has any signs or symptoms of abuse or neglect, get help from a caregiver or professional near you. You may be the only protection that person has against abuse that they cannot stop.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT

Child

- Any injury (bruising, swelling, burns, broken bones) that cannot be explained.
- Complaints of abdominal pain.
- Agitation, anxiety, fear, hesitation to talk openly.
- Wary of adult contact.
- Frequent or uncontrolled urination or bowel movements.
- Behavior extremes (strange, withdrawn, fearful, overly pleasing).
- Afraid to go home; frightened of parents.
- Reports injuries by parents.
- Torn, stained or bloody underwear.
- Pain or itching of the genital area.
- Venereal disease, especially in pre-teens.
- Pregnancy.
- Unusual sexual behavior or knowledge.
- Reports sexual assault by caretaker.
- Lack of friends; does not want to go to school.
- Consistent hunger, poor hygiene, inappropriate dress.
- Lack of supervision; States there is no caretaker.
- Constant fatigue or listlessness.
- Unattended physical needs or medical problems.
- Abandonment.
- Decayed or painful teeth.

- Begging, stealing food.
- Loss of hair.
- Alcohol or drug abuse.
- Attempted suicide.

Spousal

- Any injury (bruising, swelling, burns, broken bones) that cannot be explained.
- Reports of sexual abuse.
- Public and private demeaning actions.
- Frightened behavior when with the opposite sex.
- Reports of injuries by batterer.
- Afraid to go home.
- Drastic behavior changes in presence of batterer.

Elder

- Any injury (bruising, swelling, burns, broken bones) that cannot be explained.
- Difficulty walking or sitting.
- Frequent hospital shopping or frequent use of emergency rooms.
- Implausible stories, ambivalence, etc.
- Withdrawal, fantasy, or infantile behavior.
- Guilty feelings, anxieties.
- Injury that has not been cared for properly.
- Dehydration and/or malnourishment without illness-related cause.
- Weight loss.
- Frequent or uncontrolled urination or bowel movements.
- Poor skin hygiene; soiled clothing.
- Evidence of inadequate/inappropriate administration of medications.
- Agitation, anxiety, fear, hesitation to talk openly.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

- Take your child out of the home if you feel that violence is going to occur. Learn the warning signs of danger. This varies with situations but may include: use of alcohol; weapon threats; threats to your child, yourself and other family members or pets; forced sexual contact; or less frequent apologies.
- Tell your doctor or nurse. They are legally obligated to report all suspected cases of abuse to the police.
- If you or anyone you know is attacked or beaten, report it to the police so the abuse is documented.
- Find someone you can trust and tell them what is happening. It is very important to get a child out of an abusive situation as soon as possible. They cannot protect themselves and are in danger.
- It is important to have a safety plan in case you or your child is threatened:
  - Keep extra clothing for yourself and your children, medicines, money, important phone numbers and papers, and an extra set of car and house keys at a friend's or neighbor's house.
  - Tell a supportive friend or family member that you may show up at any time of day or night in an emergency.
  - If you do not have a close friend or family member, make a list of other safe places to go (shelters, crisis centers, etc.). Keep an abuse hotline number available. They can help you.
  - Many victims do not leave bad situations because they do not have money or a job. Planning ahead may help you in the future. Try to save money in a safe place. Keep your job or try to get a job. If you cannot get a job, try to obtain training you may need to prepare you for one. Social services are equipped to help you and your child. **Do not stay or leave your child in an abusive situation. The result may be fatal.**

TELEPHONE NUMBERS TO KEEP CLOSE AT HAND INCLUDE YOUR:

- Local Social Services.

- Local safe house or shelter.
- Local emergency service (911 in the U.S.).

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your child has new problems because of injuries.
- You feel the level of danger growing that you or your child may be abused.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You are afraid that you or your child, or someone you know may be beaten or abused. **Call emergency services (911) for help.**
- You or your child receives new injuries related to abuse.

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