Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect

Presented by:
Early Care and Education Training and Consulting

No liability is assumed with respect to the use of the information contained herein. The authors and publisher assume no responsibility for errors and omissions. Nor is any liability assumed for damages resulting from the use of the information contained herein. It is not intended as legal advice. This information is intended to be used as a guide and users should consult with local legal counsel for applicable advice regarding applicability of provided language to their specific program and/or regarding any changes they make thereto.
The following are some signs often associated with particular types of child abuse and neglect: physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse.

It is important to note, however, that these types of abuse are more typically found in combination than alone. A physically abused child, for example, is often emotionally abused as well, and a sexually abused child also may be neglected.
Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the child:
- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school
- Seems frightened of the parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home
- Shrinks at the approach of adults
- Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the parent or other adult caregiver:
- Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child's injury
- Describes the child as "evil," or in some other very negative way
- Uses harsh physical discipline with the child
- Has a history of abuse as a child
Signs of Neglect

Consider the possibility of neglect when the child:
- Is frequently absent from school
- Begs or steals food or money
- Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses
- Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs
- States that there is no one at home to provide care

Consider the possibility of neglect with the parent or other adult caregiver:
- Appears to be indifferent to the child
- Seems apathetic or depressed
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner
- Is abusing alcohol or other drugs
Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the child:

- Has difficulty walking or sitting
- Suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under 14
- Runs away
- Reports sexual abuse by the parent or another adult caregiver

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Is unduly protective of the child or severely limits the child’s contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex
- Is secretive and isolated
- Is jealous or controlling with family members
Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the child:

- Shows extremes in behavior, such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity, or aggression
- Is either inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example) or inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking or head-banging, for example)
- Is delayed in physical or emotional development
- Has attempted suicide
- Reports a lack or attachment to the parent

Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child
- Is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for the child’s problems
- Overly rejects the child
RECAP
Common Indicators of Possible Child Abuse

Child
- Bruises or wounds in various stages of healing
- Injuries on two or more planes(sides) of the body
- Injuries reported to be caused by falling but which do not include hands, knees, or forehead
- Oval, immersion (in hot liquid), doughnut-shaped, or imprint (hot iron or cigarette) burns
- Reluctance to leave school, comes in early, stays late
- Inappropriate dress for the weather
- Discomfort when sitting
- Sophisticated sexual knowledge or play
- Radical behavior changes or regressive behavior
- Child withdraws or watches adults
- Child seems to expect abuse
- Revealing discussion, stories, or drawings
- Sudden changes in school performance
- Has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to parents attention
RECAP
Common Indicators of Possible Child Abuse

**Adult**
- Unrealistic expectations for child
- Reliance on child to meet (adult) social or emotional needs
- Lack of basic childrearing knowledge and skills
- Substance abuse
- Shows little concern for the child
- Denies the existence, or blames the child, for problems in school
- Asks the teacher to use harsh discipline when child misbehaves at school
- Sees the child as entirely bad, worthless or a burden
- Child and the parent rarely make eye contact with each other