
What is child physical abuse?

Physical abuse happens when a child is physically harmed or killed by someone else. It includes such things as:

- Slapping, pushing, punching or beating with an object
- Kicking
- Shaking
- Choking
- Scalding or burning

Child neglect happens when a child is not cared for or supervised, or when a child is abandoned by a parent or caretaker. Neglect means that a child is not provided with the things that are needed for life. It includes not providing a child with such things as:

- Food and drink
- Housing or warm clothing in cold weather
- Medical care when a child is sick or injured
- Schooling and education

Neglect can also be:

- Leaving a child alone for long periods of time.
- Placing a child in a dangerous situation.

Child abuse or neglect can happen only one time, or they can happen repeatedly. Either way, they place a child at great risk for harm and lack of health and well-being.

What are the possible signs of physical abuse?

There are many signs and symptoms of physical abuse – some are physical, and some are emotional.

Physical signs may include such things as:

- Bruises, black eyes and swelling
- Bites, scrapes, cuts, scratches, pinch marks and strap marks
- Burns
- Broken bones

Other signs may be internal (inside the body), such as deep bruising and bleeding in the eyes, chest, abdomen (stomach area) or brain.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Child physical abuse, continued

Children may also show emotional signs of abuse and neglect, such as problems with:

- Sleep
- Appetite or eating
- Behaviors, such as acting out, temper tantrums and rage, aggression, or drug or alcohol problems
- Self-image, such as inability to trust others, fear of adults or problems with making friends
- School
- Self-destructive behavior or suicide attempts

What medical tests could my child have if there is a concern of abuse?

- Your child will have a head-to-toe exam by a health care provider.
- Other tests may be needed depending on what is found during the exam.
- X-rays or blood tests may be ordered.
- Any tests will be discussed with you during or after the exam.

When do I get the results?

If any of the test results are positive, your child's doctor or other Children's health care provider will contact you.

What is the treatment?

Your child's doctor will talk with you about specific care for your child.

- Be sure to give your child any prescribed medicines, and follow all treatment directions.
- Contact the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) at 1-800-GA-CHILD and law enforcement (police) if you have not already done so.

How can I help my child?

Your child's doctor, nurse or social worker will talk with you about specific treatment and help for your child. Some guidelines may include:

- Stay as calm as possible – your child will take cues from you and your behavior.
- Assure your child that the events were not their fault.
- Be sure your child takes any prescribed medicine and follows all treatment directions.
- Listen to your child, but do not ask a lot of questions. Let your child talk in their own words when your child is ready.
- Contact the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and law enforcement (police) if you have not already done so.
- Keep all appointments for medical follow-up, interviews and counseling.
- Protect your child's privacy. Tell only people who need to know.

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Child physical abuse, continued

When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor if your child tells you that they have been physically abused. Also call your child's doctor if you see or if your child complains about:

- Bruises and burns in unlikely places
- Unexplained injuries that do not seem to match the explanation given for them

Is a follow-up exam needed?

Any child who has already had an exam for recent physical abuse should have a follow-up exam if symptoms occur or worsen.

- Some children need a follow-up visit for more medical tests and to make sure injuries are healing.
- Sometimes, we will also schedule young siblings (brothers or sisters) for an exam and tests to make sure they do not have any injuries that could be due to abuse.
- In some cases, we refer children to their primary care doctor (pediatrician) for follow-up.
- We may refer you to the Stephanie V. Blank Center for Safe and Healthy Children for a follow-up visit.
- Be sure to follow-up right away and schedule a visit for your child.

How do I schedule follow-up at the Stephanie V. Blank Center for Safe and Healthy Children?

The Stephanie V. Blank Center for Safe and Healthy Children provides specialized services to your family after an allegation of child abuse. You may be contacted to schedule an appointment, or you can call the intake line at 404-785-3833 (Scottish Rite) or 404-785-9930 (Hughes Spalding).

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

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