

Michigan Department of Health & Human Services

Terms & Potential Indicators of

Child Abuse and/or Neglect

KEY TERMS:

Child Abuse: Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare that occurs through nonaccidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or maltreatment, by a parent, a legal guardian, any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare, a teacher, a teacher's aide, a member of the clergy, or an individual 18 years of age or older who is involved with a youth program.

Child Neglect: Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare by a parent, legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare that occurs through either of the following

- Negligent treatment, including the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care, though financially able to do so, or by the failure to seek financial or other reasonable means to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care.
- Placing a child at an unreasonable risk to the child's health or welfare by failure of the parent, legal guardian, or other person responsible for the child's health or welfare to intervene to eliminate that risk when that person is able to do so and has, or should have, knowledge of the risk.



POTENTIAL INDICATORS:

Below are some of the commonly accepted physical and behavioral indicators of abuse and/or neglect. *Please note that the physical and behavioral indicators listed are not the only indicators of child abuse and neglect and if present, do not always mean a child is being abused or neglected.*

Physical Neglect - Physical Indicators

- Unattended medical needs.
- Lack of supervision.
- Regular signs of hunger, inappropriate dress, poor hygiene.
- Distended stomach, emaciated.
- Significant weight change.

Physical Neglect - Behavioral Indicators

- Regularly displays fatigue or listlessness, falls asleep in class.
- Steals/hoards food, begs from classmates.
- Reports that no caretaker is at home.

Physical Abuse - Physical Indicators

- Unexplained bruises (in various stages of healing), welts, loop marks.
- Adult/human bite marks.
- Bald spots or missing clumps of hair.
- Unexplained burns/scalds.
- Unexplained fractures, skin lacerations/punctures or abrasions.
- Swollen lips/chipped teeth.
- Linear/parallel marks on cheeks and temple area.
- Crescent-shaped bruising.
- Puncture wounds.
- Bruising behind the ears.

Physical Abuse - Behavioral Indicators

- Self-destructive/self-mutilation.
- Withdrawn and/or aggressive-behavior extremes.
- Uncomfortable/skittish with physical contact.
- Arrives at school late or stays late as if afraid to be at home.
- Chronic runaway (adolescents).
- Complains of soreness or moves uncomfortably.
- Wears clothing inappropriate to weather, to cover body.
- Lack of impulse control (e.g. inappropriate outbursts).

Sexual Abuse - Physical indicators

- Pain or itching in genital area.
- Bruises or bleeding in genital area.
- Sexually transmitted disease.
- Frequent urinary or yeast infections.
- Extreme or sudden weight change.
- Pregnancy under 12 years of age.

Sexual Abuse - Behavioral Indicators

- Withdrawal, chronic depression.
- Sexual behaviors or references that are unusual for the child's age.
- Seductive or promiscuous behavior.
- Poor self-esteem, self-devaluation, lack of confidence.
- Suicide attempts (especially adolescents).
- Hysteria, lack of emotional control.

Source

<https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/adult-child-serv/abuse-neglect/childrens/report-process/identifying-child-abuse-and-neglect/potential-indicators-of-child-abuse-and-or-neglect>