Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities including non-contact activities, such as looking at or making indecent images.

Key features
There are few physical signs, more likely to be emotional and behavioural factors.
- Aggression.
- Withdrawn/Clingy.
- Self-harming, including eating disorders, head banging.
- Drawings/ playing with toys -sexually explicit behaviours.
- Promiscuity/displaying adult like sexual knowledge/behaviours.
- Inappropriate sexualised conduct.
- Soiling/smearing faeces (except disability or very young)
- Reluctance to remove clothing for swimming or PE.
- Signs of grooming—unexplained gifts etc.

The internet has increased the risk of non-contact sexual abuse and children must be alert to these dangers when online.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child.

Key features
- Development delay with no medical explanation.
- Disassociation/Lack of attachment/ Lack of normal response, not crying, not jumping at loud noise etc.
- Low self-esteem.
- Over affectionate to strangers.
- Extreme emotional outbursts.
- Lack of confidence.
- Doesn't want to go home/have friends to visit.
- Regressing to younger child behaviours.
- Reckless to their own or others safety.

Further Information

Often signs and indicators cross over different categories. Remember SEND children may develop at different rates to peers. However staff must be alert to general changes in behaviour and bear in mind that challenging, disruptive behaviour can be a sign of abuse.

For more information see: statutory guidance

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Physical Abuse

Physical abuse involves any action that causes physical harm to a child including fabricating the symptoms of or deliberately inducing illnesses.

Key features
- Bruising of various ages/burns and scalds without reasonable explanation or parents and child's story differs.
- Bite marks.
- Fractures/bruising in non-mobile children
- Overmedication/force feeding.
- Injuries in unusual areas or outline of implement e.g. cigarette, hair straightener, belt.
- Refusal to discuss injuries/Inconsistent explanations.
- Parents claim fits/‘episodes’ at home which are never observed in school.
- Talk of punishment which seems excessive.
- Arms and legs kept covered.
- Reluctance to remove clothing for swimming or PE.
- The parents are uninterested or undisturbed by an accident or injury.

Neglect

Neglect is the failure to meet a child’s physical and or psychological needs.

Key features
- Inadequate clothing for the child’s size, weather.
- Underweight for age but eats well in school.
- Frequent school absences/ poor punctuality
- Parents are dismissive or uninterested.
- Poor health/not taken to GP or dentist when needed.
- Emotionally needy.
- Persistently dirty/body odour.
- Accidental injuries indicating a lack of supervision.