

# Child Physical Abuse

Physical abuse occurs when a child or young person suffers or is likely to suffer significant harm from intentional or inadvertent physically aggressive treatment.

## PHYSICAL ABUSE BEHAVIOURS:

Physical abuse may involve behaviours such as:

- hitting (e.g. punching, kicking, slapping)
- assault with an object (e.g. belt, brush)
- choking or strangling
- scratching
- biting
- shaking
- burning
- making up or causing an illness or injury (illness fabricated or induced by carers).

## PHYSICAL INDICATORS

Possible physical indicators of physical abuse include:

- bruises or welts (e.g. bruises in unusual configurations or resembling the object used to inflict injury)
- burns (e.g. from boiling water, cigarette, iron)
- cuts and grazes
- bite marks
- bald patches where hair has been pulled out
- fractures
- poisoning or significant over-medicating
- internal injuries
- multiple injuries – old and new.

## BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS

Possible behavioural indicators of physical abuse include:

- concealment of injuries (e.g. wearing clothing that is unsuitable to the weather conditions)
- inconsistent or unlikely explanations for injuries
- regular and habitual absences (e.g. parent may keep a child home to hide signs of injury)
- fear of specific persons or situations (e.g. mistrust, hiding, reluctance to go home)
- frequent crying and/or distress
- poor memory and concentration contributing to academic difficulties
- alertness, nervousness, and hyper-vigilance
- withdrawal from people, daily routines or activities
- fearfulness in relation to loud noises e.g. children crying, adults shouting
- aggressive or controlling behaviour toward others
- little or no emotional reaction when threatened or hurt
- excessive friendliness with strangers
- over-compliance

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## BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS CONT'D

- excessive shyness
- regressive behaviour (e.g. bed wetting, soiling)
- poor sleeping patterns (e.g. insomnia, fear of darkness and nightmares)
- drug or alcohol use
- self-harm including suicide attempts.



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*The Archdiocese of Melbourne is committed to the safety, wellbeing and dignity  
of all children, young people and vulnerable adults.*