

Behavioral Indicators of Physical Abuse

A number of variables affect a child's response to abuse and the effects of abuse on a child's development. These include:

Factors consistently associated with abusive behaviors are:

- Young age of perpetrator (18-30).
- Low income or poverty.
- Stressful life events.
- Social isolation and lack of social support.
- Experiencing or witnessing violence as a child.
- Alcohol and/or substance abuse.

Variable	Response to/Effects of Abuse
Age at Onset	The younger the child at the onset of abuse, the more likely she/he will have serious developmental problems.
Duration of Abuse	The longer the period of time the child has been abused, the more severe the developmental outcomes.
Frequency of Abuse	The more often the child is abused, the more pervasive the effects.
Relationship to Abuser	The closer the relationship of the abuser to the child, the more likely the child will be negatively affected. In general, abuse by a parent has the most serious consequences.
Type of Abuse	The more severe the pain and the more serious the injury inflicted on the child, the more negative the psychological and physical outcomes.
Availability of Support	The presence of other, non-abusive adults who can provide proper care and nurturance, either in the home or in proximity and easily available to the child, can partially mediate the negative effects of abuse.
Constitutional Factors	The child's personality and temperament can affect the outcomes of abusive treatment. Some children are more resilient than others and have unusual coping strengths. Other children are more vulnerable.

Behavioral Indicators of Physical Abuse (continued)

Children who are severely abused at an early age may show pervasive developmental delays. At other ages, abuse may manifest as:

Age at Time of Abuse	Behavioral Manifestations of Abuse
Infant	Significant delays in all areas of development.
Toddler	Remoteness, withdrawal, lack of curiosity, compliance, detachment, inability/unwillingness to relate to other people.
	Whining, whimpering, or crying with no expectation of comfort, reluctance to turn to adults for help.
	State of "frozen watchfulness," remaining emotionally withdrawn and uninvolved while paying close attention to what is going on in their immediate surroundings.
	Discomfort with or fear of physical contact.
	Showing characteristics of autistic due to maladjusted way of relating to people and objects.
	Forlorn clinging dependency coupled with lack of healthy attachments to adults; appearance of inability to form any healthy attachments.
	Depression or flat affect and lack of emotion, failure to respond/cry when in pain or injured, failure to show enjoyment or to smile or play.
Pre-school Age	Timidity, easy fearfulness, ducking, cringing, flinching, withdrawing, attempting to get out of the way or otherwise exhibiting fear when parent approaches.
	Eagerness to please, craving affection, showing indiscriminate attachment by becoming affectionate with anyone, including strangers.

Behavioral Indicators of Physical Abuse (continued)

	Early signs of role reversal, attempting to behave in ways that meet parent's needs, demonstrating a clingy attachment and repeatedly verbalizing love and concern for abusing parent.
	Physical signs of stress and anxiety, including illness and regressive behaviors.
	Aggression toward other children, temper tantrums, may be "touchy."
School Age <i>(Show many of the same characteristics as pre-school children. The longer they have been abused, the more potential for problems in relationships and in development.)</i>	Assuming adult role in relationship with abusing parent, assuming role of "little helper" who cares for parent, demonstrates excessive concern when parent is distressed, excessively compliant.
	Difficulty relating to other children and adults, manipulative or withdrawn and distant, exhibiting anger, aggression, outbursts, and temper tantrums.
	Hyperactivity, unusually short attention span, inability to concentrate and other symptoms of chronic anxiety, poor performance in school, and preoccupation.
	Fear of parent(s) or, in some cases, lack of fear of or concern with parental or adult authority.
Adolescent	Lying or stealing.
	Fighting, angry outbursts, belligerence, and behaving aggressively toward other people.
	Abusing alcohol or drugs.
	Truancy, including repeatedly running away and refusing to go home.
	Difficulty entering into and sustaining relationships.
	Emotional and social withdrawal, depression, lack of interest in activities and/or other people.