

Indications of Physical Abuse

Physical Indicators

- Sprains, dislocations, fractures, or broken bones
- Burns from cigarettes, appliances, or hot water
- Abrasions on arms, legs, or torso that resemble rope or strap marks
- Internal injuries evidenced by pain, difficulty with normal functioning of organs, and bleeding from body orifices
- Bruises – the following types of bruises are rarely accidental:
 - Bilateral bruising to the arms (may indicate that the person has been shaken, grabbed, or restrained)
 - Bilateral bruising of the inner thighs (may indicate sexual abuse)
 - “wrap-around” bruises that encircle an older person’s arms, legs, or torso (may indicate that the person has been physically restrained)
 - Multicolored bruises (indicating that they were sustained in the same location over a period of time)
- Injuries healing through “secondary intention” (indicating that they did not receive appropriate care)
- Signs of traumatic hair and tooth loss

Behavioral Indicators

- When inquiries about injuries are made, they are unexplained or explanations are implausible (they do not “fit” with the injuries observed)
- Family members provide different explanations of how injuries were sustained
- A history of similar injuries or numerous or suspicious hospitalizations
- Victims are brought to different medical facilities for treatment to prevent medical practitioners from observing a pattern of abuse
- Delay between onset of injury and seeking medical care