



The four main types of harm – physical abuse

Everyone who works with babies and young children should be able to recognise the signs that something may be wrong.

What is physical abuse?

Working Together to Safeguard Children defines physical abuse as deliberately hurting a child and causing physical harm.

It may involve:

- hitting with hands or objects
- slapping and punching
- kicking
- shaking
- throwing
- pinching
- poisoning
- burning and scalding
- biting and scratching
- breaking bones
- drowning

Signs of physical abuse

Bumps and bruises don't always mean a child is being physically abused. All children have accidents, trips and falls. And there isn't just one sign or symptom to look out for. But it's important to be aware of the signs.

Physical abuse symptoms include:

- bruises
- broken or fractured bones
- burns or scalds
- bite marks
- scarring
- the effects of poisoning, such as vomiting, drowsiness, or seizures
- breathing problems from drowning, suffocation, or poisoning

Head injuries in babies and toddlers can be signs of abuse so it's important to be aware of these.

Visible signs include:

- swelling, bruising, or fractures
- being extremely sleepy or unconscious
- breathing problems
- seizures
- vomiting
- unusual behaviour, such as being irritable or not feeding properly