

Protecting Children From Abuse: What To Look For



(NAPS)—Normal, active children can get bruises and cuts from playing outside, but certain signs may indicate a child is being abused. Child abuse can have a devastating affect on children and their families, and the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) urges all adults to learn how to recognize and protect children from abuse.

“Child abuse and neglect affect children of all ages, races, and incomes,” said Pam Ross, MD, of ACEP and division director of Pediatric Emergency Medicine at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. “More than 900,000 children were victims of child abuse and neglect in 1998, although most experts believe the figures are greater because incidents often go unreported.”

Signs that may indicate abuse include:

- Unexplained or repeated injuries, such as bruises, welts, cuts or broken bones. Injuries in various stages of healing, which appear in a pattern or are grouped together.

- Burns, which suggest the child may have been scalded, or small circular burns, which may have been inflicted by a cigarette. Burns, which show the pattern of the object used to cause injury, or friction burns, which might indi-

cate the child was tied.

- Pale, emaciated or sunken cheeks.

- Prolonged vomiting or diarrhea.

- Unexplained difficulty in walking, sitting, or performing daily tasks due to soreness.

- Reports of inflicted injuries.

“In addition, if a child seems continually depressed, angry, or anxious, it could suggest abuse,” said Dr. Ross. “Additional signs of potential abuse can include displaying extremely aggressive or disruptive behavior, crying a great deal, shrinking away when adults approach, or being fearful of going home.”

Abused children also may display overly compliant behavior or be extremely withdrawn, complacent or uncommunicative. They also may have poor school attendance and experience delays in development.

Certain professionals, including emergency physicians, have a legal obligation to report suspicion of child abuse. If you suspect child abuse, you also need to report it. Call the police or your local child welfare agency. If you don't know the number, call the National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD. For additional health and safety tips, visit ACEP's Web site at www.acep.org.