

For leaflet “Child Protection -- We All Have a Duty”

Further information on physical harm/abuse is as follows.

Possible Indicators of Physical Harm/Abuse

Physical Indicators

- Bruises, cuts, bites, burns, scalds, fractures, internal injuries or any other injuries that are unlikely to be accidental
- Marks on hands, wrists, legs, ankles, abdomen and waist that indicate the child might have been tied
- Bruises or injuries, both new and old, indicate that the child might have been injured many times
- Child looks very tired, weak or shows signs of hair loss or depression

Behavioural Indicators

- Explanations of the causes/course of child’s injury made by the parent/carer/child are unconvincing/contradictory to or inconsistent with the injuries sustained
- Failure or delay in seeking medical advice for child being injured
- Excessive amount of clothes worn by the child to cover his/her body
- Enacting/reproducing scenes of harm/maltreatment in play or daily behaviours by the child

Abusive Head Trauma (previously known as “Shaken Baby Syndrome”)

- Abusive Head Trauma (previously known as Shaken Baby Syndrome) describes the serious injuries that can occur when infants or young children are violently shaken or suffer from blunt impact related to forceful hitting, slamming, pulling, etc.
- There is a gap between human brain tissue and the skull such that they are not tightly attached together. Babies are especially vulnerable because of the softness of the brain and lack of development of muscles in the neck. Violent shaking a baby as brief as a few seconds with rapid acceleration–deceleration forces, or subject them to blunt force would both cause damage to his fragile brain, resulting in serious injuries such as permanent brain damage, blindness, seizure or even death.
- It may occur when a carer reacts impulsively out of anger or

frustration to stop the baby from crying. However, shaking a baby will lead to severe consequences and so never handle a baby forcefully.

- For details of Abusive Head Trauma and handling baby's non-stop crying, please refer to this website of the Department of Health: https://www.fhs.gov.hk/english/health_info/child/13041.html.
- For audio-visual resources on Shaken Baby Syndrome, please refer to this website of the Department of Health: https://www.fhs.gov.hk/tc_chi/mulit_med/000019.html (available in Cantonese version only).
- If you know or suspect that your baby has been severely or violently shaken, do arrange medical examination of your baby as early as possible at a hospital of the Hospital Authority. Do not conceal because of embarrassment, guilt, or fear. You should tell the medical staff the truth and let your baby receive the most proper treatment.

Does corporal punishment be regarded as physical harm/abuse? Can corporal punishment be adopted for child discipline?

- “Child discipline” includes “management” and “teaching”. Management involves establishing rules and constraints, while “teaching” involves instruction and guidance. The purposes are to teach children self-discipline and responsibility for their actions; and to help them think, learn how to act appropriately, build confidence, and express their opinions and needs in an acceptable way. Effective discipline involves guidance and appreciation, as well as making use of the natural or logical consequences of children's behavior to hold them accountable for their actions, rather than subjecting them to humiliation or harm.
- Corporal punishment usually refers to hitting a child to cause him/her pain or fear in order to change or control the child's behaviour. In most situations, parents/carers aim to discipline children when resorting to corporal punishment, without any intent to harm them. Although corporal punishment appears to have immediate control over children's behavior, it

is not an appropriate or effective way in child discipline, as children do not learn appropriate behavior from such punishment. Moreover, as parents/carers get agitated, the punishment may escalate or become excessive and turn into a channel for venting their emotions. It will not only fail to serve the purpose of child discipline but lead to many undesirable consequences. Apart from inflicting physical injury on the children, corporal punishment will also impair children's psychological development, e.g. impairing self-esteem or inducing the children's tendency to use violence in problem solving. Above all, the parent-child relationship will also be adversely affected.

- Many physical harm/abuse cases arise from corporal punishment by parents on their children. There is no absolute standard in considering what kind of corporal punishment constitutes physical harm/abuse. Personnel should evaluate the merits of individual cases. The primary consideration is the harm and the potential impact caused to the child's physical/psychological health and development by the behaviour rather than whether the parent/carer has any intent to harm the child.

What impacts will be on children being physically harmed/abused?

- Children being physically harmed/abused will suffer not only from physical injuries and pain but also different degree of harm in body functions and intellectual development which may even result in death in serious cases.
- In addition, problems will arise with the children's behaviour, emotions, perceptions and interpersonal relationship. If these problems are not dealt with properly, they will affect the growth of the children and even lead to trauma. Such problems may also affect their parenting and child discipline mode posing potential problems to the next generation.