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Battered child syndrome

Battered child syndrome: A disease in which children are physically abused. The battered child syndrome is a form of child abuse.

Not until the 19th century were children granted the same legal status as domesticated animals in regard to protection against cruelty and/or neglect. In 1962 the term "battered child syndrome" entered medicine. By 1976 all states in the United States had adopted laws mandating the reporting of suspected instances of child abuse.

Child abuse involves a complex and dangerous set of problems that include child neglect and the physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of children.

Child neglect is the most frequently reported form of child abuse and the most lethal. This form of abuse is defined as the failure to provide for the shelter, safety, supervision and nutritional needs of the child. Child neglect can be physical, educational, or emotional neglect.

Physical neglect includes refusal of or delay in seeking health care, abandonment, expulsion from the home or refusal to allow a runaway to return home, and inadequate supervision.

Educational neglect includes the allowance of chronic truancy, failure to enroll a child of mandatory school age in school, and failure to attend to a special educational need.

Emotional neglect includes such actions as marked inattention to the child's needs for affection, refusal of or failure to provide needed psychological care, spouse abuse in the child's presence, and permission of drug or alcohol use by the child.

Physical abuse is the second most frequently reported form of child abuse and is defined as physical injury inflicted upon the child with cruel and/or malicious intent. Physical abuse can be the result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, burning, shaking, or otherwise harming a child. The parent or caretaker may not have intended to hurt the child, rather the injury may have resulted from over-discipline or physical punishment.

Emotional abuse is the third most frequently reported form of child abuse and includes acts or omissions by the parents or other caregivers that could cause serious behavioral, emotional, or mental disorders. For example, the parents/caregivers may use extreme or bizarre forms of punishment, such as confinement of a child in a dark closet. Emotional child abuse is also sometimes termed psychological child abuse, verbal child abuse, or mental injury of a child.

Fatal injuries from maltreatment can result from many different acts including severe head trauma (injury), shaken baby syndrome, trauma to the abdomen or chest, scalding, burns, drowning, suffocation, poisoning, etc.

Factors affecting the likelihood of potential abuse and predisposing to child abuse include:

- The abuser's childhood: child abusers often were abused as children.
- The abuser's substance abuse: at least half of all child abuse cases involve some degree of substance abuse (alcohol, drugs, etc) by the child's parents.
- Family stress: the disintegration of the nuclear family and its inherent support systems has been held to be associated with child abuse.
- Social forces: experts debate whether a postulated reduction in religious/moral values coupled with an increase in the depiction of violence by the entertainment and informational media may increase child abuse.
- The child: children at higher risk for child abuse include infants who are felt to be "overly fussy", handicapped children, and children with chronic diseases.
- Specific "trigger" events that occur just before many fatal parental assaults on infants and young children include: an infant's inconsolable crying, feeding difficulties, a toddler's failed toilet training, and exaggerated parental perceptions of acts of "disobedience" by the child.

Children can be neglected and abused by parents, other caregivers, or society.

Child abuse should be reported, investigated and evaluated.

The treatment and prevention of child abuse include a support group structure coupled with visiting nurse home visits to reinforce good parenting skills and monitor the child's well-being. Children's school programs regarding "good touch...bad touch" can provide parents with a forum in which to role-play and learn to avoid potentially harmful scenarios. Parents should make sure that their child's daycare center is licensed and has an open door policy regarding parental visitation.

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Last Editorial Review: 4/27/2011 5:27:15 PM

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