

**WORKSHOP**

**INVESTIGATING PHYSICAL ABUSE  
OF VULNERABLE ADULTS  
AND THE ELDERLY**

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**INVESTIGATING PHYSICAL ABUSE  
OF VULNERABLE ADULTS  
AND THE ELDERLY**

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**ADULT ABUSE: WHAT IS IT**

- NYS OCFS Definitions for APS:
- SSL Section 473 :
  - Physical Abuse
  - Sexual Abuse
  - Emotional Abuse
  - Active or Passive Neglect
  - Self Neglect
  - Financial Exploitation

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## **PHYSICAL ABUSE**

The non-accidental use of force that results in bodily injury, pain or impairment, including but not limited to, being slapped, burned, cut, bruised or improperly physically restrained.

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## **SEXUAL ABUSE**

Non-consensual sexual contact of any kind, including but not limited to, forcing sexual contact or forcing sex with a third party.

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## **EMOTIONAL ABUSE**

Willful infliction of mental or emotional anguish by threat, humiliation, intimidation or other abusive conduct, including but not limited to, frightening or isolating an adult.

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### **ACTIVE NEGLECT**

Active neglect means willful failure by the caregiver to fulfill the care-taking functions and responsibilities assumed by the caregiver, including but not limited to, abandonment, willful deprivation of food, water, heat, clean clothing and bedding, eyeglasses or dentures, or health related services.

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### **PASSIVE NEGLECT**

Passive neglect means the non-willful failure to fulfill these responsibilities because of inadequate care-giver knowledge, infirmity or disputing the value of prescribed services.

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### **SELF NEGLECT**

This is an adult's inability, due to physical and/or mental impairments to perform tasks essential to caring for oneself, including but not limited to, providing essential food, clothing, shelter and medical care, obtaining goods and services necessary to maintain physical health, mental health, emotional well-being and general safety, or managing financial affairs

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## **FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION**

Improper use of an adult's funds, property or resources by another individual, including but not limited to, fraud, false pretenses, embezzlement, conspiracy, forgery, falsifying records, coerced property transfers or denial of access to assets.

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## **OMRDD DEFINITIONS**

- The maltreatment or mishandling of a person receiving services, which would endanger the physical or mental well-being of an individual, through the action or inaction on the part of anyone.
- The failure to exercise one's duty to intercede on behalf of a person receiving services also constitutes abuse.

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## **CATEGORIES**

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Psychological abuse
- Seclusion
- Unauthorized or inappropriate use of restraint

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**CATEGORIES (cont'd)**

- Unauthorized or inappropriate use of “time-out”
- Violation of a person’s civil rights
- Mistreatment
- Neglect.

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**NEGLECT**

**CONDITIONS OF DEPRIVATION**

- Most prevalent form of child mistreatment
- Failure to meet a person’s need with regard to food, shelter, care
- Subjective determination.

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**FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH ABUSE / NEGLECT**

- Negative relationship with person
- Lack of cognitive knowledge
- Physical or mental health problems
- Emotional / physical fatigue.

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## PHYSICAL INDICATORS

### ***IMPORTANT NOTE!***

Special attention should be paid to injuries which are:

- Unexplained
- Inconsistent with:
  - the parent's / caretaker's explanation
  - the developmental state of the person.

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- Take a history
- Gather as much information as possible.

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## PHYSICAL MARKERS

- Obtain a comprehensive physical assessment
- Examine carefully.

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**TRUST  
YOUR  
INSTINCTS!!!**

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**PHYSICAL INDICATORS**

**Bruises, Welts and Bite Marks...**

- Face
- Lips
- Mouth
- Neck
- Wrists
- Ankles
- Torso
- Back
- Buttocks
- Thighs
- Both eyes
- Both cheeks

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**INDICATORS**

- Always of suspicious origin because only one side of face is usually injured as the result of an accident
- Clustered, forming regular patterns reflecting shape of article (electrical cord, belt buckle, etc.)

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## PHYSICAL INDICATORS

- “Grab marks” on upper extremities (arms, shoulders) on several surface areas
- Evidence of a human bite
- Various stages of healing regularly appear after absence, weekend or vacation.

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## LACERATIONS OR ABRASIONS

- To mouth, lips, gums, eyes
- To external genitalia
- On backs of arms, legs, or torso
- ***Abdominal injury in the absence of a car accident or other trauma.***

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## FRACTURES

- Fractures to skull, nose, facial bones
- Multiple or spiral fractures
- Various stages of healing
- Fractures “accidentally” discovered in course of exam.

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**Accidental  
or  
Inflicted?**

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### **HEAD INJURIES**

- Absence of hair or hemorrhaging beneath the scalp due to vigorous hair pulling
- Subdural hematoma (a hemorrhage beneath the outer covering of the brain due to severe hitting or shaking)
- Retinal hemorrhaging or detachment due to being “shaken.”

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### **HEAD INJURIES (cont’d)**

- Unilateral hemorrhages can occur in “shaken baby syndrome”
- Hemorrhages are described by amount (e.g. > 10 to too numerous to count)
- Not all are alike
- CPR does not cause retinal hemorrhages
- Other causes of RH: elevated BP, cerebral aneurysm, leukemia.

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## BURNS

- Cigar, cigarette burns, especially on soles, palms, back or buttocks
- Immersion burns by scalding water (sock-like, glove-like, doughnut shaped on buttocks or genitalia, "dunking syndrome")
- Scalds are inflicted:
  - May be symmetrical or asymmetrical
  - Can be due to immersion.

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## BURNS (cont'd)

- Pattern – like:
  - Electric burner, iron, etc.
- Rope burns:
  - On arms, legs, neck, or torso.

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## TYPES OF BURNS

- 1<sup>st</sup> degree: Only outer layer of skin involved, similar to sunburn. Area is red and painful.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> degree: Same as 1<sup>st</sup> degree with blistering. Upper areas of skin are destroyed, scarring may result.

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## TYPES OF BURNS (cont'd)

- 3rd degree: Same as 2nd degree with full skin thickness damaged. Areas are less painful as the nerve endings are destroyed. Scarring is present. Skin grafts are required.

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## BRUISES

- Fresh injury may be painful, older ones may not
- Abrasions, tenderness, and swelling may suggest recent injuries
- Yellow color > 18 hours old.

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## BRUISES (cont'd)

- Bruising can be influenced by:
  - Severity of force
  - Vascularity of underlying tissue
  - Loose skin (e.g. genitalia)
- Older person can have delay in resolution
- Color of skin
- Drugs can alter rate of bruise dispersion (i.e. steroids).

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## RECORD

### COLOR CHANGES

- Initial color: blue/red
- 1-3 days: dark purple
- 1 week: green/yellow
- 8-10 days: brown
- Record size, location, color changes as well as swelling and/or tenderness
- Highly suspicious bruises: protected areas such as buttocks, genitalia, ear lobes, and neck.

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## BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS

- Wary of contacts with parents or other adults
- Apprehensive when others cry
- Behavioral extremes:
  - Aggressiveness
  - Withdrawal
  - Extreme mood changes.

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## PHYSICAL ABUSE BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS

- Afraid to go home
- Repeated incidents of running away
- Blaming oneself.

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## SEXUAL ABUSE

Because most sexual abuse cases do not present apparent physical evidence or indicators, identification and recognition are often very difficult.

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## CONSEQUENCE

To compound the problem of detection and identification, the many legitimate fears which many victims of sexual abuse experience make it extremely difficult for them to report the abuse, even to a trusted adult or friend.

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## FACTS

- The vast majority of molesters are family members or friends of the victim
- Victims of sexual abuse experience the fear of betraying a loved one and possibly losing their affection forever if they disclose abuse.

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## YOU SHOULD KNOW...

- Victims fear the common threats of being hurt or even killed if they disclose the abuse
- Sexual abuse is not a problem unique to certain geographic areas or among people of certain economic conditions.

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## MORE INFORMATION

- There is no profile of a typical molester or of the typical victim
- Do not assume that because an alleged offender has an unparalleled reputation for doing good works that he/she could not be a sexual molester.

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## PHYSICAL INDICATORS

- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- Pain or itching in genital area
- Bruises or bleeding in external genitalia, vaginal or anal areas
- Bruises to the hard or soft palate.

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## **SEXUAL ABUSE INDICATORS**

Sexually transmitted diseases include:

- Venereal oral infections
- Painful discharge of urine and/or repeated urinary infections
- Foreign bodies in vagina or rectum.

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## **BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS**

- Withdrawal, fantasy, or infantile behavior
- Bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual behavior or knowledge
- Seductive or promiscuous behavior
- Poor peer relationships
- Delinquent or runaway.

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## **SEXUAL ABUSE CAN RESULT IN:**

- Prostitution
- Forcing sexual acts on others
- Extreme fear of being touched
- Unwilling to submit to physical examination.

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## RESULTS (cont'd)

- Self-injurious behaviors
- Suicide attempts
- Manifestations of low self-esteem, general fearfulness.

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## DOCUMENTATION

- Document findings *objectively*
- Do not record suspicions:  
**WRONG:** "Person was hit with a belt."  
**RIGHT:** "3" x 1" welt on back of legs."

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## DOCUMENTATION (cont'd)

- Let the facts speak for themselves
- Date and time entry.

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