CHILD ABUSE: PHYSICAL ABUSE

DEFINITION:

- **PHYSICAL ABUSE** occurs when there is physical use of force against a child, resulting in harm and injury to the child.
- It includes, but is not limited to, hitting, beating, kicking, shaking, strangling, scalding, burning, poisoning, suffocating and severe corporal punishment.
- Violence against children, especially infants and the very young is a major risk factor for psychiatric disorders and can even lead to suicide.

CHILD ACT 2001 DEFINITION:

- **Section 17 (2) (a), Chapter 1 - Part V of Malaysia’s Child Act 2001** says that a child is
  
  “physically injured if there is substantial and observable injury to any part of the child’s body as a result of non-accidental application of force or an agent to the child’s body that is evidenced by, amongst other things, a laceration, a contusion, an abrasion, a scar, a fracture or other bone injury, a dislocation, a sprain, a haemorrhaging, the rupture of a viscus, a burn, a scald, the loss or alteration of consciousness or physiological functioning or the loss of hair and teeth.”

NATURE OF ABUSE:

- Parents do not usually plan to abuse their children. Parents who physically abuse are often reacting to serious stress in their own lives.
- Global experience shows that children from families that suffer from economic stresses, a history of drug or alcohol abuse, a lack of social support such as relatives and friends, and/or domestic violence may be at higher risk.

CONSEQUENCES:

- Children who are physically abused are more likely to have suicidal thoughts, learning impairments, conduct disorder, a poor self-image, abuse drugs or alcohol, sexually act out, and/or show signs of depression.
- Adults who were physically abused as children have problems establishing intimate personal relationships. They are at higher risk for anxiety, depression, substance abuse, medical abuse, medical illness, and problems with school or work. Furthermore, adults abused as children tend to continue the cycle of abuse by abusing their own children.

Children who are physically abused can carry hidden scars into their adult life.
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SIGNS & SYMPTOMS: • Having one or two bruises does not necessarily mean that the child is being physically abused. But when signs appear repeatedly or in combination with other symptoms, we should be concerned. Learning more about the signs and symptoms of abuse, and knowing how to seek advice or assistance, is the best way to help a child in need.

Physical
- Vomiting, lethargy, breathing difficulties, seizures (in infants, which could be signs of shaken baby syndrome)
- Unexplained injuries on the face (in infants and pre-school children; e.g. cuts, bruises, sores)
- Injuries (bruises, lacerations, cuts, swelling, burns, bite marks, etc.) that cannot be properly explained
- Repeated injuries over a period of time
- Repeated poisoning or accidents

Behavioural and Emotional
- Inability to remember or to offer a consistent explanation of how injuries occurred
- Describing him/herself as bad and deserving to be punished
- Displaying extreme behaviour, aggressiveness or abusive behaviour
- Being overly obedient and/or eager to please
- Suffering from depression and experiencing abnormal sleeping patterns
- Fear of the dark (especially young children)
- Having frequent nightmares
- Fear of being close to, or touched by, people, especially adults (may flinch if touched unexpectedly)
- Avoiding physical contact with parent/guardian/caregiver
- Expressing dislike or hatred for parent/guardian/caregiver
- Covering up in long sleeves and pants (to conceal bruises, etc.)
- Fear of going home
- Playing truant from school, behaving differently and doing poorly in studies (especially adolescents)
- Runaway attempts (especially adolescents)
- Showing signs of suicidal behaviour (especially adolescents)