Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is non-accidental physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with a hand, stick, strap, or other object), burning, or otherwise harming a student, that is inflicted by a parent, caregiver, or other person who has responsibility for the student. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the caregiver intended to hurt the student. Physical discipline, such as spanking or paddling, is not considered abuse as long as it is reasonable and causes no bodily injury to the student.

Identifying and Physical Abuse Among Students

While injuries can occur accidentally when a student is at play, physical abuse should be suspected if the explanations do not fit the injury or if a pattern of frequency is apparent. The presence of many injuries in various stages of healing makes it obvious that the injuries did not all occur as a result of one accident.

Physical indicators of abuse include bruises; lacerations; swollen areas; and marks on the student’s face, head, back, chest, genital area, buttocks or thighs. Wounds like human bite marks, cigarette burns, broken bones, puncture marks or missing hair may indicate abuse.

A student’s behavior might also signal that something is wrong. Victims of physical abuse may display withdrawn or aggressive behavioral extremes, complain of soreness or uncomfortable movement, wear clothing that is inappropriate for the weather, express discomfort with physical contact or become chronic runaways.