



*This fact sheet is for Parish Priests  
and Parish workers to assist in  
identifying children, young people and  
vulnerable adults at risk of significant harm.*

## FACT SHEET: WHEN IS A CHILD AT RISK OF HARM?

A child is at risk of significant harm if they are suffering, or are at risk of suffering, from neglect, abuse or psychological harm.

Some signs a child might be at risk of significant harm include:

### Signs relating to physical abuse

- bruising, lacerations and welts
- adult bite marks and scratches
- fractures of bones (especially in children under three years old)
- dislocations, sprains, twisting
- burns and scalds (including cigarette burns)
- multiple injuries or bruises
- explanation of injury offered by the child is not consistent with the injury
- consumption of poisonous substances, alcohol or other harmful drugs
- abdominal pain caused by ruptured internal organs
- drowsiness, vomiting, fits or pooling of blood in the eyes, which may suggest head injury

### Signs relating to neglect

- low weight for age and/or failure to thrive and develop
- untreated physical problems
- poor standards of hygiene
- poor complexion and hair texture
- child not adequately supervised for his/her age
- scavenging or stealing food, focus on basic survival
- extended stays at school, public places, other homes
- longs for or indiscriminately seeks adult affection
- poor school attendance

### Signs relating to sexual abuse

- describing or simulating sexual acts
- fear of being with a particular person
- sexual knowledge or behaviour inappropriate for the child's age
- outbursts of anger
- damaging property, hurting animals
- sudden unexplained personality changes, mood swings, seeming insecure
- adolescent pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections
- unexplained accumulation of money and gifts

### Signs relating to psychological harm

- feelings of worthlessness about life and him/herself
- inability to value or trust others
- lack of interaction skills necessary for daily functioning
- extreme attention-seeking behaviour
- obsession with pleasing or obeying adults
- taking extreme risks
- persistent running away from home
- eating disorders
- risk taking behaviours - self harm, suicide attempts