

Multi-Professional Protocol: Bruising / Suspicious Marks on Children Not Independently Mobile

1. Introduction and Context

Bruising is the most common presenting feature of physical abuse in children therefore bruising in a child of any age is a matter for enquiry and concern. While a high proportion of bruising in older children will be of accidental origin, bruising in children who are not independently mobile (that is not crawling, pulling to stand, walking or confined by disability) is highly predictive of maltreatment. Bruising occurs in less than 1% of children in this group. There is a substantial and well-founded research base on the significance of bruising / significant marks in children.¹

Research shows that children with disabilities are at increased risk of abuse and neglect and are therefore more likely to experience non accidental injuries.

Recent Serious Case Reviews and individual child protection cases across Berkshire have indicated that staff and volunteers have sometimes underestimated, or not recognised the potential for physical abuse, of the presence of bruising / suspicious marks in children who are not independently mobile (*see back for **Definition of Terms used***). As a result there have been a number of cases where children have suffered significant abuse that might have been prevented if action had been taken at an earlier stage.

2. Process

Bruising and unusual marks in a not independently mobile child is rare and must always result in an immediate consultation with Children's Social Care or the Emergency Duty Team out of hours.

¹ CORE INFO Cardiff Child Protection Systematic Review Group website

Bruising / suspicious marks will never be interpreted in isolation and will always be assessed in the context of medical and social history, individual development and any explanation given. Assessments will be led by Children's Social Care and a lead medical professional.

All telephone referrals should be made to Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) or Children's Social Care (CSC). The MASH / CSC will co-ordinate multi-professional information sharing and assessment.

Contact (between 9am to 5pm Mon - Fri excl. bank holidays):

01344 352005 (Bracknell Forest MASH)

01189 373641 (Reading Children's Single Point of Access)

01189 088002 (Wokingham Referral and Assessment Team)

01628 683150 (Windsor and Maidenhead MASH)

01753 875 362 (Slough First Contact Hub)

01635 503090 (West Berks Children and Families SC Services)

Outside of these hours contact the Emergency Duty Team, on:

01344 351999

3. Involving Parents or Carers


As far as possible, parents or carers should be included in the decision-making process, unless to do so would jeopardise information gathering (e.g. information could be destroyed), or if it would pose a further risk to the child.

Staff and volunteers should explain at an early stage why, in cases of bruising in not independently mobile children, additional concern, questioning and examination are required. The LSCB has produced an information leaflet for parents/carers that you may also wish to refer to.


If a parent or carer is uncooperative or refuses to take the child for further assessment, this should be reported immediately to Children's Social Care Services. If possible the child should be kept under supervision until steps can be taken to secure his or her safety.



Member of staff/volunteer observes bruising/suspicious marks to a child not independently mobile.




Seek an explanation from the family and record their explanation (i.e. using their exact words). Record what the bruising looks like.



Contact MASH or Children's Social Care (CSC) on the numbers above for discussion and advice.

MASH / CSC to follow 'Bruising in Children who are Not Independently Mobile: A Protocol for Assessment, Management and Referral by Health Practitioners' and initiate multi-agency information gathering/assessment.



Follow Berkshire Child Protection Procedures

<http://berks.proceduresonline.com/>

Definition of Terms used

Not Independently Mobile: a child who is not yet crawling, bottom shuffling, pulling to stand, cruising or walking independently; includes all children under the age of six months. It also includes children of any age who are immobile due to a disability.

Child with a disability: The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) define a disabled person as a person with ‘a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to -day activities’.

Bruising: Blood in the soft tissues; producing a temporary, non-blanching discolouration of skin however faint or small with or without other skin abrasions or marks. Colouring may vary from yellow, through green, to brown, or purple.

However, it can be difficult to differentiate bruising and unusual marks in children and young people and all such presentations should trigger consideration of the guidance within the Berkshire Child Protection Procedures. <http://berks.proceduresonline.com/>

