Child Abuse and Dependent Adult Abuse in Iowa

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Let’s start by looking at some examples of actual child abuse.

The caregivers for this child said the child was crawling, slipped and hit a coffee table leg causing the injuries on its face. The problem with this story is that the child was not old enough to crawl. When that was pointed out to caregivers, they changed their story and said the child was sitting in a car seat unsecured, and the car seat rolled off the couch and the child fell out. Stories inconsistent with a child’s developmental level, and changing stories should both raise red flags.

This child displays a typical slap mark to the face where red blood blisters have formed between where the fingers were, leaving distinct finger marks. Patterns in bruising are often clues to what has happened, or what has been used to strike a victim.

This child shows multiple bruises inflicted over a period of time, evidenced by the varying colors and stages of healing of the bruises, often referred to as the “rainbow” effect of bruising. Varying stages of healing would not be consistent with a story of a single event. Also, bruising as the result of active playing usually doesn’t occur over a period of time, as a child will not repeat actions that caused them harm.

This pictures shows classic bruising that occurs when a child is slapped in the ear, or has had their ear pulled on. This child also had a broken eardrum more consistent with slapping.

It should be obvious that this level of bruising can only be consistent with abuse. Red, linear bruises show a pattern consistent with being struck with a linear object. This child was actually beaten with a piece of PVC pipe.

The pattern in this bruise is consistent with a bite mark. Although children do sometimes bite other children, the size of the outline and number of teeth may provide evidence of the age of the person inflicting the bite. Tooth patterns can actually be used like fingerprints to match the bruise with the person who inflicted it.

Circumferential bruises, or cuts around arms or legs are usually consistent with being bound. This child was actually tied up with rope, but other items used can include electrical wires, chains, and pet leashes, in addition to other types of ropes.

“Sock” and “glove” patterns in burns are consistent with purposeful emersion burns. A child this age would most likely put one foot or one hand at a time in if the event was accidental, so burns on both hands or both feet is suggestive of abuse. Once a child feels pain, their natural reaction would be to pull their hand or foot back out, burning only a small part. Burns involving a whole hand or foot are more suggestive of intentional burns.
Sometimes evidence of abuse is evident on radiographic films. The femur, or upper leg bone, of this child shows a fracture consistent with being caused by a twisting motion. Most accidental injuries involve a direct blow, which usually results in a linear fracture. Again, look for stories that do not match injury patterns.

The parents of this child tried to explain this injury by claiming the infant dropped his leg through the bars on his crib and broke it trying to get free. This story is not consistent with this child’s developmental ability, and laws protecting children require that rails on a crib be no more than 2 3/8” apart, not wide enough for a child to catch their leg. It is also highly unlikely a child would struggle enough to break their own bone, especially a strong bone like this one.

This x-ray shows a skull fracture. The mother of this child told caregivers she “accidently” hit the child in the back of the head with a laundry basket. That type of a blow would not be consistent with this level of fracture and injury.

Although these bruises suggest some type of a pattern, they are actually hickeys placed on this adolescent by her father during sex.

You should recognize this pattern as being consistent with rope burns. In this picture, the rope was around the neck of the victim, rather than an arm or leg. The rope was put there by her father to restrain her during sex.

Evidence of child abuse can come from many different types of sources. This picture drawn by a 4 year old shows their rendition of a meth lab in their home. The only way a child could draw this was if they were there, and the child actually drew themselves in the picture in the lower left hand corner.

Many of the same patterns of physical abuse seen in children are seen in dependent adults.

Multiple scars seen on the back of this dependent adult show that the abuse can be long term and may have started as a child.

Scars are often hidden by dependent adults for a variety of reasons. This picture also shows long term abuse.

This picture shows Harvey. Harvey was beaten repeatedly by his caregivers. He was afraid he would eventually be beaten to death, and actually called in his own abuse. The person Harvey spoke to believed if he was able to call in the report, then he ought to be able to call for a taxi and remove himself from the situation. She did not believe him to be a “dependent” adult, and so no investigation was ever done. Harvey did die from injuries as the result of abuse.

Keep in mind not all dependent adults are elderly. In this case the story given by this dependent adult’s caregiver was that she had a seizure and fell.

Like in children, abuse of dependent adults often involves the use of restraints to restrain the victim in a wheelchair or in a bed.
This victim has lower leg cellulitis, which it in itself is not the result of abuse, and can be seen frequently in older adults. The abuse occurred when the caretaker did not take the victim to seek medical attention for the cellulitis. This individual eventually had to have both lower legs amputated.

Not only does this victim show signs of physical abuse, but her location also shows signs of isolation. There is nothing in the room to stimulate her – no TV, no books, no pictures, and no decorations.

Circumferential bruising around wrists or ankles can be evidence of the use of restraints. In this example however, the width of the bruise suggests it may have also been caused by being forcibly grabbed by the wrist.

The starvation, dehydration, and general neglect of this dependent adult should be readily evident. As we will discuss further in this program, dependent adult abuse may occur in a home or in a facility, like a nursing home or hospital.

In this example, the initial injury was the result of the dependent adult placing their own foot in a bath with water that was too hot. The caregiver, however, afraid the injury might become infected, scrubbed the foot with Comet, making it much worse. If you look closely, you can see the presence of maggots on the foot. The length of the toenails shows evidence of long term inadequate care.

Bed sores, or pressure sores, occur when an individual lies or sits too long in one position. The most common sites are the sacrum, coccyx, heels, or the hips, but other sites such as the elbows, knees, ankles, or the back of the cranium can be affected. Bed sores occur due to pressure applied to soft tissue where bony prominences are located close to the skin, resulting in completely or partially obstructed blood flow in the overlying soft tissue. Primary prevention is to redistribute pressure by turning or repositioning the patient regularly. The use of special pads can also help in prevention. If discovered early, bed sores are usually treatable. However, if not recognized or managed, they may sometimes be fatal. Large bed sores are very slow and difficult to heal, and can be deep enough to expose bone.

This individual shows multiple and severe pressure ulcers. Most likely, some of these will never heal.

This dependent adult suffered burns to their torso when a caregiver threw boiling water onto them.

This picture shows an individual with a large bruise to their sternum caused by a blow with a closed fist.

Abused dependent adults, even if capable of reporting abuse, infrequently do so out of shame, embarrassment, and fear that they may be placed in a facility.

As we progress through this class we will examine the frequency of abuse in Iowa, Iowa laws related to abuse and mandatory reporters, the different types of dependent adult abuse and child abuse, characteristics of abusers, and indicators of abuse you may see in victims. Let’s move forward.