

Safeguarding children

Bruising in children who are not independently mobile

1. Introduction and Context

Accidental bruising on non-independently mobile infants is rare and should therefore always warrant further investigation. The younger the child, the greater the risk that bruising is non-accidental.

Bruising is the most common presenting feature of physical abuse in children. Recent Serious Case Reviews and individual child protection cases have indicated that staff and volunteers have sometimes underestimated or not recognised the potential for physical abuse, of the presence of bruising in children who are not independently mobile (i.e. those not yet crawling, cruising or walking independently).

As a result there have been a number of cases where bruised children have suffered significant abuse that might have been prevented if action had been taken at an earlier stage.

The protocol contained in this policy is necessarily directive. While it recognises that professional judgment and responsibility have to be exercised at all times, it errs on the side of safety by requiring that all children with bruising who are Not Independently Mobile be referred to Surrey's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and for a Pediatric opinion. This protocol has been approved by Surrey's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, Policy & Procedures group.

1. Definition of Terms used in this Procedure

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.

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.

1.Scope of Protocol

This protocol relates only to bruising in children who are Not Independently Mobile however any bruising, or suspected bruising, in a child of any age that is observed by, or brought to our attention will be taken as a matter for inquiry and concern.

While accidental and innocent bruising is significantly more common in older mobile children, mobile children who are abused may also present with bruising.

Immobility, for example due to disability, in older children will be taken into account as a risk factor. Disabled children, especially those with additional communication and learning difficulties have a higher incidence of abuse whether mobile or not.

It should be noted that children may be abused (including sustaining fractures, serious head injuries and intra-abdominal injuries) with no evidence of bruising or external injury.

Where bruising is a concern, the same referral process will be followed for children who are not independently mobile and those who are ambulant.

1.Innocent Bruising

It is recognised that a small percentage of bruising in Not Independently Mobile children will have an innocent explanation (including medical causes).

Nevertheless because of the difficulty in excluding non-accidental injury, we will seek advice from a child specialist and from Surrey's Children's Services in all cases.

Occasionally spontaneous bruising may occur as a result of a medical condition such as a bleeding disorder, thrombocytopenia or meningococcal or other acute infection. **Child protection issues will not delay the referral of a seriously ill child to acute pediatric services.**

It is the responsibility of Surrey's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub in conjunction with the local acute or community paediatric department to decide whether the circumstances of the case and the explanation for the injury are consistent with an innocent cause or not.

1.Process

Bruising in immobile infants is rare and must always result in an immediate consultation with Surrey's Multi-Agencies Safeguarding Hub. Children's Services and a child specialist will lead assessments and relevant investigations.

Emergency Admission to Hospital

Any child who is found to be seriously ill or injured, or in need of urgent treatment or further investigation, will be referred immediately to hospital.

Such a referral will not be delayed by a referral to Surrey's Children's Services. Our Child Protection Liaison Officer (CPLD) or CPLD Deputy will be responsible **as the professional first dealing with the case to ensure that, where appropriate, a referral to Surrey's Multi-Agency Safeguarding hub is made.**

Referral to Children's Services

In Not Independently Mobile children, the presence of any bruising, of any size, in any site will initiate a referral to children's services.

Where a decision to refer is made, it is the responsibility of the CPLD or CPLD Deputy who learns of or observes the bruising, to make the referral by telephone to Surrey Children's Services or the Emergency Duty Team (EDT).

All telephone referrals will be followed up within 48 hours with a written referral, using the Multi Agency Referral Form and will be fully documented.

Surrey's Children's Services will co-ordinate multi-professional information sharing and assessment.

1.Involving Parents or Carers

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

In particular staff and volunteers will explain at an early stage why, in cases of bruising in not independently mobile children, additional concern, questioning and examination are required. The decision to refer to Surrey's Children's Services will be explained to the parents or carers frankly and honestly.

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

Parents/carers should be reassured that at all times they will be treated with courtesy and sensitivity and that their explanations will be listened to and discussed. They will be kept fully informed and able to ask questions at all times.

Contact details

Surrey's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub
0300 123 1610

Emergency Duty Team (Out of Hours)
01483 517 898

Review

The policy will be reviewed yearly, in May, and amendments and changes will be carried out in conjunction with the Pre School staff, through liaison by the Proprietor.

28/5/19