

Q: Why do I need to be referred to Children's Services?

A: Although rare, bruising is occasionally caused by deliberate injury. It is important that, where this occurs, it is picked up as soon as possible in order to support the family and to protect the child. Referral to Children's Services is not an accusation of wrongdoing, but a way of looking for causes of bruising in the same way that the doctor looks for illnesses. Even when bruising is due to falls and knocks the family may benefit from advice on accident prevention and home safety.

Q: What will Children's Services do?

A: Your health adviser will ring Children's Services, who will make some enquiries about you and your child. They will check whether you have received services from them in the past, ask for information from your GP and your health visitor and will make arrangements to speak to you either by phone or in person. This may be at the same time as your attendance with the child specialist or at a separate appointment and they may want to visit you at home. They will then discuss their findings with the specialist who examined your child to decide whether any further action needs to be taken or any treatment given.

Q: My child is disabled and bruising is one of the consequences of their limited mobility. What will happen to my child?

A: Professionals know that bruising in disabled young people especially those with additional communication difficulties is more difficult to assess. The same referral process will be followed as for children who are not independently mobile or in ambulant children where bruising is a concern. If the bruising is consistent with any explanation provided by the carer or the young person then, and in the context of their disability, a written record will be kept using a body map and advice will be given if that is considered appropriate.

It should be remembered however that disabled children, particularly those with additional communication and learning difficulties are more likely to suffer abuse from carers and this has to be explored.

WHAT'S GOING ON? INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

BRUISING IN CHILDREN WHO ARE NOT INDEPENDENTLY MOBILE

Q: Why is bruising in children who are not independently mobile such a concern?

A: It is difficult to cause bruising in children that are not independently mobile during normal day-to-day activities such as feeding, nappy changing and normal handling.

Q: I have explained what caused the bruising don't you believe me?

A: Even where babies fall or get knocked it is unusual for them to bruise. There are also some important causes of bruising which may seriously affect the child's health.

The child may bruise easily, for example, due to haemophilia, or be suffering from a blood disease such as leukaemia or an infection such as meningitis.

Very occasionally bruising may be due to deliberate injury. Even where there is an apparently simple explanation it is important for professionals to make further enquiries.

Q: What will happen next?

A: Your health adviser will make arrangements for you to have an appointment with the child specialist

as soon as possible and preferably straight away. This may mean attending your nearest hospital or community health clinic. There the specialist will talk to you about your child, examine your child fully and decide whether or not to do further investigations such as blood tests, x-rays, CT scans or full skeletal surveys

After this the child specialist will explain to you what they think has caused the bruising. A body map will be completed to show the location, size and severity of the bruise which will remain on the medical record.

Q: Why does my child need to see a specialist doctor?

A: A bruise can be a sign of a health condition, a blood disease or an infection. This means it is important that health advisers ask a specialist child doctor to look at your child and discuss with you why there might be a bruise and rule out or diagnose these more serious conditions. It also sometimes takes an expert to tell the difference between a bruise and certain types of birthmark which can look very similar to bruising.

There is also a requirement that health professionals discuss the bruising with Children's Services.

Q: All this is very upsetting. I feel as though I am being accused of hurting my child. Why do I have to be put through this?

A: We know this can be very upsetting but the only way of picking up the occasional serious cause for bruising is to investigate every case where it occurs. You can be reassured that you will be treated with courtesy and sensitivity and your explanations will be listened to and discussed with you. You will also be kept fully informed at all times so that you know exactly what is going on and why. You can ask questions at any time and will be given the opportunity to discuss your concerns fully at every stage.

All professionals working with children are expected as part of their professional duties to make enquiries to ensure that children are kept safe from harm. Where bruising is non-accidental immediate steps can be taken to protect the child from further harm.