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### Background

Bruising occurs after a bump or injury which damages underlying capillaries and causes leaking and collection of blood in the soft tissue under the skin. **Bruises in active children are common and often are considered "normal" childhood injuries. However, bruises may also be the result of physical abuse or some serious medical conditions.** The Serious Case Review for Baby Peter, whose bruises were hidden with chocolate by his mother, stands as a reminder that practitioners must remain alert and seek a satisfactory explanation for bruising on children.



## Bruises on Children



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### Why it matters

Bruising is the most common injury to a child that has been physically abused. The younger the child, the greater the risk that bruising is non accidental. It is not illegal for a parent to hit their child as long as the 'smack' amounts to 'reasonable punishment'. Unreasonable punishment is classed as a smack that leaves a mark or bruise on the child, or the use of an implement to hit the child. Physical abuse causes serious, and often long-lasting, harm – and in severe cases, death. Disabled children are more likely to be abused and children who are immobile because of their disability have a significantly increased risk of non-accidental injury.

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### Questions

Have parents/carers been asked for an explanation & when was bruising first noticed?

Is the explanation compatible with the bruising, case history and the child's stage of development?

[GM Protocol Bruising on immobile babies & children](#)

[NSPCC Core Information Bruising](#)

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### Information

Bruises in very young infants in any location are uncommon. In infants less than 9 months, without a known medical condition, bruises are likely indicators of abuse. As children begin to walk, bruises are seen more frequently. After 9 months of age, bruises commonly are seen on the shins and knees. Between 9 months and 4 years of age, it is not unusual for children to bump and bruise the forehead. Parts of the body rarely affected in children of any age but common in abused children include the face, head, neck, trunk, and buttocks.

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### What to do

**If a child has been seriously harmed call 999.**

Any injury, bruising, or mark that might be bruising, in a child of any age that is brought to the attention of a professional is a matter for inquiry and concern. Injuries in a non-mobile child should raise suspicion of maltreatment and result in an immediate referral to Children's Social Care (**0300 303 0440**) and an urgent paediatric opinion.

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### Information

- Clusters of bruises are a common feature in abused children.
- Bruises which have dots of blood under the skin around them are found more commonly in abused children.
- Bruises can often carry the imprint of the implement used or the hand

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### Information

**Some distinct patterns of bruising may mean that physical abuse has taken place:**

- Abusive bruises often occur in soft parts of the body – such as the abdomen, back and buttocks.
- The head is by far the commonest site of bruising in child abuse. Other common sites include the ear and neck.
- As a result of defending themselves, abused children may have bruising on the forearm, upper arm, back of leg, hands or feet.