

It is often difficult to distinguish child maltreatment from accidental injuries. Caregivers whose history of events may be deceptive or incomplete and children who are nonverbal may make the assessment more complex. A purposeful, skilled history and appropriate interview questions help the nurse ensure the right course of action. Knowledge of mechanism of injury and child development is essential. Cases of abuse are often detected when the child or caregiver history of events does not match with physical findings. Children who are verbal can often give a history of the injury. Separating the child from the caregiver may provide a more reliable history. It is important to ask non-leading, open-ended questions. The history should include a narrative of the injury from both caregiver and child (if verbal). Date, time, and location where the injury took place along with who was present at the time of the injury are essential questions. Family history for bleeding and bone disorders is important. [Box 13-5](#) outlines areas of history that are concerning for abuse.

Neglect and Emotional Abuse

Each child may manifest different responses to neglect, depending on the situation and developmental age of the child. The goal of the interview is to determine whether the child is in a safe environment and whether the caregiver has the skills and resources to care for the child. It is often difficult to determine whether the circumstances constitute poor parenting skills or true neglect. [Box 13-6](#) lists flags for behaviors to look for in neglected and abused children.

Box 13-6

Clinical Manifestations of Potential Child Maltreatment

Physical Neglect

Suggestive Physical Findings

Growth failure

Signs of malnutrition, such as thin extremities, abdominal