

Quick help for

Indicators of Abuse



General Remarks

The first step in helping children who have been abused or neglected is learning to recognize the signs of maltreatment.

The presence of a single sign does not necessarily mean that child maltreatment is occurring in a family, but a closer look at the situation may be warranted when these signs appear repeatedly or in

- Not every indicator is a proof of abuse
- There are indicators we see in the child
- There are indicators in the adults
- Look for patterns
- Look at the whole picture
- Do not jump the gun

Physical Abuse

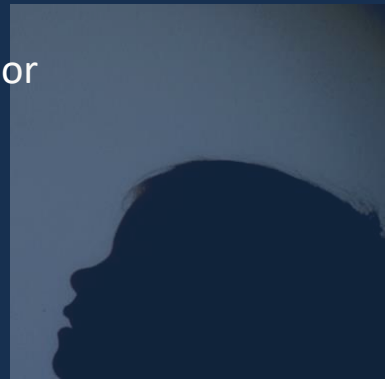


Signs we might see in the child

- Has unexplained injuries, such as burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes
- Injuries at different stages of healing
- Injuries have a pattern or look like they may have been caused by an object
- Child seems scared, anxious, depressed, withdrawn, or aggressive
- Child seems frightened of his or her parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home
- Child shrinks at the approach of adults
- Child shows changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Child reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver
- Child abuses animals or pets

Signs we might see in the parent

- Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child's injury or provides an explanation that is not consistent with the injury
- Shows little concern for the child
- Sees the child as entirely bad, burdensome, or worthless
- Uses harsh physical discipline with the child
- Has a history of abusing animals or pets



Emotional Abuse

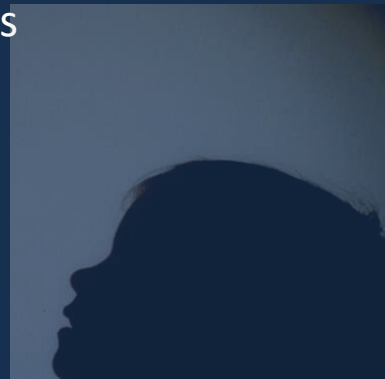


Signs we might see in the parent

- Constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child
- Describes the child negatively
- Overtly rejects the child

Signs we might see in the child

- Shows extremes in behavior, such as being overly compliant or demanding, extremely passive or aggressive
- Is either inappropriately adult (e.g., parenting other children) or inappropriately infantile (e.g., frequently rocking or head-banging)
- Is delayed in physical or emotional development
- Shows signs of depression or suicidal thoughts
- Reports an inability to develop emotional bonds with others



Neglect

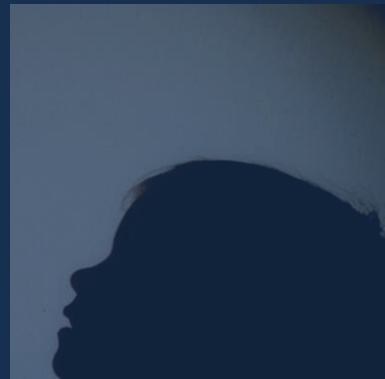


Signs we might see in the parent

- Appears to be indifferent to the child
- Seems apathetic or depressed
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs

Signs we might see in the child

- Is frequently absent from school
- Lacks needed medical care, dental care, or glasses...
- Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs
- States that there is no one at home to provide care



Sexual Abuse

Keep in mind that:

Any one sign doesn't mean that a child was sexually abused.

Some of these signs can emerge at other times of stress such as:

- during a divorce,
- death of a family member or pet,
- problems at school or with friends,
- other anxiety-inducing or traumatic events.

But the presence of several suggests that you begin asking questions and consider seeking help.

Keep also in mind the influence of uncontrolled access to internet, reading material, television...can and will compromise the innocence of a child.



Child and/or Adolescent

- Has nightmares or other sleep problems without an explanation
- Is distracted or distant at odd times
- Has a sudden change in eating habits: refuses to eat, loses or drastically increases appetite, has trouble swallowing
- Sudden mood swings: rage, fear, insecurity or withdrawal
- Leaves “clues” that seem likely to provoke a discussion about sexual issues
- Writes, draws, plays or dreams sexual or frightening images
- Develops new or unusual fear of certain people or places
- Refuses to talk about a secret shared with an adult or older child
- Talks about a new older friend
- Suddenly has money, toys or other gifts without reason
- Thinks of self or body as repulsive, dirty or bad
- Signs more typical for younger children: exhibits adult-like sexual behaviors, language and knowledge

Younger Children

- An older child behaving like a younger child (such as bed-wetting or thumb-sucking)
- Has new words for private body parts
- Resists removing clothes at appropriate times (bath, bed, toileting, diapering)
- Asks other children to behave sexually or play sexual games
- Mimics adult-like sexual behaviors with toys or stuffed animal
- Wetting and soiling accidents unrelated to toilet training

Adolescents

- Self-injury (cutting, burning)
- Inadequate personal hygiene
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Sexual promiscuity
- Running away from home
- Depression, anxiety

Adolescents (cont.)

- Suicide attempts
- Fear of intimacy or closeness
- Physical Warning Signs
- Compulsive eating or dieting

Physical Warning Signs

Physical signs of sexual abuse are rare. If you see these signs, bring the child to a doctor. The doctor can help you understand what may be happening and test for sexually transmitted diseases.

Abuse of Elderly

- Forbidden contact with others
- Extreme or excessive behaviors
- Evidence of inadequate care
- Persistent hunger, poor or inadequate nutrition
- Forging for, hoarding, or stealing food
- Unusual bank account activity

