



## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

The warning signs and symptoms of child abuse and neglect vary from child to child. Children have different ways of coping with abuse and the signs often depend on each child's characteristics and environment. As a parent, you have the responsibility to keep your child safe. One way you can do that is by observing the behaviors and interactions of your child at home and with their friends. Please keep in mind the following warning signs and possible indicators of abuse in order to help keep children safe. If you suspect any child is being abused, please call the 24-hour Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873). In reviewing the signs of abuse, it is important to keep in mind that child abuse and neglect is not strictly limited to one type, and sometimes occurs in combination<sup>i</sup>

### PHYSICAL ABUSE

#### Physical indicators

- Has unexplained bruises or injuries
- Has linear bruising, especially when seen on the buttocks, legs, arms and back
- Has injuries where children don't normally - on the face, legs, bottom or torso
- Has bruising in various stages of healing especially when on different body parts
- Has bruises in the shape of an object, a hand, shoe, iron, stick, belt, etc.
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school

#### Behavioral indicators

- Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver
- Provides difficult to believe explanations for injuries
- Has difficulty sitting, complains of soreness, or moves uncomfortably
- Wears clothing to cover body especially when inappropriate to weather
- Reports mistreatment of animals in the home
- Becomes withdrawn, aggressive or self-destructive
- Is bullied or is a bully
- Routinely arrives at school early or stays late
- Is overly compliant, an overachiever or overly responsible
- Seems frightened of the parents; appears afraid of being at home
- Is always watchful and alert - as though preparing for something bad to happen
- Has learning problems
- Has behavior changes just prior to going home from school or when picked up
- Is wary of adult contact; cringes or flinches when others get close

#### Additional indicators for adolescents

- Chronic runaway
- Engages in violent or dangerous behavior

## **NEGLECT**

### **Physical indicators**

- Has not received attention for physical or medical problems
- Medical needs are only cared for when urgent, has untreated dental needs
- Has consistently bad hygiene, has unwashed, matted hair and noticeable body odor
- Clothing is too large or too small or inappropriate for the weather
- Receives little or no support from family with homework and school activities
- Reports no caretaker, or inconsistent caretakers at home
- Has attended numerous schools with delays in enrollment
- Has no pets or many pets; describes pets as hungry or dying
- Routinely loses, or does not return school papers, permission slips, etc
- Does not have money for lunch, arrives to school in time for free meals
- Is accidentally hurt or abused by someone other than parent while unsupervised

### **Behavioral indicators**

- Is frequently absent from or late to school
- Is allowed to play in unsafe environments or with unsafe people
- Is responsible for household, cooking, cleaning, laundry, and care of siblings, not typically seen in children of the same age and family size
- Feels responsible for meeting the needs of parent
- Is tired; falls asleep in class
- Displays excessive need for affection or attention
- Exhibits self-soothing behaviors, thumb sucking, rocking
- Has learning problems, speech delays and delayed physical development
- Is self-destructive, engages in delinquent behavior at a young age
- Has difficulty making and keeping friends
- Begs or steals food or money from classmates

### **Additional indicators for adolescents**

- Drops out of school
- Uses drugs or alcohol
- Increasingly engages in dangerous or delinquent behavior

## **SEXUAL ABUSE**

### **Physical indicators**

- Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver
- Has difficulty walking or sitting
- Has a sudden weight change
- Has frequent somatic complaints, stomach or head ache, sore throat
- Suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities
- Has sudden negative change in appearance
- Has frequent urinary or yeast infections not explained by medical condition or treatment
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under age fourteen
- Runs away

### **Behavioral indicators**

- Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance
- Is inappropriately seductive
- Has sophisticated knowledge or interested in sexual activity and behaviors beyond same age peers

- Perpetrates sexual activity with another child, particularly a younger or more vulnerable child
- Is overly protective of siblings
- Avoids a specific person without an obvious reason
- Talks a lot about an adult
- Is threatened by physical contact, closeness
- Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen
- Comes to school early, stays late, and does not want to go home

#### **Additional indicators for adolescents**

- Is self-destructive
- Is considered promiscuous
- Abuses drugs or alcohol
- Self mutilates or attempts suicide
- Develops an eating disorder
- Runs away

### **CHILD ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

#### **Behavioral indicators**

- Low self-esteem
- Shows unusual signs of anxiety
- Shows signs of guilt
- Exhibits signs of depression
- Becomes more angry and hostile

#### **Additional indicators for adolescents**

- Shows signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Suicidal thoughts or ideation
- Misses or skips a lot of school
- Runs away from home
- Abuses drugs or alcohol
- Is sexually promiscuous

### **EMOTIONAL ABUSE**

#### **Physical indicators**

- Has speech delays
- Reports a lack of attachment to the parent
- Exhibits frequent somatic complaints typical with anxiety, ulcers, frequent stomach or headaches

#### **Behavioral indicators**

- Is fearful or anxious about doing something wrong or making a mistake
- Is excessively withdrawn
- Does not play as other children do
- Speaks negatively about his/her self
- Does not appear to be attached to the parent or caregiver
- Displays extremes in behavior, being overly compliant one minute and demanding the next
- Is extremely passive or aggressive
- Has delayed emotional development, exhibited by crying, whining, temper tantrums, hitting, biting, etc.
- Engages in self-soothing behaviors, thumb sucking, rocking, etc., outgrown by peers
- Has inappropriate adult behaviors; for example, parenting other children

- Comes to school early, stays late, and does not want to go home
- Has learning problems
- Appears anti-social and or destructive
- Is bullied or is a bully
- Attempts suicide

#### **Additional indicators for adolescents**

- Over eats
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs
- Attempts suicide

### **CHILDHOOD BULLYING**

#### **Physical indicators**

- Child has frequent cuts and/or bruises with excuses to explain them
- Physical complaints
- Changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- Has ripped or torn clothing at the end of the school day

#### **Behavioral indicators**

- Child has a sudden reluctance to go to school
- Lost lunch money or personal possessions and has excuses they seem untrue
- Spends much more time alone
- Looking and acting sad

### **CYBER PREDATORS AND CYBERBULLYING**

#### **Behavioral indicators**

- Spends large amounts of time on-line, especially at night
- Find pornography on child's computer
- Child receives phone calls from men you don't know or is making calls, sometimes long distance, to numbers you don't recognize
- Child receives gifts, mail, or packages from someone you don't know
- Child becomes withdrawn from the family
- Child uses an on-line account that belongs to someone else

**IF YOU KNOW OF OR SUSPECT CHILD ABUSE, PLEASE REPORT IT! REMEMBER YOU DO NOT HAVE TO SUBSTANTIATE THE REPORT OF ABUSE BUT IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO REPORT IT SO SOMEONE ELSE CAN.**

---

<sup>1</sup> This information was adapted from Child Welfare Information Gateway. Available online at [www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/signs.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/signs.cfm).

Additional Internet resources

<http://www.nationalcac.org/>

[http://www.preventchildabuse.org/about\\_us/faqs.shtml](http://www.preventchildabuse.org/about_us/faqs.shtml)

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/educator/educatorj.cfm>

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/educator/educatorc.cfm>

*Gilbert, R., Kemp, A., Thoburn, J., Sidebotham, P., Radford, L., Glaser, D., & MacMillan, H. L. (2009). Recognizing and responding to child*

---

maltreatment. *The Lancet*, 373(9658), 167-180. doi:DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736(08)61707-9

Walsh, K., & Farrell, A. (2008). Identifying and evaluating teachers' knowledge in relation to child abuse and neglect: A qualitative study with Australian early childhood teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(3), 585-600. doi:DOI: 10.1016/j.tate.2007.07.003