



10 Signs of Child Abuse

- 1. Unexplained injuries.** Visible signs of physical abuse may include unexplained burns or bruises in the shape of objects. You may also hear unconvincing explanations of a child's injuries.
- 2. Changes in behavior.** Abuse can lead to many changes in a child's behavior. Abused children often appear scared, anxious, depressed, withdrawn, or more aggressive.
- 3. Returning to earlier behaviors.** Abused children may display behaviors shown at earlier ages, such as thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, fear of the dark or strangers. For some children, even loss of acquired language or memory problems may be an issue.
- 4. Fear of going home.** Abused children may express apprehension or anxiety about leaving school or about going places with the person who is abusing them.
- 5. Changes in eating.** The stress, fear, and anxiety caused by abuse can lead to changes in a child's eating behaviors, which may result in weight gain or weight loss.
- 6. Changes in sleeping.** Abused children may have frequent nightmares or have difficulty falling asleep, and as a result may appear tired or fatigued.
- 7. Changes in school performance and attendance.** Abused children may have difficulty concentrating in school or have excessive absences, sometimes due to adults trying to hide the children's injuries from authorities.
- 8. Lack of personal care or hygiene.** Abused and neglected children may appear uncared for. They may present as consistently dirty and have severe body odor, or they may lack sufficient clothing for the weather.
- 9. Risk-taking behaviors.** Young people who are being abused may engage in high-risk activities such as using drugs or alcohol or carrying a weapon.
- 10. Inappropriate sexual behaviors.** Children who have been sexually abused may exhibit sexual knowledge beyond their years or use explicit sexual language.

If you suspect a child has been abused...

Do

- Keep calm.
- Tell the child you believe them.
- Show interest and concern.
- Reassure and support the child.
- Take action. Report suspected abuse or neglect.

Don't

- Panic or overreact.
- Pressure the child.
- Confront the offender.
- Blame the child or minimize the child's feelings.
- Overwhelm the child with questions.

Some signs that a child is experiencing violence or abuse are more obvious than others. Trust your instincts. Suspected abuse is enough of a reason to contact the authorities. You do not need proof. If you suspect a child is in immediate danger, call 911. In Indiana, call the Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect Central Intake Hotline at 1.800.800.5556.

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