

Behavioral and Physical Warning Signs That a Child Has Been Abused

Any one sign does not mean that the child was abused. Some of the behaviors below can show up during stressful times in a child's life, as well as when abuse occurs. If you see several of these signs in a child you know well, please begin to ask questions.

- Nightmares, trouble sleeping, fear of the dark, or other sleeping problems.
- Extreme fear of "monsters".
- Spacing out at odd times.
- Loss of appetite, or trouble eating or swallowing.
- Sudden mood swings: rage, fear, anger, or withdrawal.
- Fear of certain people or places. For example, a child may not want to be left alone with a baby-sitter, a friend, a relative, or some other child or adult; or a child who is usually talkative and cheery may become quiet and distant when around a certain person.
- Stomach illness all of the time with no identifiable reason.
- An older child behaving like a younger child, such as bed-wetting or thumb sucking.
- Sexual activities with toys or other children, such as simulating sex with dolls or asking other children/siblings to behave sexually.
- New words for private body parts.
- Refusing to talk about a "secret" he or she has with an adult or older child.
- Talking about a new older friend.
- Suddenly having money.
- Cutting or burning herself or himself as an adolescent.

Physical Warning Signs include...

- Unexplained bruises, redness, or bleeding of the child's genitals, anus, or mouth?
- Pain at the genitals, anus, or mouth?

- Genital sores or milky fluids in the genital area? If you said "yes" to any of these examples, take your child to a doctor. Your doctor can help you understand what may be happening and test for sexually transmitted diseases. *From: "Because There Is a Way to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse: Facts About Abuse and Those Who Might Commit It", Joan Tabachnick, Editor, Stop It Now!, Haydenville, MA, 1998.*