



Child Sexual Abuse

Signs and Symptoms

Sexual abuse in children shows itself in many ways — behavioral and physical. Listed below are some common signs or indicators of sexual assault. Many are general signs of distress and may not indicate that a child has been abused. But if a child shows a number of these signs and symptoms, he or she may have been a victim.

Child sexual abuse is never the child's fault. However, if the abuse was committed by someone with whom the child likes to spend time, they may experience feelings of guilt. Childhood sexual abuse may be committed by strangers, family members, acquaintances, friends or persons in a position of power over the child. Most commonly, the abuser is someone the child knows and trusts.

Behavioral Signs and Symptoms of Child Sexual Abuse

- Sudden changes in behavior: mood, fears, hypersensitivity, compulsions, withdrawal
- Disturbed sleeping patterns (nightmares, fear of dark or sleeping alone, bed-wetting)
- Excessive fears of, discomfort with or extreme sensitivity to being touched
- Fear of a certain person or certain places (such as showers or washrooms)
- Fears of previously enjoyed places/people (including fears of going home)
- Indirect allusions to problems at home; spending little time at home
- Inappropriate and obsessive sexual awareness and sexual playing
- Sudden interest in genital of others, sexual acts, and terminology
- Acting out sexual or abusive behavior with toys, animals, or people
- Sexual knowledge, vocabulary, or behavior inappropriate for the child's age
- Compulsive masturbation
- Excessive bathing or poor hygiene
- Sudden self-consciousness about genital
- Discomfort about undressing in front of peers
- Fear about examinations of the mouth
- Vehement overreaction when child is asked about being touched
- Lack of friends; lack of trust of others; isolation from peers
- Withdrawal from friends/family or retreating to fantasy world.
- Running away
- Problems in school: dramatic change in academic performance; difficulty concentrating; arriving early/leaving late; truancy; bullying peers and younger children; disrupting class

Physical signs and symptoms of child sexual abuse

- Complaints of headaches, stomachaches, overall not feeling well
- Physical ailments: pain in stomach, anal, or genital area
- Venereal disease
- Oral, genital, or anal bleeding
- Bloody, torn, or stained underpants or diapers
- Redness, swelling, itching, or trauma to the genital/anal area
- Difficulty walking, sitting, or exercising
- Pain or injury to the genitals or mouth
- Recurring vaginal or bladder infections, painful urination
- Vaginal or penile discharge
- Unusual or offensive odors

Child Sexual Abuse (continued)

Signs and Symptoms



Younger Children May Exhibit These Signs

- Nightmares and other sleep disturbances
- Irritability, Aggressiveness
- Withdrawal
- Drawings that are scary, use a lot of black and red
- Bed-wetting
- Frequent genital infection
- Clinging/Whining
- Excessive masturbation
- Loss of appetite
- Agitation, Hyperactivity
- Regression to more infantile behavior
- Unexplained gagging
- Thumb-sucking
- Fecal soiling

Older Children May React in These Ways

- Depression
- Withdrawal
- Poor self-image
- Passive or overly pleasing behaviors
- Aggression or hostility
- School failure or marked change in school performance
- Limited social life
- Recurrent physical complaints
- Self mutilation
- Suicide attempts
- Truancy
- Chemical abuse
- Overtly seductive behavior
- Attention getting or delinquent behavior
- Running away or aversion to going home

*The Sexual Violence Center works with persons 12 and above, and refers children under 12 to an agency specializing in childhood sexual violence. However, we can refer you to organizations that specialize in child sexual abuse. We do work with parents, siblings, other family members and friends of child sexual abuse victims, recognizing that these concerned persons also need to heal. Please call us at **612-871-5111** to speak to a counselor or for referrals.*