

RECOGNIZING ABUSE and WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

Helping a child

Many people are afraid of reporting child abuse. They think, "I don't want the person I reported to know," or, "I'm afraid it will come back to haunt me," or, "it's not my business."

Ironically, if you asked people if they should help if seeing a nearby car accident, most will say yes. But in a case of suspected child abuse, that thinking may be different. Why? Because of prevalent attitudes that someone else's children are either "their responsibility" or "their property."

Without aware adults, some children might never receive help. Be an advocate for children by knowing the signs of abuse and reporting child abuse. Remember, you are reporting suspicion of child abuse. Even if you aren't sure, it's better to let authorities check it out. You might save a child's life!

You should know about these signs...

When you have concerns for a child's well-being, the indicators listed below may help guide you in your thought process. Many of these "symptoms" or "signs" could be caused by things other than abuse or neglect. Generally, these indicators do indicate that a child's safety may be at risk and, at the very least, the situation should be assessed by a professional who is able to determine the causes of these symptoms and offer the help and assistance necessary to reduce the risk to a child.

Signs of Physical Abuse

Physical Indicators:

- Unexplained bruises and welts on the face, throat, upper arms, buttocks, thighs or lower back in unusual patterns or shapes which suggests the use of an instrument (belt buckle, electric cord) on an infant in various stages of healing that are seen after absences, weekends, or vacations.
- Unexplained burns, cigarette burns, especially burns found on palms, soles of feet, abdomen, buttocks; immersion burns producing "stocking" or "glove" marks on hands and feet; "doughnut shaped" on buttocks or genital area.
- Rope burns.
- Infected burns indicating delay in treatment; burns in the shape of common household utensils or appliances.

Behavioral Indicators:

- Behavioral extremes (withdrawal, aggression, regression, depression).
- Inappropriate or excessive fear of parent or caretaker.
- Antisocial behavior such as substance abuse, truancy, running away, fear of going home.
- Unbelievable or inconsistent explanation for injuries.
- Lies unusually still while surveying surroundings (for infants).
- Unusual shyness, wariness of physical contact.

Signs of Sexual Abuse

Physical Indicators:

- Torn, stained or bloody underclothes.
- Frequent, unexplained sore throats, yeast or urinary infections.
- Somatic complaints, including pain and irritation of the genitals.
- Sexually transmitted diseases.
- Bruises or bleeding from external genitalia, vagina or anal region.
- Pregnancy.

Behavioral Indicators:

- The victim's disclosure of sexual abuse.

- Regressive behaviors (thumb-sucking, bedwetting, fear of the dark).
- Promiscuity or seductive behaviors.
- Disturbed sleep patterns (recurrent nightmares).
- Unusual and age-inappropriate interest in sexual matters.
- Avoidance of undressing or wearing extra layers of clothes.
- Sudden decline in school performance, truancy.
- Difficulty in walking or sitting.

Signs of Emotional Abuse

Physical Indicators:

- Eating disorders, including obesity or anorexia.
- Speech disorders (stuttering, stammering).
- Developmental delays in the acquisition of speech or motor skills.
- Weight or height level substantially below norm.
- Flat or bald spots on head (infants).
- Nervous disorders (rashes, hives, facial tics, stomach aches).

Behavioral Indicators:

- Habit disorders (biting, rocking, head-banging).
- Cruel behavior, seeming to get pleasure from hurting children, adults or animals; seeming to get pleasure from being mistreated.
- Age-inappropriate behaviors (bedwetting, wetting, soiling).
- Behavioral extremes, such as overly compliant-demanding; withdrawn-aggressive; listless-excitabile.

Signs of Neglect

Physical Indicators:

- Poor hygiene, including lice, scabies, severe or untreated diaper rash, bedsores, body odor.
- Squinting.
- Unsuitable clothing; missing key articles of clothing (underwear, socks, shoes); overdressed or underdressed for climate conditions.
- Untreated injury or illness.
- Lack of immunizations.
- Indicators of prolonged exposure to elements (excessive sunburn, insect bites, colds).
- Height and weight significantly below age level.

Behavioral Indicators:

- Unusual school attendance.
- Chronic absenteeism.
- Chronic hunger, tiredness, or lethargy.
- Begging for or collecting leftovers.
- Assuming adult responsibilities.
- Reporting no caretaker at home.

This information provided courtesy of Lorain County, Ohio Children Services, through their website, www.childabuse.net. We provide this information as a service, and no listing of abuse or neglect indicators can include all signs. Please use your best judgment.