

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: WARNING SIGNS

- FACT:** Child sexual abuse is not rare. Research indicates that as many as 1 out of 4 girls and 1 out of 6 boys experience some form of sexual abuse before age 18.
- FACT:** Children are most often sexually abused by someone they know and trust.
- FACT:** Children of all ages, races, ethnicities, and economic backgrounds are vulnerable to sexual abuse in all kinds of neighborhoods and communities.
- FACT:** 23% of reported cases are perpetrated by individuals under the age of 18.
- FACT:** Many children are resilient, and with a combination of effective professional counseling and support from parents or caregivers, children can and do recover. Treatment from a mental health professional can minimize the physical, emotional, and social problems of these children by allowing them to process their feelings and fears related to the abuse.

It is hard to face the facts that someone we know and like might sexually abuse children. But because it's true, we all need to know what to look for and how to make sure that everyone we know lives up to an expectation of safety in our homes and communities. Do you notice some of the following behaviors in a child you know well?

BEHAVIOR INDICATORS:

- Nightmares, sleep problems, extreme fears without an obvious explanation.
- Sudden or unexplained personality changes. Seems
 withdrawn moody clingy
 change of behavior angry outbursts
 anxiety or depression significant changes in eating habits
- An older child behaving like a younger child.
- Develops fear of certain places or resists being alone with an adult or young person for unknown reasons.
- Show resistance to routine bathing, toileting, or removing clothes.
- Play, writing, drawings or dreams of sexual or frightening images.
- Stomach aches or illness, often with no identifiable reason.
- Uses new or adult words for body parts.
- Engages in adult-like sexual activities with toy, objects, or other children.
- Unexplained money, gifts or receives special privileges from certain family members.
- Intentionally harms themselves (alcohol, drugs, cutting, burning, running away).
- Becomes secretive around use of the Internet or cell phone.

PHYSICAL INDICATORS:

- Develops physical symptoms such as unexplained soreness, pain or bruises around genital or mouth.

- Has difficulty walking or sitting.
- Has repeated unusual injuries.
- Experiences pain during elimination.
- Contracts frequent yeast infections.
- Develops sexually transmitted diseases or becomes pregnant.

TIPS TO HELP PROTECT CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL ABUSE

- Teach children accurate names to private body parts.
- Keep in mind that most children are abused by someone they know and trust.
- Teach children about body safety and the difference between “okay” and “not okay” touches.
- Let children know that they have the right to make decisions about their bodies. Empower them to say no when they do not want to be touched.
- Make sure children know that adults and older children never need help with their private body parts (e.g., bathing or going to the bathroom, wiping after bathroom use).
- Educate about the differences between good secrets and bad secrets.
- Trust your instincts! If you feel uneasy about leaving a child with someone, don't do it. If you are concerned about possible sexual abuse, ask questions.

NOTE: If your child discloses any history of sexual abuse, listen carefully, and take disclosure seriously. Too often, children are not believed, particularly if they implicate a family member. Contact your pediatrician, the local child protection service agency, or the police. If you don't intervene, the abuse might continue, and the child may come to believe that home is not safe and that you are not available to help.

REFERENCES, RESOURCES TO CONTACT, & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- American Academy of Pediatrics (https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/healthy-foster-care-america/Documents/Ch4_%20PP_Child_Abuse.pdf#search=child%20sexual%20assault)
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network: Child Sexual Abuse Fact Sheet (<http://www.nsvrc.org>)
- Stop It Now! Prevent Child Sexual Abuse: Facts About Sexual Abuse and How To Prevent It (publication)
- Parents Protect! (http://www.parentsprotect.co.uk/warning_signs.htm)
- National Sexual Violence Resource Center – Under Projects: Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Resources (<http://www.nsvrc.org>)
- Missouri Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Children (http://www.msbanet.org/files/governmental_relations/MoKidsFirst_Report_FINAL.pdf)