



### 1. Changes in behavior.

Abuse can lead to many changes in behavior. Abused children often appear scared, anxious, depressed, withdrawn or more aggressive.

### 2. Returning to earlier behaviors.

Abused children may display behaviors shown at earlier ages, such as thumbsucking, bedwetting, fear of the dark, or fear of strangers. For some children, even loss of acquired language or memory problems may be an issue.

### 3. 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 or exhibit an unusual fear of a familiar person or place.

### 4. Changes in eating.

The stress, fear, and anxiety caused by abuse can lead to changes in a child's eating behavior, which may result in weight gain or weight loss.

### 5. Changes in sleeping.

Abused children may have frequent nightmares or have difficulty falling asleep and as a result may appear tired or fatigued.

### 6. 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 child's injuries from authorities.

### 7. 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.

### 8. 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.

### 9. Inappropriate sexual behaviors.

Children who have been sexually abused may exhibit overly sexualized behavior or use explicit sexual language and may exhibit symptoms of a genital infection.

### 10. Unexplained injuries.

Children who have been physically abused may exhibit unexplained burns or bruises in the shape of objects. You may also hear unconvincing explanations of a child's injuries.

## NEGLECT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Poor growth
- Excessive weight with medical complications that are not being adequately addressed
- Poor personal cleanliness
- Lack of clothing or supplies to meet physical needs
- Hoarding or stealing food
- Poor record of school attendance
- Lack of appropriate attention for medical, dental or psychological problems or lack of necessary follow-up care

## RISK FACTORS

Factors that may increase a person's risk of becoming abusive include:

- A history of being abused or neglected as a child
- Physical or mental illness, such as depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Family crisis or stress, including domestic violence and other marital conflicts, or single parenting
- A child in the family who is developmentally or physically disabled
- Financial stress, unemployment or poverty
- Social or extended family isolation
- Poor understanding of child development and parenting skills
- Alcohol, drugs or other substance abuse

## HOW CAN I STOP CHILD ABUSE?

**Talk to the child.** Talk to the child if you notice a change in their behavior or if they start reacting in worrisome new ways. Having open, friendly conversations (within healthy boundaries) allows the child to trust you and feel comfortable telling you if they don't feel safe. Let children know it's OK to tell you something even if it might upset someone.

**Seek help.** Don't let fear or embarrassment prevent you from seeking help. When you contact authorities to report abuse, your name is not released to the family or person involved. If you suspect that a child is experiencing abuse, call or contact:

- 911 if the child is in immediate danger.
- Your local child protective agency, police or hospital.
- The Child Help National Child Abuse hotline: 800-422-4453, open 24/7.
- Pediatrician, who can also help direct you in cases of child abuse.
- Religious or spiritual advisor, who can provide counseling and support.

