

# Signs of Possible Child Sexual Abuse

There is no universal list of child sexual abuse (CSA) signs and symptoms. However, the list here is designed to help watch for potential indications that a child is being abused. The list is drawn from multiple resources.\*

Be diligent. If you suspect CSA, report it to authorities.

See the back of this card for what to do if you suspect abuse or a child tells you that he/she is experiencing it.



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- Sudden and noticeable behavioral/physical changes
- Guilt or shame-based behaviors
- Avoidance behaviors (i.e. avoiding particular situations or persons for no apparent reason)
- Intimate physical contact (i.e. kissing) or spending a lot of time with older persons
- Aggressive and/or risky personal behaviors (i.e. bullying, self-mutilation)
- Overriding depression or suicidal thoughts or behaviors
- Regressive behavior patterns (returning to an earlier stage in their social development)
- Decrease in school performance/social involvement in activities/general low self-esteem
- Sudden onset of sexualized behavior that is age and situationally inappropriate
- Sudden onset gender confusion (especially in males)
- Expressions of anger, hostility, or fear toward others or themselves
- Sudden weight gain or prolonged loss of appetite
- Long-term sleeping difficulties/nightmares/waking up screaming
- Physical addictions (drugs/alcohol) or addictive behaviors (i.e. sexually-based actions)
- Taking excessive showers or baths (feeling "dirty")
- Sudden onset bedwetting or involuntary defecating or constipation
- Difficulty using the toilet or void-related actions (i.e. must be alone to void, feces spreading)
- Sudden onset rectal or vaginal bleeding or genital pains; torn, bloody, or stained clothing
- An unusually close mother-son, father-daughter, or child-leader relationship
- Situations for a child that "just don't seem right." **Listen to your inner warning radar!**

\* Most children will normally display some of these signs and symptoms during their developmental years. That does not necessarily indicate abuse. Pay attention to sudden onset changes and their severity, dramatic changes in the child's personality and social functioning, and behaviors that are not appropriate for given situations.

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# If you suspect a child is being sexually abused

## What can I do?

- Look for the signs of abuse.\*
- Find a child-safe place and time\*\* to talk to the child about your concerns or any disclosures from them.
- Believe what you are being told. Most abuse reports are genuine.
- Listen carefully and remain calm to make the child more willing to talk about their abuse.
- Don't ask leading or probing questions. Ask open-ended questions like "what happened next?"
- Answer their questions the best you can. Be honest if you don't know something.
- Validate their feelings about how difficult it is to discuss the situation and subject.
- Assure them that the abuse is not their fault and you will try to help stop it.
- Determine the specific details of the abuse if possible and make notes after the conversation to accurately report the abuse to authorities.
- Keep the child safe as you notify authorities (police and/or child protective services) and then follow up to make sure that they have investigated.
- Don't confront the perpetrator directly. But identify and protect other children who may be abused by the same perpetrator.

\* See our brochure for a comprehensive list of the signs and symptoms of child sexual abuse or visit our website for a printable version.

\*\* Child-safe place and time means a place and time that is private enough for the child to disclose abuse, but keeps the child safe from further abuse or intimidation.

## BEST PREVENTION PRACTICE:

**Be diligent and present in a child's life to prevent sexual abuse from ever occurring**



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