

## Know the Signs of Sexual Abuse

### Physical

Many times sexual abuse does not injure a child's body so there may be no physical indicators of sexual abuse. Of course, if a child has any injury to their anal or genital areas this is certainly cause for concern and the child should be examined by a physician. Also, any unusual discharge or sign of sexually transmitted disease should be immediately brought to the attention of a physician.

### Emotional

Sexual abuse affects children in many different ways making it really difficult to list definitive "signs" of abuse. The effects of sexual abuse are also a function of a child's developmental level so it is important to consider changes in a child's behavior in light of their age and development. In preschool children, the following could be cause for concern:

- Unusual preoccupation with sex and sexual behavior
- Knowledge of adult sex acts either acted out or verbalized
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Increased fearfulness and anxiety
- Increased irritability and angry outbursts
- Increased sadness and crying
- Regression to earlier developmental level -- for example, bedwetting or loss of bowel control when child was previously potty trained

Older children may show some of the same changes in behavior as well as the following:

- Withdrawing from friends and caregivers
- Changes in school performance
- Loss of interest in activities or hobbies
- Engaging in "risky" or self-harming behavior

Please remember there is no "diagnosis" of sexual abuse. It is something that happens to children and it can have many different effects. If you suspect child abuse, report it.



**ANY ADULT who suspects that a child is being Sexually Abused IS Required to report it to AUTHORITIES!**

### WHAT TO DO

1. Stay calm. Take a deep breath. Reacting in an angry or hysterical way will not reassure your child that you can handle whatever they may need to tell you. No child wants to upset Mom or Dad.
2. Talk to your child. Make sure she understands the rules about OK and Not OK touches and let her know it is always right to tell if someone is not following the rules. Reassure him that no matter what someone else has said, he will not be in trouble.
3. Ask your child open-ended questions. Do not introduce anyone's name or ask about a specific act. Children are not as suggestible as people once thought but you do not want to introduce something that the child has not said.
4. Listen carefully and let your child know you will do everything you can to keep her safe. Do not make promises or threats. This may actually make your child reluctant to disclose abuse to you.
5. Report any suspicions to the police or Child Protective Services.

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