

child abuse and neglect red flags

for mandated reporters providing online services

When looking for signs of child abuse and neglect while providing online services, it can be difficult, as most traditional ways to assess are not accessible. This guide hopes to aid professionals in upholding their mandates. One or some of these signs are *not definitive proof* of abuse, but are red flags to *be aware of*. Use it to help make clinical determinations. Be mindful of internal bias and systemic racism which disproportionately increases reporting rates for BIPOC families. Consult regularly and use strong clinical judgement.

signs from the caregiver

Most of the signs for potential abuse will come from interaction with the caregiver. Take note of these different interactions:

- Shows little concern for youth's schooling or engagement in treatment.
- Not accessible for follow-up and communication.
- Does not follow up on referrals for mental or medical care.
- Minimal ability to recognize physical or emotional distress in the youth. The youth is upset, crying, or screaming, and the guardian does not respond.
- Excessively blames problems in the household on the youth and complains to teachers/providers that not enough is being done to stop their disruptive behavior. Minimal acknowledgment or refusal to make any connections over how the pandemic and disruption to routine has caused trauma.
- Uses belittling language in front of the youth when speaking to providers, such as calling them "useless," "worthless," or "evil."
- Showing unnecessary and over-the-top attention to the youth and speaks of getting jealous over other family members giving the youth attention. Unnecessary attention may include requesting the youth do sessions on their lap (and doesn't match developmental need) or in their bedroom when youth has other private space options.
- Demands an inappropriate level of physical or academic performance that isn't age or developmentally appropriate.
- Severely limits the youth's contact with friends, family, and teachers or providers. Session times or class times are shortened unnecessarily.
- Physically disciplining the youth on camera (with or without an object). Providers are expected to ask the youth about pain level (requesting the guardian not be present if possible) and request to see the area to look for signs of marks left on the body. *Be aware that this may happen often because families tend to regress to their mean actions (how they normally behave) forgetting that they are on camera.*

signs from the youth

Take note these different interactions that are potential signs from youth:

- Signs in behavior changes, including aggression, anger, hostility, hyperactivity, or shyness.
- Signs of regression, including encopresis, enuresis, or loss of previously acquired developmental skills.
- Signs of weight loss in the face (sunken cheeks, sunken eyes, seeing collarbone easily, etc.). Inquire about how much the youth weighs or if they have lost weight. Ask what their diet is. Ask them if they are hiding food or keeping food in special places. Ask them if their room has a smell or ask the guardian if they have noticed a smell (looking for signs of hoarding).
- Wearing the same outfit daily. Ask how long and how often they have been wearing the same outfit. Even at home and finding more ways to be relaxed, youth should still at least change their clothes fairly regularly (learn what is normal for the family and if anything has changed behavior-wise). On the opposite spectrum, look for signs of the youth changing their clothes often. Ask how many showers they take.
- Excessive scratching of their arms or legs. These are potential signs of healing wounds.
- Signs of difficulty using the mouse, keyboard, or fine tools (like pencil and pens). Inquire if they are in pain when using these items.
- Include movement exercises in session and see if the youth has difficulty with certain movements (stretching their arms all the way up or twisting their back and body) that shouldn't be a problem. This may be an indicator of pain.
- Unexplained injuries or injuries that don't match the explanation, such as bruises, fractures, or burns. Look for these on their arms, shoulders, and/or legs (which may be visible during movement exercises).
- Looking at pornography during the session, or requesting to undress or show explicit sexual acts on screen.
- Reporting a desire to run away, self-harm, or die by suicide.



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This resource is not a substitute for professional training, supervision, or competency. Be mindful of current laws and professional ethics.