

Identifying and Reporting Child Sexual Abuse

Recognizing and reporting child sexual abuse is vital to protect a child's immediate safety and support their long-term well-being. Reporting abuse opens the door to essential medical, psychological, and social help. It also fulfills our legal and moral duty as responsible adults.

Signs of abuse may be subtle and can overlap with other signs of stress or trauma in children. Being informed about what to watch for can make a critical difference.

Please note: Many of these signs could have other explanations, and are not always indicative of abuse. If you have suspicions, you can make a report.

POSSIBLE SIGNS OF CHILD PHYSICAL ABUSE

Unexplained Bruises or Lacerations

- On face, lips, mouth, gums
- On torso, back, buttocks, thighs
- In various stages of healing
- Clustered, forming a regular pattern
- Reflecting the shape of an object (e.g., electric cord, belt buckle)
- On several different surface areas
- Bite marks
- To external genitalia

Unexplained Burns

- Cigar or cigarette burns (especially on soles, palms, back, buttocks)
- Immersion burns (sock-like, glove-like, doughnut-shaped on buttocks/genitalia, patterned like a burner or iron)
- Rope burns (on arms, legs, neck, torso)

Unexplained Fractures

- Skull, nose, or facial fractures
- Fractures in various stages of healing (visible on x-rays)
- Multiple fractures
- Fractures in children under 3 years old without a clear explanation or witness
- Spiral fractures (caused by twisting force)

Behavioral Indicators

- Wary of adult contact
- Apprehensive when other children cry
- Aggressive, withdrawn, or extreme behaviors
- Frightened of caregivers or certain individuals
- Reluctant or afraid to go home or to specific places
- Reports of injury by a caregiver or specific person

POSSIBLE SIGNS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Physical Indicators

- Pain or itching in the genital area, with blood or discharge
- Painful urination or bowel movements
- Loss of anal sphincter control
- Bruising or lacerations on genitalia, vaginal, or anal areas
- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or pregnancy in a child under 16

Behavioral Indicators

- Sexualized play or knowledge that is inappropriate for the child's age
- The child discloses sexual assault
- Unexplained changes in sleep (nightmares, insomnia, bed wetting)
- Self-destructive behavior:
 - Self-mutilation
 - Eating problems
 - Suicidal thoughts or actions

POSSIBLE SIGNS OF CHILD EMOTIONAL ABUSE OR NEGLECT

Developmental & Physical Indicators

- Speech or developmental delays
- Failure to thrive (poor growth or weight gain)
- Habit disorders (e.g., rocking, head banging)
- Consistent hunger or poor hygiene
- Unattended medical or dental needs
- Begging or stealing food
- Extended stays at school (arriving early or leaving late)
- Constant fatigue or listlessness

Emotional & Behavioral Indicators

- Conduct disorders (e.g., disruptive, defiant behavior)
- Behavioral extremes (overly passive or aggressive)
- Overly adaptive behavior:
 - Acts too adult (e.g., parenting siblings)
 - Acts too infantile (e.g., clinging, rocking)
- Psychoneurotic symptoms:
 - Hysteria
 - Obsessions or compulsions
 - Phobias
 - Hypochondria
- Attempted suicide or self-harm
- Child reports having no caretaker

It is important to report any possible signs of abuse as soon as they are observed. Prompt reporting ensures trained authorities can assess the situation and take appropriate action to protect the child. Reports must be made to law enforcement or the child protection/human services agency in the county where the child resides.

Please note: Referrals for our services must come directly from local law enforcement or county human services. For a complete list of local Minnesota Agencies, visit the Department of Human Services at: <https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/children-and-families/services/child-protection/contact-us/>

If you have any questions or need more information, our staff is happy to assist you. Please call us directly at 507-386-3900.

Learn more about our center and the services we provide at: <https://cfacsouthcentralmn.org>