

# Recognizing Child Abuse

## Types of Abuse

The following are some signs often associated with particular types of child abuse and neglect: physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. It is important to note, however, that these types of abuse are more typically found in combination than alone. A physically abused child, for example, is often emotionally abused as well, and a sexually abused child also may be neglected.

### Signs of Physical Abuse - Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the child:

- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school
- Seems frightened of the parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home
- Shrinks at the approach of adults
- Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver

### Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child's injury
- Describes the child as "evil," or in some other very negative way
- Uses harsh physical discipline with the child
- Has a history of abuse as a child

### Signs of Neglect - Consider the possibility of neglect when the child:

- Is frequently absent from school
- Begs or steals food or money
- Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses
- Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs
- States that there is no one at home to provide care

### Consider the possibility of neglect when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Appears to be indifferent to the child
- Seems apathetic or depressed

- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner
- Is abusing alcohol or other drugs

**Signs of Sexual Abuse - Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the child:**

- Has difficulty walking or sitting
- Suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under age 14
- Runs away
- Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver

**Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the parent or other adult caregiver:**

- Is unduly protective of the child or severely limits the child's contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex
- Is secretive and isolated
- Is jealous or controlling with family members

**Signs of Emotional Maltreatment - Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the child:**

- Shows extremes in behavior, such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity, or aggression
- Is either inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example) or inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking or head-banging, for example)
- Is delayed in physical or emotional development
- Has attempted suicide
- Reports a lack of attachment to the parent

**Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the parent or other adult caregiver:**

- Constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child
- Is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for the child's problems
- Overtly rejects the child

**Resources for Recognizing Potential Indicators of Child Abuse**

-Identification of Child Abuse & Neglect (U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services)  
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/can/identifying/>

-Recognizing Child Abuse or Neglect (U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services)  
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/childcare/chaptertwo.cfm>

-Warning Signs of Abuse and Neglect (Childhelp Speak Up Be Safe)  
<http://www.speakupbesafe.org/parents/warning-signs-of-abuse-and-neglect-for-parents.pdf>

-Warning Signs of child abuse and neglect (HelpGuide.org)  
[http://www.helpguide.org/mental/child\\_abuse\\_physical\\_emotional\\_sexual\\_neglect.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/child_abuse_physical_emotional_sexual_neglect.htm)

-Indicators for Child Maltreatment (Quality Improvement Center on Early Childhood (QIC-EC))  
<http://www.qic-ec.org/documents/research-and-findings/research-commissioned-papers/Indicators-for-Child-Maltreatment-Prevention-Programs.pdf>

-Indicators of Abuse (Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance) [https://www.pafsa.org/mandated\\_reporters/child\\_abuse\\_information/indicators\\_of\\_child\\_abuse\\_0.aspx](https://www.pafsa.org/mandated_reporters/child_abuse_information/indicators_of_child_abuse_0.aspx)

-Signs of Child Abuse (Joyful Heart Foundation) <http://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org/learn/child-abuse-neglect/about-issue/know-signs>

-Abuse and Neglect Resources (Kids Matter, Inc.) – Click on types of child abuse for indicator list  
<http://www.kidsmatterinc.org/for-families/abuse-and-neglect-resources/?gclid=CKfOheOa68ACFUvo7Aodl1sAYw>

-Child Physical Abuse (American Humane Association) <http://www.americanhumane.org/children/stop-child-abuse/fact-sheets/child-physical-abuse.html>

-Child Sexual Abuse (American Humane Association) <http://www.americanhumane.org/children/stop-child-abuse/fact-sheets/child-sexual-abuse.html>

-Child Neglect (American Humane Association) <http://www.americanhumane.org/children/stop-child-abuse/fact-sheets/child-neglect.html>

-Emotional Abuse (American Humane Association) <http://www.americanhumane.org/children/stop-child-abuse/fact-sheets/emotional-abuse.html>

Source: The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center