



# SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE



Below are indicators of child abuse that can include but are not limited to these signs. Some signs that a child is experiencing violence or abuse are more obvious than others. Trust your instincts. Suspected abuse is enough of a reason to contact the authorities. You do not need proof.

## 1 Unexplained injuries

Visible signs of physical abuse may include unexplained burns or bruises in the shape of objects. You may also hear unconvincing explanations of a child's injuries.

## 2 Changes in behavior

Abuse can lead to many changes in a child's behavior. Abused children often appear scared, anxious, depressed, withdrawn or more aggressive.

## 3 Returning to earlier behaviors

Abused children may display behaviors shown at earlier ages, such as thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, fear of the dark or strangers. For some children, even loss of acquired language or memory problems may be an issue.

## 4 Fear of going home

Abused children may express apprehension or anxiety about leaving school or about going places with the person who is abusing them.

## 5 Changes in eating

The stress, fear and anxiety caused by abuse can lead to changes in a child's eating behaviors, which may result in weight gain or weight loss.

## 6 Changes in sleeping

Abused children may have frequent nightmares or have difficulty falling asleep, and as a result may appear tired or fatigued.

## 7 Changes in school performance and attendance

Abused children may have difficulty concentrating in school or have excessive absences, sometimes due to adults trying to hide the children's injuries from authorities

## 8 Lack of personal care or hygiene

Abused and neglected children may appear uncared for. They may present as consistently dirty and have severe body odor, or they may lack sufficient clothing for the weather.

## 9 Risk-taking behaviors

Young people who are being abused may engage in high-risk activities such as using drugs or alcohol or carrying a weapon.

## 10 Inappropriate sexual behaviors

Children who have been sexually abused may exhibit overly sexualized behavior or use explicit sexual language.

If a child discloses:

**DO**

Remain calm.

Believe the child.

Allow the child to talk.

Show interest and concern.

Reassure and support the child.

Take action. It could save a child's life

**DON'T**

Panic or overreact.

Press the child to talk.

Promise anything you can't control.

Confront the offender.

Blame or minimize the child's feelings.

Overwhelm the child with questions.



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If you suspect a child is being abused, contact the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families local Area Office nearest you or call the Child-At-Risk Hotline at 1-800-792-5200. If the child is in immediate danger, call 911. Visit Norfolk Advocates for Children website at [www.NorfolkAdvocatesForChildren.com](http://www.NorfolkAdvocatesForChildren.com) for more information.

**One**  
with courage

**One with Courage** is a national campaign that focuses on the courage it takes to talk about child sexual abuse and the unique role Children's Advocacy Centers play in providing comprehensive, coordinated and compassionate services to child victims of abuse. You can help — learn the signs, share this information and be the **One with Courage** to make a difference.

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