

HOW TO RECOGNIZE ABUSE

If I Am Being Abused

What is child abuse?

All abuse hurts, but different kinds of abuse may hurt you in different ways. It can be emotional, physical or sexual. Neglect is also a form of child abuse. This is when a parent or caregiver doesn't take care of a child's needs. All of the feelings below are normal reactions to being abused.

How do I know if I am being abused?

If you are being abused you may feel:

- sad
- angry
- scared
- confused
- lonely
- guilty
- embarrassed
- ashamed

All of these feelings are normal reactions to being abused, and it's ok to have them.

You may have lots of questions about abuse and why it happens and we can answer those questions. It's our job to help keep you safe if you are hurt or scared.

Emotional abuse

When someone is emotionally abusing you they are saying things to hurt you. There are no cuts or bruises, but emotional abuse can make you feel unwanted, unloved, useless and unworthy. It can make you feel helpless and alone like there is no one to love and care for you.

Here are some ways an adult would act if they were emotionally abusing you:

- Ignoring you
- Threatening to have the police or someone else take you away
- Not letting you leave the house or see your friends
- Always swearing in front of you
- Saying that you are bad or stupid

If you are feeling bad about the way an adult is treating you, call us to talk about it, because we can help.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse might leave marks, bruises, broken bones or more serious injuries on your body. Here are some examples of physical abuse:

- hitting

- punching
- burning
- shaking
- scratching
- kicking
- pinching
- biting

Physical abuse hurts your body and makes you feel bad. It is never OK for someone to hurt a child. If an adult is hurting you, it is important to call your [local Children's Aid Society](#), so you can talk to a worker and get help.

Sexual abuse

Your private parts are any areas of your body that are covered up when you are wearing a bikini (for girls) or a bathing suit (if you're a boy). If someone touches or tries to touch your private parts, or, if someone tries to take pictures of your private parts, this is called sexual abuse. And if someone makes you touch, or asks you to touch their private parts or someone else's, this is also sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse can make you feel:

- dirty
- scared
- guilty
- ashamed
- angry
- sad
- embarrassed

It is never okay for someone to sexually abuse you, no matter what they tell you. Many kids keep sexual abuse secret, especially if they are confused about how their body responded. This can make it even harder to talk about sexual abuse than to talk about other types of abuse.

We understand what you are feeling, and we can help. It's important to call us if you think you are being abused.

Neglect

Neglect is when your parent or other adult does not give you things you need such as:

- food
- a safe home
- clothing
- safety
- supervision

You should have enough food every day so that you don't feel hungry, clothes that are clean, fit you and keep you warm in the winter. You should live in a home and not on the street. Your home should be clean, safe and warm, and you should feel safe inside your home.

If I Suspect Abuse

How abuse and neglect happens

Abuse and neglect of a child can occur through two main ways - acts of commission (doing something) and acts of omission (not doing something).

An act of commission occurs as the result of a caregiver doing something that harms or is likely to harm a child. For example, striking a child or sexually molesting a child is an act of commission.

An act of abuse or neglect through omission results from a caregiver not taking action to protect a child. For example, allowing a small child to play near a busy street unsupervised or allowing a known sexual offender to be alone with your child could be acts of omission.

What is child abuse

Child abuse means physically hurting a child, sexually molesting a child, failing to provide proper care or depriving a child of support and affection.

Children's Aid Societies are mandated by government to protect children from harm. To read the Child and Family Services Act, visit www.gov.on.ca

Signs of abuse

Child abuse has many faces. Here are some of the most common signs:

The signs and indicators of abuse and neglect may include but are not limited to those that follow. It is important to realize that the presence of any one indicator is not conclusive proof that a child has been abused. In most instances, abused children will exhibit a number of behavioural and physical indicators. It's not your responsibility to determine whether a child is being abused. Call your [local Children's Aid Society](#) to report known or suspected signs and indicators of abuse.

Neglect

Most parents and caregivers don't intend to neglect their children. Instead, neglect is usually the result of ignorance about parenting and an inability to plan ahead. When there is a pattern where the caregiver fails to provide basic needs such as food, sleep, safety, supervision, appropriate clothing or medical treatment, that's neglect.

Children suffering neglect are often pale, listless and unkempt. They frequently miss school and may show up dressed inappropriately or in dirty clothes. More signs and indicators of neglect

The signs and indicators of abuse and neglect may include but are not limited to those that follow.

Behavioural indicators

- pale, listless, unkempt
- frequent absence from school
- inappropriate clothing for the weather, dirty clothes
- engaged in delinquent acts, alcohol/drug abuse
- frequently forgets a lunch

Physical indicators

- poor hygiene
- unattended physical problems or medical needs, e.g. dental work, glasses
- consistent lack of supervision

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is when a child is injured or harmed by his or her caregiver, or when the caregiver fails to do something to protect the child. Injuries include bruises, cuts, burns, and fractures. Children who are physically abused often can't remember how injuries happened or they offer inconsistent stories when questioned. They might be wary of adults and extremely aggressive or extremely withdrawn. More signs and indicators of physical abuse

Injuries may include: bruises, welts, cuts, fractures, burns or internal injuries. Physical abuse can be one or two isolated incidents or can occur over a prolonged period of time. The signs and indicators of abuse and neglect may include but are not limited to those that follow.

Behavioural indicators

- cannot recall how injuries occurred or offers an inconsistent explanation
- wary of adults
- may cringe or flinch if touched unexpectedly
- infants may display a vacant stare
- extremely aggressive or extremely withdrawn
- indiscriminately seeks affection
- extremely compliant and/or eager to please

Physical indicators

- injuries that are not consistent with explanation
- presence of several injuries that are in various stages of healing
- presence of various injuries over a period of time
- facial injuries in infants and preschool children
- injuries inconsistent with the child's age and developmental phase

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse happens when a caregiver treats a child in an extremely negative way that damages self esteem and the concept of self. This type of behaviour might include constant yelling, demeaning remarks, rejection or isolation or exposing a child to domestic violence in the home. Emotional abuse can be difficult to identify, but some behavioural indicators include inhibition in play, severe depression and extreme withdrawal or aggressiveness. Children may complain of headaches, nausea or abdominal pain. More signs and indicators of emotional abuse

The signs and indicators of abuse and neglect may include but are not limited to those that follow.

Behavioural indicators

- severe depression
- extreme withdrawal or aggressiveness
- overly compliant, too well mannered, too neat or clean
- extreme attention seeking
- displays extreme inhibition in play

Physical indicators

- bed wetting that is non-medical in origin
- frequent psychosomatic complaints, headaches, nausea, abdominal pains
- child fails to thrive

Sexual abuse*

Sexual abuse is any sexual exploitation of a child by a caregiver or someone else and includes sexual touching, getting sexual activity from a child, exposing genitals to a child and incest. Signs that a child has been sexually abused include excessive itching in the genital or anal areas, torn, stained or bloody underwear and injuries to the genital area. Behavioural signs include age inappropriate sexually explicit drawings, displaying sexual acts or unusual sexual knowledge. More signs and indicators of sexual abuse

*According to the Child and Family Services Act, the law that gives Children's Aid Societies their legal authority, sexual abuse is any sexual exploitation of a child by someone having charge of the child-parent, caregiver; sexual abuse is also sexual exploitation by another person where the person with responsibility (parent or caregiver) should be aware of the possibility of abuse and fails to protect the child.

The signs and indicators of abuse and neglect may include but are not limited to those that follow.

Behavioural indicators

- age inappropriate play with toys, self or others displaying explicit sexual acts
- age inappropriate sexually explicit drawing and/or descriptions
- bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual knowledge
- prostitution
- seductive behaviours

Physical indicators

- unusual or excessive itching in the genital or anal area
- torn, stained or bloody underwear (may be observed if the child needs bathroom assistance)
- pregnancy
- injuries to the genital or anal areas, e.g. bruising, swelling or infection
- venereal disease

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