

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 Abused children often appear scared, anxious, depressed, withdrawn or more aggressive.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. For cases outside of our state, go to machildrensalliance.org and click on "One with Courage" for links to resources nationwide.



One with Courage, a national campaign proudly offered by the Massachusetts Children's Alliance, focuses on the courage it takes to talk about child sexual abuse. As a leader among the state membership associations of Children's Advocacy Centers, our goal each and every day is to change the way Massachusetts responds to child abuse. You can help – learn the signs, share this information and be the **One with Courage** to make a difference.