

Recognize the Warning Signs of Abuse

Most children are too scared or too ashamed to disclose abuse, especially when it's sexual in nature. In fact, it's estimated that only 10% of child victims ever come forward on their own. You can help by becoming familiar with the warning signs of abuse and watch for changes in a child's behavior or other signs. These warning signs can be physical, emotional, behavioral or environmental in nature. Although it is important to remember that this is not a checklist that determines if a child has been abused or not, it is equally important that a child's safety and well-being be of paramount importance. If you have reason to suspect a child has been abused or neglected, NYS law requires professionals that are mandated reporters to make a report to the State Central Register immediately. If you are not a mandated reporter, you are encouraged to report suspected abuse or maltreatment or seek help if you are unsure of what to do.

Physical Indicators of Abuse:

- Bruises, welts, burns that can not be sufficiently explained
- Injuries where children don't usually get hurt (the back, neck, back of the legs, face)
- Repeated injuries
- Sudden weight loss or gain
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Pregnancy
- Nausea / upset stomach
- Unattended physical or medical problems
- Lack of supervision
- Pain or itching in the genital area
- Forcing or attempting sexual acts on other children or adults

Emotional Symptoms:

- Mood swings
- Depression
- Suicidal thoughts or attempts
- Flashbacks
- Difficulty concentrating

Behavioral Indicators of Abuse:

- Changes in sleep patterns
- Nightmares or night terrors
- Excessive masturbation
- Sexual knowledge or play inappropriate for the child's age
- Promiscuity
- Self-abuse such as cutting
- Running away from home
- Isolation from others
- Conduct disorders
- Explicit drawings
- Self disclosure of abuse
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs
- Layers of clothing inappropriate for the weather

Environmental Indicators of Abuse:

- Fire hazards – blocked exits, flammable materials
- Spoiled food or no food
- Toxic materials accessible to children
- Exposed raw sewage
- Human or animal feces in the home
- No heat source in cold weather
- No access to water or toilets