

Understanding the Signs of Child Abuse and Neglect

Child abuse can come in different forms, like physical and emotional harm, sexual abuse, or neglect. Part of our responsibility as community members is to be aware of these signs and protect children from harm. Being aware allows us to act and helps create a safer environment for kids to grow up in without fear.

Changes in behavior. Children who are experiencing abuse often appear anxious, aggressive, depressed, withdrawn, or scared. Some may return to earlier behaviors such as thumb sucking, wetting the bed, or intense fear of strangers or the dark.

Fear of going home. Children may hesitate or feel anxiety about leaving school or going places with the person who is abusing them. They may also show an unusual fear of a familiar person or place.

Changes in eating. Stress, fear, and anxiety caused by abuse can lead to changes in a child's eating behavior. This may result in weight gain or weight loss.

Changes in sleeping. Children experiencing abuse may have frequent nightmares or difficulty falling asleep. As a result, they may appear tired or fatigued.

Changes in school performance and attendance. Children may have difficulty concentrating in school or have excessive absences if they are experiencing abuse. Absences can be due to adults trying to hide the child's injuries.

Lack of personal care or hygiene. Abused and neglected children may visually appear uncared for. They might often seem dirty and have a strong body odor, or they may not have appropriate clothing for the weather.

Risk-taking behaviors. Some children and young adults who are being abused may engage in high-risk activities. This can include using drugs or alcohol or carrying a weapon.

Inappropriate sexual behaviors. Children who have been sexually abused may display overly sexualized behavior, have physical signs of sexual abuse, or use explicit sexual language.

Unexplained injuries. Burns, cuts, and bruises are all visible signs of physical abuse. Explanations from caregivers for these injuries are often unconvincing.

It's important to understand that children may show all or none of these signs. Suspicion of abuse is enough of a reason to take action. Concerned citizens have a legal obligation to report to the Department for Community-Based Services (DCBS) when there is reason to believe a child is being abused or neglected. Individuals can make a report by calling 1-877-595-2331. If a child needs immediate protection, call 911.

By understanding the signs of child abuse and neglect, we can work together to make a profound difference and shape a future where every child grows up in a world filled with love, safety, and endless possibilities.



Seven Counties Services