

HOW TO RECOGNIZE
CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT





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How do we know when a child is being abused or neglected? As a school community, part of our responsibility in protecting children is reaching out to children suffering abuse, but we must first know how to identify them. Learning to recognize the indicators of abuse and neglect is crucial for our school communities.

The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide practical information on the various forms and indicators of abuse and neglect, so that educators can recognize cases of abuse and take appropriate actions to support the child, based on school policies.

Seeing one or more of the following indicators does not necessarily mean that a child is being abused. Indicators usually occur in clusters. In some cases, there are no obvious indicators that abuse is taking place. However, when signs appear often, or when several appear at a time, you should report your suspicions to the person designated by your school to handle these matters, and follow your school policy for handling cases of abuse.

It's important to bear in mind that the abuser, whether a parent, another adult, or even another child, has often been a victim of abuse. Parents may be overwhelmed by stress, feelings of helplessness, or may be involved in substance abuse. Shaming them may only aggravate the situation. Referring such cases for professional intervention and counseling, where available, is the best option.

Based on the child's age, abilities, medical and family history, the following signs may indicate abuse or neglect, whether in the home, at school, or in other settings.

Possible Indicators of Abuse or Neglect	
The Child:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance ▪ Has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to the parents' attention ▪ Has learning problems (or difficulty concentrating) that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes ▪ Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen ▪ Lacks adult supervision ▪ Is overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn ▪ Comes to school or other activities early, stays late, and does not want to go home



<p>The Parent:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shows little concern for the child ▪ Denies the existence of—or blames the child for—the child’s problems in school or at home ▪ Asks teachers or other caregivers to use harsh physical discipline if the child misbehaves ▪ Sees the child as entirely bad, worthless, or burdensome ▪ Demands a level of physical or academic performance the child cannot achieve ▪ Looks primarily to the child for care, attention, and satisfaction of emotional needs
<p>The Parent and Child:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rarely touch or look at each other ▪ Consider their relationship entirely negative ▪ State that they do not like each other, or make other derogatory remarks

<h3 style="text-align: center;">Types of Abuse</h3>	
<p><i>The following types of abuse are more often found in combination than alone. A physically abused child, for example, is often emotionally abused as well, and a sexually abused child may also be neglected.</i></p>	
<p>Physical Abuse</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes ▪ fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school ▪ seems frightened of the parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home ▪ shrinks at the approach of adults ▪ reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver
<p>Neglect</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ frequent absences from school ▪ begging or stealing food or money ▪ lack of needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses ▪ lack of personal grooming ▪ lacks sufficient clothing for the weather ▪ abuses alcohol or other drugs ▪ states that there is no one at home to provide care
<p>Sexual Abuse</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ has difficulty walking or sitting ▪ suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities ▪ reports nightmares or bedwetting ▪ experiences a sudden change in appetite ▪ demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior ▪ becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under age 14 ▪ runs away



<p>Emotional Abuse</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shows extremes in behavior, such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity, or aggression ▪ Is either inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example) or inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking or head-banging, for example) ▪ Is delayed in physical or emotional development ▪ Has attempted suicide ▪ Reports a lack of attachment to the parent
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For more information see also:

[How to Help Someone You Care About Do Children Abuse Other Children?](https://www.rainn.org/sites/default/files/HelpSomeoneOnePageRAINN.pdf)

<https://www.rainn.org/sites/default/files/HelpSomeoneOnePageRAINN.pdf>
<https://cultureofsafety.thesilverlining.com/childcare/peer-abuse/>

Age-Specific Information on Child Abuse:

[Ages 0-5](https://www.thewholechild.org/parent-resources/age-0-5/how-to-identify-child-abuse-ages-0-5/)

<https://www.thewholechild.org/parent-resources/age-0-5/how-to-identify-child-abuse-ages-0-5/>

[Ages 6-12](https://www.thewholechild.org/parent-resources/age-6-12/how-to-identify-child-abuse-ages-6-12/)

<https://www.thewholechild.org/parent-resources/age-6-12/how-to-identify-child-abuse-ages-6-12/>

[Ages 13-18](https://www.thewholechild.org/parent-resources/age-13-18/how-to-identify-child-abuse-ages-13-18/)

<https://www.thewholechild.org/parent-resources/age-13-18/how-to-identify-child-abuse-ages-13-18/>