

Protecting Our Children

Recognizing the Signs



What are some of the Signs and Symptoms of Abuse that I ought to watch for if I suspect a child or youth has been or is being abused?

Signs and Symptoms of Abuse

- The **first step** in **helping abused or neglected children:**

- Learn to recognize the **signs of child abuse and neglect.**

- The **second step:**

- Learn to recognize the **signs and traits of a possible abuser.**

The presence of a single sign does not prove child abuse is occurring nor that someone is an abuser. A closer look at the situation is warranted when these signs appear repeatedly or in combination.

Signs and Symptoms of Abuse

The Child:

- 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- Is overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn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

Recognizing Child Abuse

The following signs may signal the presence of child abuse or neglect

The Parent or Adult Caretaker:

- 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

Recognizing Child Abuse

The following signs may signal the presence of child abuse or neglect

The Parent or Adult Caretaker and Child:

- Rarely touch or look at each other
- Consider their relationship entirely negative
- State that they do not like each other

Recognizing Child Abuse

The following signs may signal the presence of child abuse or neglect

Types of abuse:

- **Physical abuse:** includes any types of physical assaults (such as striking, kicking, biting, throwing, burning, or poisoning) that caused, or could have caused, serious physical injury to the child.
- **Sexual abuse:** includes any act of vaginal, anal, or oral intercourse; vaginal or anal penetrations; and other forms of inappropriate touching, exhibitionism for sexual gratification, or acts of sexual exploitation performed by an adult with a child

Types of Abuse

Types of abuse:

- **Emotional abuse:** involves any physical or emotional assaults (such as torture or close confinement) that caused or could have caused serious psychological injury to the child.

Neglect: involves a failure to provide the basic necessities (such as food, clothing, hygiene, and shelter) for a child, and/or a lack of appropriate care for a child including grossly inadequate parental supervision or ethical guidance, or grossly inadequate attention to the child's physical, medical, psychological, emotional, or educational needs

Types of Abuse

The following slides discuss signs often associated with particular types of child abuse and neglect.

It is important to note, however, that these types of abuse are more typically found in combination than alone.

A physically abused child, for example, is often emotionally abused as well, and a sexually abused child also may be neglected.

Types of Abuse

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the child:

- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, cuts, broken bones, or black eyes
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school
- Seems frightened of the parents or another adult caregiver 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

Signs of Physical Abuse

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the **parent or other adult caregiver**:

- Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child's injury
- Describes the child as "evil," or in some other very negative way
- Uses harsh physical discipline with the child
- Has a history of abuse as a child

Signs of Physical Abuse

Consider the possibility of neglect when the **child:**

- Is frequently absent from school
- Begs or steals food or money
- Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses
- Is consistently dirty and has noticeable body odor
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs
- States that there is no one at home to provide care

Signs of Neglect

Consider the possibility of neglect when the **parent or other adult caregiver:**

- Appears to be indifferent to the child
- Seems apathetic or depressed
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner
- Is abusing alcohol or other drugs

Signs of Neglect

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the **child**:

- 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
- Runs away
- Is abandoned (forgetful or consistent tardiness with transportation) by parent or adult caregiver.

Signs of Sexual Abuse

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the **parent or other adult caregiver**:

- Is unduly protective of the child or severely limits the child's contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex
- Is secretive and isolated
- Is jealous or controlling with family members

Signs of Sexual Abuse

Consider the possibility of emotional **maltreatment** when the **child**:

- 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

Signs of Emotional Maltreatment

Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the **parent or other adult caregiver:**

- Constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child
- Is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for the child's problems
- Overtly rejects the child

Signs of Emotional Maltreatment

- This material, about abuse, mirrors Circle of Grace and is taken from www.childwelfare.gov .
- Responsible adults should ask open ended questions when making an inquiry. Example of a good open ended question:
 - **Ask:** How did you get that bruise? **Instead of:** Did you fall down?
- When a child makes a disclosure be careful of your reaction – shock, disgust could possibly cause the young person to minimize or stop the disclosure.

Talking about it

- Those who suspect abuse or neglect are obligated to make verbal report to the agency:

1-800-RI-Child

Mandated Reporting Law

- Rhode Island state law imposes an affirmative duty on all persons who have reasonable cause to know or suspect that abuse or neglect of a child has occurred to make a report of this, within 24 hours, to the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (R.I.G.L. 40-11-3).
- The report must be made in “good faith,” i.e. any reasonable person, given the same information, would draw a conclusion that abuse or neglect may have occurred. Any person making a report in good faith has immunity from liability, civil or criminal, that might otherwise be incurred or imposed.
- A good faith reporter will have the same immunity with respect to participation in any judicial proceeding resulting from such a report (R.I.G.L. 40-11-4).

DUTY TO REPORT

Failure to report known or suspected child abuse or neglect **is a violation** of the law (R.I.G.L. 40-11-6-1).

DUTY TO REPORT

It is diocesan policy that sexual misconduct or the failure to report an observation or complaint of sexual misconduct is a violation of an **employee's** obligations of employment and one's commitment to Christian service.

In the case of **volunteers**, such behavior is considered to be a violation of one's responsibility to those whom they serve.

Reporting Requirements

If an **employee** or **volunteer** observes or receives a complaint of an individual's sexual misconduct, he/she shall record:

- the date and time of the observation or of the communication of the complaint and
- the name, address and telephone number of the person communicating the complaint.

Reporting Requirements

A **report** of the observation or complaint **shall be made immediately** to:

- the local authority (Agency Director, Pastor, Principal) or to the immediate supervisor of the employee or volunteer.
- Supervisory personnel shall then immediately inform the Area of Mission Secretary, in the case of diocesan offices or agencies, or the Moderator of the Curia who shall in turn notify the coordinator of the Office of Education and Compliance.

Reporting Requirements

Important Numbers to Know:

**Office of Outreach and Prevention,
call 401-946-0728**

**Office of Education and Compliance
call 401-941-0760**

80 Saint Mary's Drive
Cranston, RI 02920

**Pastoral Outreach to Those Violated and
to Their Families**

Resource Information and Websites

- Diocese of Providence:
 - www.dioceseofprovidence.org
- United States Catholic Conference of Bishops:
 - www.usccb.org/ocyp
- Rhode Island Department of Children Youth and Families
 - www.dcyf.ri.gov

Resources