

# Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect: Signs & Symptoms

<p><b>Recognizing Child Abuse</b> The following signs may signal the presence of child abuse or neglect.</p> <p><b>The Child:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to the parents' attention</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Has learning problems (or difficulty concentrating) that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Lacks adult supervision</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Comes to school or other activities early, stays late, and does not want to go home</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Parent:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Shows little concern for the child</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Denies the existence of—or blames the child for—the child's problems in school or at home</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Asks teachers or other caregivers to use harsh physical discipline if the child misbehaves</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sees the child as entirely bad, worthless, or burdensome</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Demands a level of physical or academic performance the child cannot achieve</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Looks primarily to the child for care, attention, and satisfaction of emotional needs</li> </ul> <p><b>The Parent and Child:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Rarely touch or look at each other</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Consider their relationship entirely negative</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> State that they do not like each other</li> </ul>
<p><b>Signs of Physical Abuse: Consider when the child:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Seems frightened of the parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Shrinks at the approach of adults</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver</li> </ul> <p><b>Consider when the parent or other adult caregiver:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child's injury</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Describes the child as "evil," or in some other very negative way</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Uses harsh physical discipline with the child</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Has a history of abuse as a child</li> </ul> <p><b>Signs of Neglect: Consider when the child:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is frequently absent from school</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Begg or steals food or money</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Abuses alcohol or other drugs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> States that there is no one at home to provide care</li> </ul> <p><b>Consider when the parent or other adult caregiver:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Appears to be indifferent to the child</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Seems apathetic or depressed</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is abusing alcohol or other drugs</li> </ul> <p><b>Signs of Sexual Abuse: Consider when the child:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Has difficulty walking or sitting</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reports nightmares or bedwetting</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Experiences a sudden change in appetite</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under age 14</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Runs away</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver</li> </ul> <p><b>Consider when the parent or other adult caregiver:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is unduly protective of the child or severely limits the child's contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is secretive and isolated</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is jealous or controlling with family members</li> </ul> <p><b>Signs of Emotional Maltreatment: Consider when the child:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Shows extremes in behavior, such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity, or aggression</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is either inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example) or inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking or head-banging, for example)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is delayed in physical or emotional development</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Has attempted suicide</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reports a lack of attachment to the parent</li> </ul> <p><b>Consider when the parent or other adult caregiver:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child and overtly rejects the child</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for the child's problems</li> </ul>	

Child Welfare Information Gateway (2007). Retrieved from:  
<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/signs.cfm>