

Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect: Signs & Symptoms

Recognizing Child Abuse or Neglect

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

The Child:

- **Reports abuse or neglect: Believe them!**
- Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance
- Has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to the adult's 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- Is overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn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 or to a caregiver

The Adult: (Parent, Caregiver or Person in Position of Trust)

- May show little or excessive concern for the child
- Denies the existence of—or blames the child for—the child's problems in school or at home
- Asks others 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

Signs of Physical Abuse:

Consider when the child:

- Reports injury: Believe them!
- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes
- Has 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 adult

Consider when the adult:

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

Signs of Neglect:

Consider 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 severe body odor
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs
- States that there is no one at home to provide care

Consider 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 Sexual Abuse:

Consider 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
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under age 14
- Runs away
- Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver. Believe them!

Consider 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 Emotional Maltreatment:

Consider 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

Consider when the parent or other adult caregiver:

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

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

**Call 1-800-4-A-CHILD if you need to talk confidentially to
an experienced counselor about this information**



~Connecting ~Advocating ~Supporting ~Listening ~Challenging ~Educating~Mentoring~Validating~

The O.U.R. Project

Observing, Understanding, and Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect

Our deaf and hard of hearing children face three times greater risk of abuse or neglect than hearing children. No child should experience the devastating trauma of abuse or neglect. The danger comes far more often from people they know than strangers. The good news is that we can help protect them when we are aware of the problem, teach them empowering safety skills, know what to watch for, and know how to respond. Join us!

Call 1-800-4-A-CHILD if you need to talk confidentially to an experienced counselor about any questions you have about your own child or another child you know.

- The Hotline counselors can help you decide what to do or say about another child's possible abuse or neglect.
- The Hotline counselors can help you with your child's problem behaviors.
- The Hotline counselors can help you understand what normal behavior is at different stages of a child's development. For example, babies sometimes cry for no reason, even after you have done all you can to comfort them. Two and three year olds have tantrums. These things, while frustrating to deal with, don't mean you are a bad parent.
- The Hotline counselors can provide non-judgmental emotional support. They will listen. They won't blame you.
- When you are feeling isolated or overwhelmed, Childhelp's hotline counselors can provide a safe outlet for your stress and anger.
- The Hotline counselors can refer you to local groups and agencies in your area who can help.

Who can protect our deaf and hard of hearing kids from child abuse and neglect? We can! While the task seems such a large one, we can all pitch in. We would ask that you consider the following:

1. **Pass-it-on:** Share this handout, and its related resources, with at least one other parent, teacher, camp counselor, interpreter, audiologist, therapist, coach (you get the idea) and then ask them to **"pass-it-on."**
2. **Share the Story:** Have a conversation with your child about abuse and neglect (see http://www.cohandsandvoices.org/our/helping_parents.htm Helping Parents Talk to Children+ document), then **share the story with us** of how it went so that other parents can learn from your experience.
3. **Recognize the Best and Challenge Everyone Else:** Ask the professionals in your child's life what they are doing to protect your child from abuse and neglect, then share the resulting reactions, information, resources, programs, and questions so that we **recognize the best and challenge everyone else.**
4. **Join** our website, the **wiki** page+at <http://deafed-childabuse-neglect-col.wiki.educ.msu.edu/>
5. **Consider** your potential involvement in the O.U.R project. For next steps and commitment requirements, contact Harold Johnson at hjohnson@educ.msu.edu or Janet DesGeorges at janet@handsandvoices.org