

# Signs of Abuse

## Signs of sexual abuse

- Inappropriate interest in or knowledge of sexual acts
- Seductive behavior
- Refusal to undress in front of others
- Fear of particular person or family member

## Signs of physical abuse

- Wearing clothes to cover injuries in hot weather
- Bald patches
- Fear of medical examination
- Unexplained recent injuries or burns
- Fear of physical contact—shrinking away if touched

## Signs of emotional abuse

- Overreaction to mistakes
- Extreme fear of any new situation
- Sudden speech disorders
- Inappropriate response to pain ('I deserve this')
- Continual self-depreciation ('I'm stupid, ugly, worthless...')

## Neglect

- Constant hunger
- Poor state of clothing
- No social relationships
- Poor personal hygiene
- Constant tiredness

## Reporting Child Abuse

Sometimes people think that child abuse is a private family matter. It is not. If you have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, promptly report your concerns to the child welfare agency, provincial or territorial social services department or police force in your community. If necessary, a report can be made anonymously.

Reporting is not difficult or time consuming. In all cases, the person reporting is protected from any kind of legal action, provided the report is not falsely made and motivated by malice.

## Sexual abuse facts

- A study reported that almost all sexual abusers of girls and boys are heterosexual males.
- Children know their abuser in over eight out of ten cases.
- More than four out of ten are fathers or father figures.



# Child Abuse



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# What is Child Abuse?

Child abuse occurs when a parent, guardian or caregiver mistreats or neglects a child, resulting in:

- Injury
- Significant emotional or psychological harm
- Serious risk of harm to the child.

Child abuse entails the betrayal of a caregiver's position of trust and authority over a child. It can take many different forms:

**Physical abuse** may involve hitting a child a single time or it may involve a pattern of incidents. Physical abuse also includes behavior such as shaking, choking, biting, kicking, burning or poisoning a child, holding a child under water, or any other harmful or dangerous use of force or restraint. Child physical abuse is usually connected to physical punishment or is confused with child discipline.

**Sexual abuse** occurs when an adult or adolescent uses a child for sexual purposes. It involves exposing a child to any sexual activity or behavior. Sexual abuse is inherently abusive emotionally and is often accompanied by separate and more direct forms of psychological abuse or other forms of mistreatment.

**Neglect** occurs when a child's parents or other caregivers are not providing essential requisites to a child's emotional, psychological and physical development. Physical neglect occurs when a child's needs for food, clothing, shelter, cleanliness, medical care and protection from harm are not adequately met. Emotional neglect occurs when a child's need to feel loved, wanted, safe and worthy is not met.

**Emotional abuse** involves an attack on a child's sense of self. Emotional abuse is usually found in the context of a long-term problem in a parent's treatment of a child. It is often part of a pattern of family stress and dysfunctional parenting. Emotional abuse frequently co-exists with other types of abuse. Other forms of emotionally abusive treatment include forcing a child into social isolation, intimidating, exploiting, terrorizing or routinely making unreasonable demands on a child.

## Family Factors

- Child abuse is not confined to any one social class or sector of the population; it cuts across all ethnic, religious, social and economic backgrounds. However, economic disadvantage is a major contributor to child neglect. Poverty also appears to be a risk factor for physical abuse, though not for emotional abuse.
- Causes of stress on families, such as unemployment, can contribute to child maltreatment.

## The Victim

- The most potentially serious cases of child abuse involve preschoolers and infants.
- "Failure to thrive" in infants is sometimes the result of neglect.

- A child can be harmed by events that occur before he or she is born.
- The effects of child abuse are profound. Children who are abused tend to experience more social problems and perform less well in school than non-abused children.
- Children who are both emotionally and physically abused exhibit the greatest degree of aggression, delinquency and interpersonal problems.
- Victims of childhood abuse are at greater risk of becoming violent criminals
- Women who were abused in childhood are more likely to suffer from depression, low self-esteem and suicidal thoughts.

## The Abuser

- Abusive parents frequently receive little enjoyment from parenting and are more isolated from the community than non-abusive parents.
- Abusive parents are often afraid of or are emotionally unable to ask for help from sources of support in their community.
- Most abusive parents have themselves been abused or neglected as children. However, not all victims of abuse go on to assault children.
- Many abusers view themselves as victims in life generally or in the parent-child relationship in particular.
- Because abusive parents often have unrealistic expectations about their child's development and abilities, they demand a level of physical, social and emotional maturity which is not appropriate for the age of the child.