

# Signs of Child Abuse

Indicators of child abuse may include but are not limited to the signs listed below. Some signs that a child is experiencing violence or abuse are more obvious than others. Trust your instincts. Suspected abuse is enough of a reason to contact the authorities. You do not need proof.

- 1 Unexplained injuries.** Visible signs of physical abuse may include unexplained burns or bruises in the shape of objects. You may also hear unconvincing explanations of a child's injuries.
- 2 Changes in mood or behavior.** Abuse can lead to many changes in a child's mood or behavior. Abused children often appear scared, anxious, depressed, withdrawn or more aggressive.
- 3 Returning to earlier behaviors.** Abused children may display behaviors shown at earlier ages, such as thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, fear of the dark or strangers. For some children, even loss of acquired language or memory problems may be an issue.
- 4 Fear of certain places or people.** Abused children may express apprehension or anxiety about leaving school or about going places with the person who is abusing them.
- 5 Changes in eating.** The stress, fear and anxiety caused by abuse can lead to changes in a child's eating behaviors, which may result in weight gain or weight loss.
- 6 Changes in sleeping.** Abused children may have frequent nightmares or have difficulty falling asleep, and as a result may appear tired or fatigued.
- 7 Changes in school performance and attendance.** Abused children may have difficulty concentrating in school or have excessive absences, sometimes due to adults trying to hide the children's injuries from authorities.
- 8 Lack of personal care or hygiene.** Abused and neglected children may appear uncared for. They may present as consistently dirty and have severe body odor, or they may lack sufficient clothing for the weather.
- 9 Risk-taking behaviors.** Young people who are being abused may engage in high-risk activities such as using drugs or alcohol or carrying a weapon.
- 10 Inappropriate sexual behaviors.** Children who have been sexually abused may exhibit overly sexualized behavior or use explicit sexual language.



## If a child outcries:

### DO

- ▶ Remain calm.
- ▶ Believe the child.
- ▶ Allow the child to talk.
- ▶ Show interest and concern.
- ▶ Reassure and support the child's feelings.
- ▶ Take action. It could save the child's life.

### DON'T

- ▶ Panic or overreact.
- ▶ Press the child to talk.
- ▶ Promise anything you can't control.
- ▶ Confront the offender.
- ▶ Blame or minimize the child's feelings.
- ▶ Overwhelm the child with questions.

## Remember, you are obligated by law to report suspected child abuse.

If you suspect a child is in immediate danger, call 911.

For all other cases in Texas, call the abuse and neglect  
hotline at 800.252.5400.

There are more than 70 children's advocacy centers (CACs) located throughout Texas serving approximately 60,000 children each year. Your local CAC offers a child-friendly environment where children and their families can begin the healing process.

It is the goal of all local CACs to reduce trauma to child abuse victims and their families by offering six core services: joint investigation coordination, forensic interviews, medical evaluations, multidisciplinary team case review with investigative entities, trauma-focused therapy, and family advocacy and victim support.

CACs also offer volunteer opportunities and trainings for educators, local community members, and others interested in learning how they can make a difference for child victims of abuse.

**Every Child. Every Service. Every Effort.**



*This is a resource of*  
Children's Advocacy Centers™ of Texas

[www.cactx.org](http://www.cactx.org)