

# **FACTORS, WHICH MAY INDICATE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

No one characteristic or symptom will indicate that a child has been abused. Children who exhibit symptoms usually show a pattern of multiple symptoms. While few child victims have physical indicators of sexual abuse, approximately 80% display behavioral indicators. A change in the child's typical behavior may indicate abuse.

Children will react in different ways. Some children may internalize their experiences and withdraw or retreat from people or social situations and show signs of depression. Other children may choose to act out or show signs of aggression towards people and objects in their environment. Still others may become overly involved in fantasy or pretend.

The child's reaction to sexual abuse will also depend upon his/her chronological age and developmental age.

## **PHYSICAL INDICATORS**

- Blood or body fluid stains on diaper/underwear
- Frequent urinary tract infections
- Rashes, itching, lesions of the genital or anal area
- Symptoms of venereal disease such as vaginal/penile discharge, genital/oral sores
- Pain in the genital or anal area
- Genital warts
- Frequent vomiting without organic cause
- Recurrent abdominal pain or complaints of gastrointestinal problems
- Painful defecation, constipation
- Dysuria
- Vaginitis, Urethritis
- Pregnancy
- Physical Abuse
- Visible bite marks or bruises around genitals, buttocks, breasts

# **FACTORS WHICH MAY INDICATE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE (CONTINUED)**

## **BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS**

### **PRE-SCHOOLERS**

- Explicit sexual knowledge, behavior, or language which is unusual for child's age
- Excessive masturbation (causes irritation or interferes with normal activities)
- Increased/insatiable interest in sex play with peers or dolls
- Self mutilation
- Sudden regressive behavior: enuresis, encopresis, baby talk, stuttering, thumb sucking, clinging or fretful behavior
- Nightmares, sleep disturbances, refusing to sleep alone
- Extreme aggressiveness towards others and/or objects
- Inordinate fear of other people, either males or females in particular – extreme fear of being left with someone or of being left alone
- Sudden crying without provocation
- Indiscriminate affection toward other adults
- Suicidal ideation; rage reactions

### **SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN**

- Regressive behavior – acting “babyish”, onset of enuresis/encopresis
- Sudden drop in grades, changes in school behavior, and/or nonparticipation in school activities
- Nightmares or sleep disturbances
- Changes in eating patterns or habits
- Exceptional secrecy
- Withdrawal or over compliance to requests
- Somatic complaints
- Involvement in or hints of sexual activity or sex play with others or dolls
- Over aggressiveness
- Sudden phobic behavior
- Feelings of low self worth
- Agitation, hyperactivity, irritability
- Excessive anxiety
- Running away from home
- Suicidal ideation; rage reactions
- Layering clothing; sleeping in clothing; discarding underwear
  - Self mutilation

# **FACTORS WHICH MAY INDICATE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE (CONTINUED)**

## **BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS**

### **ADOLESCENTS**

- Poor self-image
- Poor peer relationships, limited social life, guarded in relationships
- Home truancy – running away
- School problems such as poor grades, failure, truancy, conflict with authority figures
- Sexual provocativeness or promiscuity, prostitution
- Delinquent behavior – alcohol, drug abuse, stealing, lying, fighting
- Feelings of depression, isolation
- Pregnancy or early marriage
- Suicidal thoughts or gestures
- Recurrent physical complaints such as severe headaches, abdominal pain without medical findings
- Self mutilation
- Eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia, obesity, sudden weight gain or loss
- Rage reactions
- Layering clothing, sleeping in clothing, discarding underwear

**Remember, no one symptom alone will indicate sexual abuse. Look for a change in the individual's behavior and look for a pattern of multiple symptoms that last over time.**

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