

# Indicators of Sexual Abuse

The first indicators of sexual abuse may not be physical signs or complaints, but behavioral changes or abnormalities. These are different at various ages, are not necessarily seen just in sexually abused children, and the absence of any or all of them does not rule out sexual abuse.

- Toddlers and young children (ages 2 to 5):
  - (1) Fear of a particular person or place.
  - (2) Regression to earlier forms of behavior such as bed-wetting, stranger anxiety, separation anxiety, thumb sucking, baby talk, whining, fear of abandonment, and clinginess.
  - (3) Sexualized behaviors with other children.
  - (4) Unusual mood swings, temperament changes, excessive sadness, or loss of interest in age appropriate activities.
  - (5) Feelings or expressions of shame, low self-esteem, or guilt.
  - (6) Excessive masturbation.
  - (7) Cruelty to animals.
  - (8) Fire setting.
  
- Six- to 8-year-old children. Any of the above symptoms or changes and/or:
  - (1) Nightmares and other sleep disturbances.
  - (2) Sexualized behaviors with other children or directed towards adults. Sexually inappropriate or graphic language or drawings.
  - (3) Phobias about specific school or community activities, places or people.
  - (4) Withdrawal from family and friends and previously enjoyed activities
  - (5) Regressive behaviors.
  - (6) Eating disturbances.
  - (7) Physical complaints such as abdominal pain or urinary or bowel difficulties.
  
- Preadolescents (10 to 12 years). Any of the above symptoms or changes and/or:
  - (1) Depression, anxiety, mood swings, unusual anger or aggression.
  - (2) Nightmares and other sleep disturbances.
  - (3) Poor school performance.
  - (4) Sexualized behaviors with other children or directed towards adults.
  - (5) Sexually inappropriate or graphic language or drawings.
  - (6) Promiscuity.
  - (7) Pregnancy.
  - (8) Use of illegal drugs or alcohol.
  - (9) Fear that the abuse will recur. (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms).
  - (10) Eating disorders such as anorexia.

## Indicators of Sexual Abuse (continued)

- (11) Regression to earlier behaviors.
  - (12) Withdrawal from family and friends or previously enjoyed activities.
  - (13) Suicidal thoughts, gestures, or attempt.
- Early adolescents (13 to 15 years). Any of the above symptoms or changes and/or:
    - (1) Running away from home.
    - (2) Depression.
    - (3) Promiscuity or prostitution.
    - (4) Recurrent physical complaints.
    - (5) Pregnancy.
    - (6) Use of illegal drugs or alcohol.
    - (7) Suicidal thoughts gestures or attempts.
    - (8) School truancy.
    - (9) Poor school performance.
    - (10) Fear that the attack will recur. (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms).
    - (11) Anger and rage about being forced into a situation beyond one's control or with attempted disciplinary action by a parent or caregiver.
    - (12) Withdrawal from family and friends or previously enjoyed activities.

