



CHILD MALTREATMENT (PART 2): POTENTIAL SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

The Bottom Line

In order to effectively respond to child maltreatment, it is important for adults in regular contact with children and youth to know the potential signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect.

Potential Signs of Abuse and Neglect Among Children

Physical Abuse

- Frequent absences from school
- Fear of adults or flinching if touched unexpectedly
- Extremely aggressive or withdrawn
- Extremely compliant and/or eager to please
- Injuries inconsistent with child's age and development
- Inconsistent explanations of how injuries occurred
- Reluctant to go home

Emotional Abuse

- Overly compliant or too well-mannered
- Extreme attention-seeking behaviours
- Poor peer relationships
- Frequent psychosomatic complaints
- Excessive weight gain or loss
- Bedwetting
- Extreme withdrawal or mood swings

Sexual Abuse

- Pregnancy or sexually transmitted infection (STI)
- Injuries or itching in the genital or anal areas
- Age-inappropriate sexual play
- Advanced sexual knowledge and vocabulary
- Involvement in sexually exploitative behaviour
- Cruelty to animals
- Fear of home and/or adults

Neglect

- Unmet medical or dental needs
- Hunger, inappropriate dress, poor hygiene
- Persistent untreated health conditions
- Developmental delays
- Consistent fatigue or listlessness
- Often reports that no caregiver is at home
- Frequently absent or late for school

Possible Responses

While many of these indicators can be connected with normal growth and development, especially for adolescents, it is important to remain attentive and vigilant as they can also be indicators of maltreatment.

- If several of these symptoms are present, child maltreatment may be occurring (although individual signs such as pregnancy or STIs should be taken very seriously). In the Prairies, any person who suspects child abuse has a legal obligation to report such abuse to their local authorities.
- A child may be very avoidant of any abuse-related questions. They may be threatened if they disclose the abuse.
- A child may appear to be triggered while wearing a mask if they have experienced or are currently experiencing sexual abuse. Wearing a face mask can retraumatize sexual assault survivors as it may signify reminders of having their mouths covered to induce silence during a sexual assault.
- If indicated, Child Protection Services will conduct an investigation of suspected maltreatment. If you are unsure, you may still report any suspected maltreatment; this will not automatically incriminate anyone and your report will remain anonymous.
- It is not the job of the person who suspects maltreatment to conduct an investigation; however, speaking with the child may provide additional information and possibly result in an abuse disclosure. While it is important for children to feel safe in talking to someone who cares, be careful not to make promises or to delve too deeply into the child's disclosure: a trained professional will be able to follow up with this.
- Be aware that similar signs and symptoms can be present not only with child maltreatment, but if a child is witnessing maltreatment of their caregiver, sibling, or others in close relation.



For original sources and documents, please visit: www.childtraumaresearch.ca