

## Early Warning Signs & Symptoms of Child Sexual Abuse

**Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)** is any kind of sexual act or behavior with a child including contact and non-contact events (for example, taking sexual picture or videos of a child). Children experiencing sexual abuse may exhibit physical and emotional signs or symptoms. **Physical signs are less common**, and when found, should be immediately looked into. **Emotional or behavioral signs are more likely** but may also be symptoms of other trauma in a child's life, such as physical abuse, neglect, or parents' divorce or separation. It is also important to keep in mind that **some children exhibit no signs of abuse**.

### Physical Signs

*Direct Physical Signs* of CSA are less common and include:

- Bruising, bleeding, redness and bumps, or scabs around the mouth, genitals, or anus
- Vaginal or rectal cuts, tears, or pain
- Urinary tract infections, sexually transmitted infections, and abnormal vaginal or penile discharge
- Any unexplained injury (bruise, burn, fracture, abdominal, genital, or head injury)

CSA victims are more likely to exhibit *Indirect Physical Signs* such as:

- Continuous or reoccurring pain during urination or bowel movements
- Chronic stomach pain and headaches with no medical cause
- Bedwetting or accidents unrelated to toilet training

### Emotional and Behavioral Signs

- Abnormal and unusual sexual behaviors and language that are not age-appropriate
- Unusual fear of certain people or places; not wanting to be alone with a certain person
- Nightmares, night terrors, or other sleep-related problems
- Thinking of self or body as "dirty" or "bad"
- Changes in eating habits, which may include over-eating or stealing food
- A shift in nature or mood, leading to anger or aggressiveness towards family, friends, or pets
- A shift in nature or mood leading to anxiety or depression
- Return to "outgrown" behavior, such as thumb sucking, bedwetting etc.
- Poor self-esteem and avoidance of relationships
- Rebellious behavior
- Change in attitude towards school, or change in hobbies or interests
- Stopping activities, interests, or spending time with friends and family
- Attempts to run away
- Too "perfect" behavior, or overly agreeable behavior
- Self-harm, such as biting self, scratching self, pulling out hair, or cutting

**Do NOT overlook signs and symptoms. If you or someone you know suspects child abuse, please contact your local law enforcement agency or [department of child protective services](#).** The [Darkness to Light National Child Sexual Abuse Helpline](#) can provide local resources and information at 1-866-FOR-LIGHT or via a crisis textline (Text "LIGHT" to 741741). You can also contact the [ChildHelp USA National Child Abuse Hotline](#) at 1-800-422-4453 for 24/7 support via phone and text. For more information or additional resources, visit <https://mcasa.org/prevention/preventing-child-sexual-abuse>