

Warning Signs of Child Abuse

Indicators of child abuse can 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.

Unexplained injuries. The child may have burns or bruises in the shape of objects. You may hear unconvincing explanations of a child's injuries.

Changes in behavior. Abuse can lead to many changes in a child's behavior. The child may appear scared, anxious, depressed, withdrawn or aggressive.

Returning to earlier behaviors. The abused child may revert to behaviors shown at earlier stages, such as thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, fear of the dark, or fear of strangers. Other issues may include loss of acquired language or problems with memory.

Fear of going home. The child may express anxiety about leaving school or about going places with the person who is abusing them.

Changes in eating. The stress, fear and anxiety caused by abuse can lead to changes in the child's eating habits, possibly resulting in weight gain or loss.

Changes in sleeping. The child may have frequent nightmares and/or difficulty falling asleep, and as a result may appear tired or fatigued.

Changes in school performance or attendance. Abused children often have trouble concentrating in school, or have excessive absences, possibly due to adults trying to hide the child's injuries from authorities.

Lack of personal care or hygiene. The child may appear uncared for. He or she may be consistently dirty, have severe body odor, or lack appropriate clothing for the weather.

Risk-taking behaviors. Abused children sometimes engage in high-risk behaviors such as using drugs or alcohol, or carrying a weapon.

Inappropriately sexual behaviors. The child may exhibit overly sexualized behaviors, or use sexually explicit language.



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What to do if a child discloses:

DO:	DON'T:
Remain calm.	Panic or overreact.
Believe the child.	Press the child to talk.
Allow the child to talk.	Promise anything you can't control.
Show interest and concern.	Confront the offender.
Reassure and support the child.	Blame or minimize the child's feelings.
Take action. It could save a child's life.	Overwhelm the child with questions.
<i>Remember, you are obligated by law to report suspected child abuse.</i>	

If you suspect a child is in immediate danger, call **911**. All suspicions of child abuse in New Jersey should be reported to the hotline, **1-877-NJ-ABUSE**. You will not be held responsible for any report made in good faith. For more information, visit www.njcainc.org.



The New Jersey Children's Alliance is a statewide non-profit membership organization whose mission is to ensure victims of child abuse and family violence have access to comprehensive, evidence-based quality services that promote hope, healing and justice.