



Mahoning County
Children Services
330.941.8888

Warning Signs of Child Abuse



Pocket Pal

Be Aware, Save a Child

Child abuse is an epidemic in the United States. A report of child abuse is made on average every 10 seconds, yet this represents only a portion of the actual number of incidents. *You can make a difference.*

By being alert for the physical and behavioral signs of neglect and of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, you can come to the aid of children in danger. Though many of these signs may have a variety of causes, when they appear repeatedly or in combination they can indicate abuse. The first step is notifying authorities who can take the appropriate action.

Keep this guide with you so you're always ready to step up on behalf of a child—whether the child is yours or someone else's.

Physical Signs of Abuse

- Burns, bruises, black eyes, or other injuries that are suspicious or unexplained
- Unkempt or dirty appearance
- Malnourishment
- Inadequate medical or dental care
- Sexually transmitted diseases or urinary tract infections
- Wetting and soiling accidents not related to toilet training
- Discoloration or scarring of genital area
- Difficulty walking or sitting that may indicate injury to the genital area
- Pain during urination and/or bowel movements



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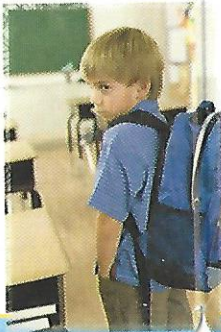
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Behavioral Signs of Abuse

- Depression and/or general anxiety
- Fear or anxiety about a particular person or place
- Being passive and withdrawn, or aggressive and disruptive
- Sudden changes in behavior



- Abrupt change in eating habits
- Major change in school performance
- Nightmares or other sleep problems
- Sudden mood swings



Behavioral Signs of Abuse

- Frequent absence from school, regular early arrival, or reluctance to go home
- Unusual knowledge of body parts or sexual language
- Acting out sexual behavior with toys or other children

Additional signs in older children:

- Self-injury
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Promiscuity
- Running away from home
- Suicide attempts
- Eating disorders



What To Do

Always take it seriously when children speak of being abused, or if you have suspicions.

- Provide a safe physical and emotional environment for the child.
- Remain calm, listen carefully to what the child says, and write it down.
- Be supportive and comforting.
- **REPORT IT** to the police or your local Child Protective Services agency at once.



If you have questions or are unsure about what action to take, call the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Intervening in Public

It can be daunting to insert yourself into a situation in which a parent is mistreating a child in public. Using a positive approach is the best strategy for effective intervention.

- Avoid disapproving looks or comments, which may only increase the parent's anger and impatience.
- Distract the parent with conversation. For instance, ask "Children can be difficult to shop with, can't they?"
- Find something to praise about the child or parent, such as "I like your shoes. Where did you get them?"
- Interrupt a child's disruptive behavior by starting a conversation with him/her.
- If a child is in danger and it's not safe for you to intervene, call 911.

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