

Signs that a child may have been sexually abused

Physical warning signs:

- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Signs of trauma to the genital area, such as unexplained bleeding, bruising, or blood on the sheets

Behavioral signs:

- Sexual behavior that is inappropriate for the child's age
- Bedwetting or soiling the bed, if the child has already outgrown these behaviors
- Not wanting to be left alone with certain people or being afraid to be away from primary caregivers, especially if this is a new behavior
- Tries to avoid removing clothing to change or bathe

Emotional signs:

- Excessive talk about or knowledge of sexual topics
- Resuming behaviors that they had grown out of, such as thumbsucking
- Nightmares or fear of being alone at night
- Excessive worry or fearfulness

Signs that an adult may be hurting a child

Keeping children safe can be challenging since many perpetrators who sexually abuse children are in positions of trust—93 percent of child sexual assault victims know the perpetrator.² Keeping a child away from the perpetrator may mean major changes in your own life, even if you are outside of the child's family.

Be cautious of an adult who spend time with children and exhibits the following behaviors:

- Does not respect boundaries or listen when someone tells them “no”
- Engages in touching that a child or child's parents/guardians have indicated is unwanted
- Tries to be a child's friend rather than filling an adult role in the child's life
- Does not seem to have age-appropriate relationships
- Talks with children about their personal problems or relationships
- Spends time alone with children outside of their role in the child's life or makes up excuses to be alone with the child
- Expresses unusual interest in child's sexual development, such as commenting on sexual characteristics or sexualizing normal behaviors
- Gives a child gifts without occasion or reason
- Spends a lot of time with your child or another child you know

Taking action isn't easy, but it's important

It's not always easy to identify child sexual abuse—and it can be even more challenging to step in if you suspect something isn't right. If a child tells you that someone makes them uncomfortable, even if they can't tell you anything specific, listen. Talk to someone who can help you figure out if this is something that must be reported, such as a staff member from your **local sexual assault service provider**. In the meantime, if you are the parent or have influence over the child's schedule, avoid putting the child in a potentially unsafe situation.

Remember, you are not alone. If you suspect sexual abuse you can talk to someone who is trained to help. Call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800.656.HOPE (4673) or chat online at **online.rainn.org**.