

Recognising Child Sexual Abuse



Physical indicators:

- Bruises, scratches or other injuries not consistent with accidental injury
- Itching, soreness, discharge or unexplained bleeding
- Painful and frequent urination
- Signs of sexually transmitted infections
- Semen in the vagina, anus or external genitalia or on clothing
- Unexplained pain in the genital area
- Bruises, bite marks or other injuries to breasts, buttocks, lower abdomen and thighs
- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Persistent headaches or recurrent abdominal pain

Sexual behavioural indicators:

- Sexual knowledge or language inappropriate for child's age/development
- Sexual themes in child's artwork, stories or play
- Hints about sexual activity through actions/comments
- Inappropriate sexual behaviour or play with self, dolls, toys, adults or other children
- Open displays of sexuality, for example, repeated public masturbation
- Promiscuity, repetitious sexually precocious behaviour

Developmental behavioural indicators:

Younger children: open and compulsive sexualised behaviour (including sexual touching of self, others or toys); regression to an earlier stage with bedwetting or soiling; may become unusually withdrawn or aggressive.

School-age children: problems in school (lack of concentration); sleeping and eating disturbances; lack of self-esteem; may become unusually withdrawn or aggressive.

It is important to note that some of the developmental behavioural indicators listed above may not necessarily be connected to sexual abuse. However they do mean that something is wrong and that the child needs help.