

Recognizing Child Abuse

Definitions & Warning Signs

Teaming up to keep kids...



Common Definitions

Physical abuse is defined as non-accidental physical injury, such as a severe beating, burns, strangulation and human bites.

Emotional abuse is a pattern of behavior that attacks a child's emotional development and sense of self-worth. Examples include constant criticism, insults, rejection, or the withholding of love, support or guidance.

Sexual abuse is defined as the sexual exploitation of a child, including rape, incest, fondling of the genitals, pornography or exhibitionism.

Neglect is the failure to provide a child with the basic necessities of life, including food clothing, shelter or medical care. It also includes the lack of appropriate supervision or total abandonment.

Recognizing Child Abuse

None of the following signs prove that child abuse is present in a family, since any of them may be found in any parent or child at one time or another. But when these signs appear repeatedly or in combination with one another, it may indicate that a closer look is needed into the situation.

The Parent and Child...

- ... rarely look at each other;
- ... consider their relationship entirely negative;
- or,
- ... state that they do not like each other.

The Child...

- ... shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance;
- ... has not received help for medical problems brought to the parent's attention;
- ... has learning problems that cannot be attributed to physical or psychological causes;
- ... is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen;
- ... lacks adult supervision;
- ... is overly compliant, an overachiever or too responsible; or,
- ... comes to school early, stays late and does not want to go home.

The Parent...

- ... shows little concern for the child, rarely responding to the school's request for information, conferences or home visits;
- ... denies the existence of -- or blames the child for -- the child's problems in school or at home;
- ... uses harsh physical discipline if the child misbehaves;
- ... sees the child as entirely bad, worthless or burdensome;
- ... demands perfection or a level of physical or academic performance the child cannot achieve; or,
- ... looks primarily to the child for care, attention, and satisfaction of emotional needs.

200 S. Michigan Ave., 17th Floor
 Chicago, IL 60604.2404
 1-800-CHILDREN
mailbox@preventchildabuse.org
www.preventchildabuse.org

Adapted from "Foster Parenting Abused Children" by Eliana Gil and from "Educators, Schools and Child Abuse" by Diane D. Broadhurst. ©1994 Prevent Child Abuse America

