## Signs of Child Abuse



Indicators of child abuse may include but are not limited to the signs listed below. 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.

- 1. **Unexplained injuries**. Visible signs of physical abuse may include unexplained burns or bruises in the shape of objects. You may also hear unconvincing explanations of a child's injuries.
- 2. **Changes in mood or behavior**. Abuse can lead to many changes in a child's mood or behavior. Abused children often appear scared, anxious, depressed, withdrawn, or more aggressive.
- 3. **Returning to earlier behaviors.** Abused children may display behaviors shown at earlier ages, such as thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, and fear of the dark or strangers. For some children, even loss of acquired language or memory problems may be an issue.
- 4. **Relationship warning signs**. You may notice behavioral changes (such as fear of someone or tantrums prior to contact) or secrecy within a relationship that is not appropriate. Not all children display fear, given that many abusers are people close to them.
- 5. **Changes in eating.** The stress, fear, and anxiety caused by abuse can lead to changes in a child's eating behaviors, which may result in weight gain or weight loss.
- 6. **Changes in sleeping**. Abused children may have frequent nightmares or have difficulty falling or staying asleep, and as a result, may appear tired or fatigued.
- 7. **Changes in school performance and attendance**. Abused children may have difficulty concentrating in school or have excessive absences, sometimes due to adults trying to hide the children's injuries from authorities.
- 8. **Ignored basic and developmental needs**. Abused and neglected children may appear uncared for, unkempt, or malnourished despite access to community resources. They may also exhibit slowed development, such as emotional, cognitive, or physical delays.
- 9. **Risk-taking behaviors**. Young people being abused may take part in high-risk activities such as using drugs or alcohol or engage in sexual activity that may be developmentally inappropriate.
- 10. **Problematic sexual behaviors.** Children who have experienced or witnessed various kinds of abuse may exhibit overly sexualized behavior or use of explicit sexual language.



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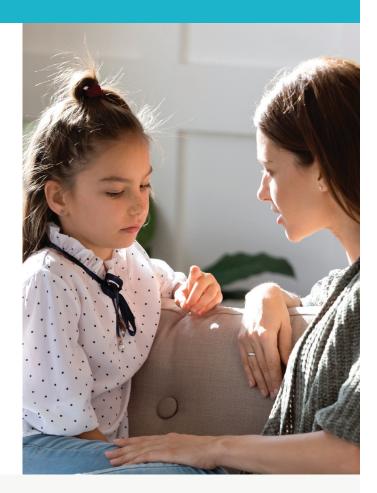
## If a child outcries:

## DO

- Remain calm.
- Believe the child.
- Allow the child to talk.
- Show interest and concern.
- Reassure and support the child's feelings.
- Make a report. It could save the child's life.

## DON'T

- Panic or overreact.
- Press the child to talk.
- Promise anything you can't control.
- Confront the offender.
- Blame or minimize the child's feelings.
- Overwhelm the child with questions.



REMEMBER, YOU ARE OBLIGATED BY LAW TO REPORT SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE.

If you suspect a child is in immediate danger, call 911. For all other cases in Texas, call the abuse and neglect hotline at 800.252.5400 or website at txabusehotline.org.

Children's advocacy centers (CACs) are situated at the point of entry into the investigation of crimes against children's cases and are a vital part of the frontline response to child abuse.

The Texas CAC network seeks to ensure that it reaches **every child** that needs the services of a CAC, provides **every service** needed by that child, and makes **every effort** to ensure that those services are of the highest standard of care.

Every Child. Every Service. Every Effort.



children's advocacy centers of texas

This is a resource of Children's Advocacy Center<sup>™</sup> of Texas WWW.CACTX.ORG