

Recognizing and Responding to Child Abuse and Childhood Sexual Abuse

Recognizing the Signs

Don't always expect obvious signs when a child is being abused or sexually abused. Signs are often there, but you have to know what to look for. Most of the time there are no physical signs of sexual abuse. Over 90% of the time, the child knows the perpetrator and there is no physical force used by the perpetrator.

Emotional or Behavioral Signals

- Too perfect behavior
- Anger or rebellion
- Delayed or inappropriate emotional development
- Loss of self-confidence or self-esteem
- Social withdrawal or a loss of interest or enthusiasm
- Headaches or stomachaches with no medical cause
- Avoidance of certain situations, such as refusing to go to school or ride the bus
- Desperately seeks affection
- A decrease in school performance or loss of interest in school
- Loss of previously acquired developmental skills
- Sometimes, there are no signs whatsoever

Signs of sexual abuse

- Sexual behavior or knowledge that's inappropriate for the child's age
- Pregnancy or a sexually transmitted infection
- Blood in the child's underwear
- Statements that he or she was sexually abused
- Trouble walking or sitting or complaints of genital pain
- Abuse of other children sexually

Signs of physical abuse and neglect

- Unexplained injuries, such as bruises, fractures or burns
- Injuries that don't match the given explanation
- Untreated medical or dental problems
- Complaints about rashes/swelling, bruising, lacerations.
- Poor growth or weight gain
- Lack of clothing or supplies to meet physical needs
- Poor hygiene
- Taking food or money without permission
- Eating a lot in one sitting or hiding food for later
- Poor record of school attendance
- Lack of appropriate attention for medical, dental or psychological problems or lack of necessary follow-up care
- Emotional swings that are inappropriate or out of context to the situation
- Indifference

Talking about it

Children often keep abuse a secret; talking openly about our bodies (starting at a young age), and boundaries can encourage children to share.

Why kids are afraid to tell

- Shame- It's their fault or parents will be mad; or they are ashamed they didn't tell
- The abuser is manipulative
- The child is threatened
- Afraid of disappoint caregiver
- They don't want the abuser to get in trouble-main bread winner
- They don't understand it's wrong

Listening to kids

- Kids may tell portions of happened to "test the waters" or say, "I have a friend..."
- They will shut down or recant their stories
- Always be open minded and non judgemental.
- Kids often tell other people than the caregivers
- Kids have nicknames for private parts. Pocketbook, cookie, etc..

Talking to kids

- Recognizing and talking about the private parts of the body in age appropriate words
- No one should touch them on the private part of the bodies
- Talk about tricky people, set family rules
- Be proactive. If a child seems uncomfortable, or resistant to being with a particular adult, ask why

Reacting Responsibly

It's important to understand how to appropriately respond to disclosures, discoveries, and suspicions of sexual abuse. Your goal is to create a trusting, nonjudgmental environment so the child will feel comfortable disclosing information about the abuse.

Responding to a Disclosure

- Don't Overreact. Stay calm
- Be open-minded.
- Listen to what they have to say
- ALWAYS BELIEVE THEM
- No leading questions, no investigations
- Thank them for sharing; tell them they are brave for sharing this information
- Let them know you are there to help them *never make any promises*
- Report this immediately!

If you witnessed abuse or sexual abuse

- Report it immediately
- Share who, what, when, where it happened and where the offender is
- Share any other details you feel are related, ex-victim behavior leading up to the incident

If you suspect abuse or sexual abuse

- Report the behavior!
- Ask open ended questions

Call Julie Valentine Center if you have any questions or concerns!

864-331-0560

Crisis line: 864-467-3633

www.julievalentinecenter.org