

# INDICATORS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE



Though about 20 percent of child abuse reports concern sexual abuse, it is not easily detectable, usually because observers are unaware of the subtle changes in abuse victims and their relationships with others. Many of the differences listed cross age and gender.

**Caution:** Because quite often other causes can be attributed to the observed behaviors, no *one* of the following necessarily indicates an abusive situation unless otherwise noted.

## INDICATORS IN YOUNG CHILDREN

- recurrent nightmares
- loss of appetite or increased eating
- sleeplessness or increased sleeping
- crying or whining for no apparent reason
- withdrawal from and fear of adults
- sexually acting out with other children or toys (*strong indicator*)
- talking in sexually explicit language in a manner beyond child's age (*strong indicator*)
- changes in school work
- not getting along with peers
- increased aggressiveness or hostility
- exhibiting fear of one person or wanting to spend an inordinate amount of time with one person (maybe due to abuser giving love, attraction and gifts)
- fear of dark
- injury or abuse of pets
- early pregnancy (*strong indicator*)

## INDICATORS IN ADOLESCENTS

- isolation from others, withdrawn
- poor peer relationships
- poor self-image, puts self down, difficulty accepting compliments
- either improved or decreased school performance
- truancy
- drinking or using other chemical substances, eating disorders
- over-compliance, lack of self-assertion
- increased hostility and anger
- aggressiveness, fighting with peers and siblings
- excessive anxiety, nervousness, tension, easily distracted
- lack of trust
- (males) may be likely to set fires
- (males) feelings of homophobia
- (females) may marry early to escape an abusive situation
- (females) involved in pornography or prostitution (*strong indicator*)
- self-mutilation (i.e., biting nails, fingers, lips, etc. until sore, infected or bleeding)
- running away from home
- sexual promiscuity (*strong indicator*)
- seductive behavior (i.e., obsession with sex talk, drawings, jokes, movies) (*strong indicator*)
- excessive masturbation (*strong indicator*)
- may abuse younger siblings or non-related children sexually (*strong indicator*)
- clinically significant depression or suicidal ideation or attempts
- feelings of dissociation
- injury or abuse of pets
- bedwetting