

Signs and Symptoms of Abuse

Please note: A CPS report can be made no matter how long ago an incident occurred.

Every parent knows that raising a child can be difficult at times. No one ever achieves “perfection” when it comes to parenting. On the other hand, there’s a big difference between normal parenting mistakes and serious abuse or neglect. Here are some common warning signs that abuse or neglect may be happening.

Warning Signs of Physical Abuse

- Unexplained or poor explanation of bruises, welts or cuts
- A pattern of injuries over time
- Fearful behavior by the child
- Parents/caregivers who are physically abusive or often angry
- Inappropriate child clothing, which may be used by the child or caregiver to hide signs of injury

Warning Signs of Emotional Abuse

- Excessively fearful or shy behavior
- Persistent anti-social behavior (e.g., very aggressive)
- Children who constantly try to “parent” other kids
- Regression – older children acting much younger
- Harsh, belittling or manipulative caregiver behavior
- Children witnessing violence between caregivers

Warning Signs of Sexual Abuse

- An STD or pregnancy before age 14
- Stained, bloody or torn underclothes
- Injury to the genital area
- Children who have age-inappropriate knowledge about sex or interest in sexual acts
- Extreme passive or aggressive behavior
- Self-destructive behavior such as substance abuse, self-mutilation or suicide threats/attempts
- Parents/caregivers who limit the child’s contact with others

Warning Signs of Neglect

- Chronically bad hygiene, such as very dirty or matted hair, persistent body odor, etc
- Poorly fitting clothes that are dirty and disheveled
- Children who appear to be unsupervised
- Substance abuse or reckless disregard by parents/caregivers

