



# Sophie's Place Child & Youth Advocacy Centre

## Signs and Symptoms of Abuse

The signs and symptoms of child abuse are not always obvious, especially in cases of child sexual abuse. Often children have been threatened or confused by their abuser not to disclose the abuse.

The guidelines listed below are general signs and symptoms and if you notice these in your child you should ask them if anything has happened.

### New Fears, Withdrawn, Depressed

Abused children or teenagers may develop new fears of situations, places, or people. They may become excessively shy, clingy, anxious, scared or withdrawn. They may show distress or resistance to spending time with a particular adult. They may resist playing with their usual friends and withdraw from activities they previously enjoyed.



### Anger/Hostility

If children or teens are not allowed or able to express anger toward the abuser, they may take their anger out on others or against themselves.



### Problems at School

Children or teens may have difficulty concentrating which can affect school performance. A change in grades or behavior at school is not uncommon.



### Unexplained Injuries

Visible signs physical abuse may include unexplained burns or bruises in the shape of objects. You may also hear unconvincing explanations of a child's injuries.



### Returning to Earlier Behaviour

Abused children may display behaviors shown at earlier ages, such as thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, fear of the dark or strangers. For some children, even loss of acquired language or memory problems may be an issue.



### Sleeping and Eating Problems

Children or teens may have problems sleeping, experience nightmares, or display sudden loss or gain in appetite. Children may regress in their development. A child might return to younger, more babyish behavior such as wetting the bed or thumb sucking.



Sources: <https://www.allianceforchildren.org/signs-and-symptoms>; [https://content.c3p.ca/pdfs/C3P\\_ChildSexualAbuse\\_ItsYourBusiness\\_en.pdf](https://content.c3p.ca/pdfs/C3P_ChildSexualAbuse_ItsYourBusiness_en.pdf)

### Child Abuse Reporting

Emergency: 911  
1-800-663-9122 (Ministry of Children & Family Development)  
Police: 604-599-0502

### Contact Us

Phone: 604-588-0727  
[www.the-centre.org/sophies-place](http://www.the-centre.org/sophies-place)  
Email: [spinfo@the-centre.org](mailto:spinfo@the-centre.org)



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### Self-Destructive Acts

Children or teens may feel such guilt and shame from the abuse that they may take their feelings out by hurting themselves. This may involve hitting or cutting themselves, using drugs and/or alcohol or even a suicide attempt. As teens that were abused as children mature, it is common for issues of abuse to resurface requiring additional or new services.

### Inappropriate Sexual Behaviours

Children may act out sexually, in a way that's inconsistent with children of the same age. They may show an unusual interest in other people's or animal's genitals, or masturbate excessively. They may try to express affection in an inappropriate way, such as fondling private parts. Teens may participate in risky sexual behavior and make inappropriate advances in public. They may have sexual knowledge beyond their level of development.

### Lack of Personal Care or Hygiene

Abused and neglected children or teenagers may appear uncared for. They may present as consistently dirty and have severe body odor, or they may lack sufficient clothing for weather.

### Risk-Taking Behaviours

Children or teenagers who are being abused may engage in high-risk activities such as using drugs or alcohol or carrying a weapon.

### Loss of Boundaries

Children or teens may be overly friendly and attached to total strangers, or they may tolerate abuse from other children. They may become excessively isolated and withdrawn, or may become overly obedient. They might excessively seek time with a specific adult who gives them extra attention, gifts, or privileges.

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