

# Signs of Child Abuse

Matthew wrote that when Jesus saw the people, “He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (9:36, NIV). Just as Jesus shepherded those in need of justice, you and your Adventurer team can help children in need of protection in your club. As Adventurer staff, you are in a unique position that allows you to closely observe and get to know children and their families. Therefore, it’s important that you know the signs that may indicate child abuse.

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Signs of abuse and neglect are from “Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect: Signs and Symptoms” by the Child Welfare Information Gateway ([childwelfare.gov](http://childwelfare.gov)). For free copies to reproduce and distribute, go to [childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/signs.cfm](http://childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/signs.cfm).

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## SIGNS THAT MAY SIGNAL CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT

### **The child:**

- shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance.
- has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to the parents’ or guardians’ attention.
- has learning problems (or difficulty concentrating) that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes.
- is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen.
- lacks adult supervision.
- is overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn.
- comes to school or other activities early, stays late, and does not want to go home.

### **The parent or guardian:**

- shows little concern for the child.
- denies the existence of, or blames the child for, the child’s problems in school or at home.
- asks teachers or other caregivers to use harsh physical discipline if the child misbehaves.
- sees the child as entirely bad, worthless, or burdensome.
- demands a level of physical or academic performance the child cannot achieve.
- looks primarily to the child for care, attention, and satisfaction of emotional needs.

### **The child and parent or guardian:**

- rarely touch or look at each other.
- consider their relationship entirely negative.
- state that they do not like each other.

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## SIGNS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE

### **Consider that physical abuse is a possibility when the child:**

- has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes.
- has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school or Adventurer Club meetings or events.
- seems frightened of the parents/guardians and protests or cries when it is time to go home.
- shrinks at the approach of adults.
- reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver.

### **Consider that physical abuse is a possibility when the parent or guardian:**

- offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child's injury.
- describes the child as "evil" or in some other very negative way.
- uses harsh physical discipline with the child.
- has a history of abuse as a child.

## SIGNS OF NEGLECT

### **Consider that neglect is a possibility when the child:**

- is frequently absent from school.
- begs or steals food or money.
- lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses.
- is consistently dirty and has severe body odor.
- lacks sufficient clothing for the weather.
- abuses alcohol or other drugs.
- states that there is no one at home to provide care.

### **Consider that neglect is a possibility when a parent or caregiver:**

- appears to be indifferent to the child.
- seems apathetic or depressed.
- behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner.
- is abusing alcohol or other drugs.

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## SIGNS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

### **Consider that sexual abuse is a possibility when the child:**

- has difficulty walking or sitting.
- suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities.
- reports nightmares or bed wetting.
- experiences a sudden change in appetite.
- demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior.
- becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under age 14.
- runs away.
- reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver.

### **Consider that sexual abuse is a possibility when a parent or guardian:**

- is unduly protective of the child or severely limits the child's contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex.
- is secretive and isolated.
- is jealous or controlling with family members.

## SIGNS OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE

### **Consider that emotional abuse is a possibility when the child:**

- shows extremes in behavior, such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity, or aggression.
- is either inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example) or inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking or head-banging, for example).
- is delayed in physical or emotional development.
- has attempted suicide.
- reports a lack of attachment to the parent.

### **Consider that emotional abuse is a possibility when the parent or guardian:**

- constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child.
- is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for the child's problems.
- overtly rejects the child.