

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.

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

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- is overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn.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.