

# Signs of Sexual Abuse or Assault

**THE FOLLOWING ARE PRELIMINARY WARNING SIGNS AND DO NOT NECESSARILY MEAN THAT A CHILD HAS EXPERIENCED SEXUAL ABUSE OR ASSAULT; THEY COULD BE INDICATIONS OF OTHER PROBLEMS. IF MANY SYMPTOMS ARE PRESENT, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MEDICAL EVALUATIONS ARE RECOMMENDED.**

## I. EMOTIONAL CHANGES

- Anxiety, Irritability
- Withdrawal, Depression
- Sleep disturbances
- Change in appetite
- New fears
- Abrupt change in personality
- Poor self-esteem

## II. BEHAVIORAL CHANGES

*Verbal:*

- Unusual interest in and/or knowledge of sexual acts or language inappropriate to the child's age
- Suicidal threats
- Denial of a problem with marked lack of expression
- Aggression or anger directed everywhere
- Reluctance to go to a particular place or be with a particular person

*Non-verbal:*

- "Acting out" or attention seeking behaviors such as frequent tardiness or absence from school, drug and/or alcohol abuse, delinquency or running away, rebelling, stealing, physical abuse of others and/or property
- Excessive masturbatory behavior
- Wearing many layers of clothing regardless of the weather
- Drop in grades or change of attitude toward school

## III. PHYSICAL CHANGES

- Child may be diagnosed as having a sexually transmitted disease
- Recurrent physical complaints such as infections, cramps, or abdominal pains, dizziness, gagging, and severe headaches
- Sudden weight loss or gain, or diagnosis of an eating disorder
- Pregnancy when the victim refuses to reveal information about the father of the baby
- Self-injury (ie: cutting or burning oneself)

## IV. SIGNS IN YOUNG CHILDREN

- Nightmares and other sleep disturbances
- Bed wetting
- Clinging, whining
- Regression to more infantile behavior
- Agitation, hyperactivity
- Irritability

- Aggressiveness
- Evidence of physical trauma to genital area
- Abuse of animals
- Fire-setting
- Sexual acting out on other children