



LINCOLN Medical Education Partnership  
Strengthening Families through Health Education

## **CHILD ABUSE**

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**Did you know that in some states it is not required that teachers, physicians, dentists and other professionals report suspected cases of abuse to authorities? Luckily, Nebraska does require this reporting.**

Child abuse is common. Studies reveal that one in four girls and one in eight boys will be sexually abused before they are 18 years old. About one in twenty children are physically abused each year. And yet, the number of deaths of children under 11 years old who die as a result of child abuse is greatly underreported in the United States. The physical and psychological effects of abuse can be extensive and severe, often outlasting the actual episodes of mistreatment. Abuse can impair brain development and intellect, delay development of skills such as walking and speaking, and cause physical disabilities and other long-term health problems. Some abused children develop posttraumatic stress disorder.

**WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?** The U.S. Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act defines child abuse and neglect as, at a minimum:

- Any recent act or failure to act resulting in imminent risk or serious harm, death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation...
- of a child (a person under the age of 18, unless the child protection law of the state in which the child resides specifies younger age for cases not involving sexual abuse)...
- by a parent or caretaker (including any employee of a residential facility or any staff person providing out of home care) who is responsible for the child's welfare.

### **GENERAL SIGNS OF ABUSE:**

- A poor self-image
- Sexual acting out
- Aggressive, disruptive, and sometimes illegal behavior
- Anger and rage, or feelings of sadness or other symptoms of depression
- Chronic sadness, frequent crying
- Self-destructive or self-abusive behavior, suicidal thoughts
- Passive or withdrawn behavior
- Anxiety or fears, or flashbacks and nightmares
- School problems or failure
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Fears parents or other adults
- Reluctant to talk about home life or to invite friends over
- Regressive behaviors such as thumb-sucking, bedwetting and soiling, clinging

(over)

## TYPES OF ABUSE AND SIGNS TO WATCH FOR:

- **Physical Abuse:** infliction of physical injury as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, burning, shaking or otherwise physically harming a child.
  1. Any injury (bruise, burns [cigarette or immersion in scalding water], fracture, abdominal or head injuries) that cannot be explained.
  2. Explanation for the injury seems inconsistent with the injury.
  3. Different caregivers' accounts contradict each other.
  4. An inappropriate parental reaction to an injury, either overly concerned or not concerned enough.
- **Sexual Abuse:** includes fondling a child's genitals, intercourse, incest, rape, sodomy, exhibitionism, and commercial exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic materials.
  1. Fearful behavior (nightmares, depression, unusual fears, attempts to run away).
  2. Abdominal pain, bedwetting, urinary tract infection, genital pain or bleeding, sexually transmitted disease.
  3. Extreme sexual behavior that seems inappropriate for the child's age.
- **Emotional Abuse:** acts or omissions by the parents or the caregivers that have caused, or could cause, serious behavioral, cognitive, emotional or mental disorders, such as withdrawing affection, criticizing, blaming, isolating, rejecting, terrorizing a child or exposing a child to a violent or sexually inappropriate environment.
  1. Sudden change in self-confidence.
  2. Headaches or stomachaches with no medical cause.
  3. Abnormal fears, increased nightmares.
  4. Withdrawn and listless.
  5. Unhappy
  6. Developmentally behind.
  7. Attempts to run away.
- **Child Neglect:** physical neglect, such as withholding food, clothing, shelter and other physical necessities; emotional neglect, such as withholding love, comfort, affection, supervision and approval necessary for healthy development; medical neglect, such as withholding needed medical care; and educational neglect, such as causing the child to be chronically absent from school.
  1. Failure to gain weight (especially in infants)
  2. Physically smaller than their peers
  3. Desperately affectionate behavior
  4. Voracious appetite and stealing of food

Not all abuse victims have severe reactions. Usually, the younger the child, the longer the abuse continues, and the closer the child's relationship with the abuser, the more serious the emotional damage will be.