

SIGNS OF POSSIBLE SEXUAL ABUSE

Children who have been abused may display a range of emotional and behavioral reactions. These include, but are not limited to:

- ◆ sexual knowledge, language, and/or behaviors that are inappropriate for the child's age
- ◆ aspects of sexual molestation in drawings/games/fantasies
- ◆ sleep disturbances/nightmares
- ◆ unusual aggressiveness/angry outbursts
- ◆ anxiety
- ◆ changes in eating patterns
- ◆ not wanting to be left alone with a particular individual(s)
- ◆ a sudden drop in performance at school
- ◆ fear of people/places that the child used to be comfortable around
- ◆ unusual interest in or avoidance of - ALL things sexual in nature
- ◆ seductiveness
- ◆ withdrawal from friends or family
- ◆ excessive sadness/depression
- ◆ refusal to go to school/delinquency
- ◆ secretiveness/talk about secrets
- ◆ painful or itching genitalia
- ◆ underwear that is stained, torn, or bloody
- ◆ toilet trained child begins to wet their pants or their bed
- ◆ statements that their bodies are dirty or damaged
- ◆ fear that there is something wrong with them in the genital area
- ◆ anger at God and/or refusal to pray for a specific person
- ◆ a belief that he or she is more sinful than other people
- ◆ child obsesses about "being perfect"
- ◆ self harm or suicidal behavior
- ◆ other severe behaviors (ie. feces smearing, cutting, anorexia/bulimia)



Although many children who have experienced sexual abuse show behavioral and emotional changes, many others do not. It is therefore critical to focus not only on detection, but on prevention and communication—by teaching children about body safety and healthy body boundaries, and by encouraging open communication about sexual matters.

*** NOTE: It is common for children who have experienced other types of trauma or abuse to also display some of the above characteristics.**

