



Signs of Child Abuse and Neglect

Nationally and in the District of Columbia, most reports and substantiations of child maltreatment are neglect, followed by physical abuse and sexual abuse.

Neglect occurs when parents or caretakers do not provide proper supervision, control, subsistence, education as required by law, or other care necessary for healthy development. By itself, lack of financial means to provide for a child is not neglect.

Physical signs may include:

- Poor hygiene.
- Inappropriate or ill-fitting clothing.
- Being left alone or with people unable to provide proper supervision.
- Obvious lack of necessary medical treatment.

Behavioral signs may include:

- Chronic hunger or sleepiness.
- Delayed language development.
- Clinging behavior or development of indiscriminate attachments.
- Frequent complaints of feeling unwell.
- Frequent tardiness or absence from school.

Physical abuse is non-accidental injury of a child by a parent or caretaker.

Physical signs may include:

- Bruises, welts, or swelling.
- Sprains or broken bones.
- Burns.
- Lacerations or abrasions.
- Bite marks.
- Unexplained or repeated injuries.

Behavioral signs may include:

- Attempts to hide injuries.
- Difficulty sitting or walking.
- Wariness of physical contact with adults.
- Reluctance to go home.
- Depression or self-mutilation.
- Fear of parent(s) or caregiver(s).

Sexual abuse is exploitation of a child for the sexual gratification of an adult or older child.

Physical signs may include:

- Difficulty walking or sitting.
- Torn, stained, or bloody clothing.
- Genital pain or itching.
- Sexually transmitted diseases.
- Pregnancy.

Behavioral signs may include:

- Precocious sexual knowledge or behavior.
- Extremes—hostile and aggressive or fearful and withdrawn.
- Self-mutilation.
- Substance abuse.
- Running away.



To report child abuse and neglect in the District, call 202-671-SAFE.