

Notifications

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What is child abuse, neglect and sexual exploitation

Find out how to recognize and know the warning signs.

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24-hour help

Call 911 if you or the person you are reporting is in immediate danger.

Child Abuse Hotline: [1-800-387-5437](tel:1-800-387-5437) (KIDS) to get help if you, or children you know, are being neglected, abused or sexually exploited. If you believe a child is at risk, you must report it. Help is available in multiple languages 24/7.

Recognize child abuse and neglect

Child abuse is defined by the [Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act](#). Anyone can contact Child Intervention when they are worried about the safety or well-being of a child or youth.

There are 4 types of child abuse and neglect:

1. neglect
2. emotional abuse

3. physical abuse
4. sexual abuse

Know who it affects

Child abuse and neglect can happen to any child or youth:

- up to 18 years of age
- living full-time or part-time, with or apart, from their parents or guardians
- of all abilities, gender identities and cultural and spiritual backgrounds

Know the behaviours

Neglect

Neglect is when a parent or guardian does not provide their child or youth with basic age-appropriate care such as:

- food
- clothing
- shelter
- love and affection
- protection from harm

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse can happen along with neglect or the other types of abuse. This may include:

- humiliating the child by blaming or belittling them
- refusing to comfort the child when the child is upset or frightened
- criticizing the child by calling them names like stupid, bad, useless or a troublemaker
- setting unrealistic expectations, threatening or accusing the child
- exposing the child to violence or chronic drug or alcohol use in the home
- cruel or unusual treatment or punishment

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is when a parent or guardian causes an injury or trauma to any part of their child's body. It might leave bruises and marks that can be seen, but can also include internal injuries that are hard to spot. Physical abuse can happen only once or many times. It may include:

- hitting, choking and kicking
- biting, scratching and pulling hair
- throwing or hitting their child with things

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse happens when a parent or guardian exposes their child or youth to inappropriate sexual contact, activity or behaviour. This may include:

- non-touching activities such as:
 - having inappropriately sexual phone calls or conversations
 - making the child watch someone expose themselves
 - showing them pornographic material
- sexual touching activities such as:
 - fondling
 - making them touch an adult's or other child's genital area
 - sexual intercourse with the child or youth
- sexual exploitation activities such as:
 - engaging a child or youth for prostitution
 - using them in pornography
 - luring them via the Internet for sexual purposes

Know the warning signs

Child abuse, neglect and sexual exploitation have many different warning signs. Below, you will find some common examples. This is not an exhaustive list. If you have a question or any reason to be concerned, [contact us](#).

Neglect

A neglected child or youth may:

- often be hungry and steal or hoard food
- be underweight or dehydrated
- have poor hygiene
- wear clothes that are torn, dirty, do not fit or are not right for the season
- try to take on adult responsibilities like caring for siblings, doing household tasks or looking after a parent
- say that their parents are rarely home or not want to go home
- have medical or dental problems that will not go away such as infected sores, decayed teeth or difficulty seeing that is not being addressed

Emotional abuse

An emotionally abused child or youth may:

- constantly apologize or try too hard to please others
- show anxiety, fears or depression
- have trouble concentrating, learning or sleeping
- have episodes of aggressive, angry and demanding behaviour

- cry for no apparent reason
- have problems with bed-wetting or fecal incontinence

Physical abuse

A physically abused child or youth may have visible injuries or illness that are unexplained or poorly explained, including:

- bruises, cuts, scrapes, welts, fractures, sprains, dislocations or head injuries
- injuries that could not have happened by accident like a bruised earlobe or cut behind the knee
- visible handprints, finger prints or other marks
- burns on various parts of their body
- unusual behaviour or appearance

In addition, the child or youth may:

- be defensive about their injuries
- wear clothing that covers their body even when the weather is warm
- not be able to tolerate physical contact or touch
- fear their parents or guardians or other adults
- run away
- be reluctant to undress around others
- say their parent or guardian has injured them

Sexual abuse

A sexually abused child or youth may:

- know more about sex than others their age
- behave in an improper or aggressively sexual way with peers, teachers or other adults
- use sexual language or make drawings with sexual images
- start wetting or soiling their pants, wetting the bed or thumb-sucking
- be afraid to go to sleep, have nightmares or sleep long hours
- become withdrawn, anxious, fearful or depressed
- have physical trauma or irritations in the anal and genital areas

Why it happens

There are many reasons child abuse or neglect may happen within a family, such as:

- parents or guardians are lacking parenting skills or have negative childhood experiences
- job loss or other financial challenges
- chronic alcohol and/or drug use in the home
- the impacts of colonization and intergenerational trauma
- the family lives far away from other family, friends or supports

- family violence in the home
- parents involved in drug manufacturing or trafficking
- frequent family crisis

Every situation is unique. While some signs might point to abuse, they can also mean that a family is facing other challenges.

We are here to help children and support families in many different ways. If you suspect any child is being abused or neglected, [report it immediately](#).

Recognize child sexual exploitation

Child sexual exploitation is defined in the [Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act](#). Children or youth involved in sexual exploitation are victims of sexual abuse who need help and protection.

Sexual exploitation includes:

- luring a young person via the Internet and/or social media for sexual purposes
- involving a child in sexual activity in exchange for money, food, shelter, clothes, electronics or other items of value to the child or youth
- making, selling or distributing child pornography

Know who it affects

Sexual exploitation can occur anywhere and to any young person under the age of 18 regardless of their gender, family situation or social, cultural or economic background. It can happen:

- through social media, apps and chat sites
- on the internet
- at parties
- at the mall or other public spaces
- within a family

Know the warning signs

A sexually exploited child may:

- withdraw from regular friends and family
- be secretive about who they see and where they have been
- be unusually protective about a new relationship or friendship and unwilling to talk about it
- hang around with older people
- wear clothing or jewelry or have a phone or device they could not afford to buy
- carry a lot of condoms or sexual aids
- be very secretive or reactive about their browser history, websites they visit or contacts on their phone

Recognize a sexual exploiter

Anyone who seeks out a child or youth and uses them for sexual purposes is a sexual exploiter. They can:

- be male or female, young or old, rich or poor
- pose as a boyfriend or girlfriend or friend
- be manipulative, threatening or violent
- offer the child drugs, alcohol, money, items of value or emotional support for participating in sexual activities
- act like a manager by placing ads, arranging hotels and driving a child to meet-ups for sex

Help is available. If you suspect that your child or someone you know may be sexually exploited, get help immediately.

Child Abuse Hotline

Get help if you, or children you know, are being neglected, abused or sexually exploited. If you believe a child is at risk, you must report it. Help is available in multiple languages 24/7.

- Phone: [1-800-387-5437](tel:1-800-387-5437) (KIDS) in Canada and the United States.
- Elsewhere in the world dial [00-1-780-427-9485](tel:00-1-780-427-9485).

Contact

Connect with us to get assistance in your area during business hours:

[Children's Services offices](#)

Related

[Child guardianship, foster care and kinship care](#)

[Child Intervention Action Plan](#)

[What is family violence](#)

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