


# Signs of Sexual Abuse



*not all wounds are visible*

Supporting Your Child

# Warning Signs in Children of Possible Sexual Abuse

The occurrence of one indicator does not necessarily mean a person has experienced sexual abuse. Additionally, indicators of sexual abuse can vary widely from person to person.

## Behavior you may see in a child or adolescent:

- Has nightmares or other sleep problems without an explanation.
- Seems distracted or distant at odd times.
- Has a sudden change in eating habits.
- Loses or drastically increases appetite.
- Has trouble swallowing.
- Sudden mood swings: rage, fear, insecurity, or withdrawal.



- Thinks of self or body as repulsive, dirty, or bad.
- Leaves “clues” that seem likely to provoke a discussion about sexual issues.
- Develops new or unusual fear of certain people or places.
- Refuses to talk about a secret shared with an adult or older child.
- Writes, draws, plays, or dreams of sexual or frightening images.
- Suddenly has money, toys, or other gifts without reason.
- Talks about a new older friend.
- Exhibits adult-like sexual behaviors, language, and knowledge.

All of the warning signs listed above are general indicators of sexual abuse in children. Many children do not actually disclose what happened; it is up to attentive adults to recognize hints. However, if you suspect a child has been abused by seeing these indications, or if he or she hints at abuse or outright discloses sexual abuse, seek help.

### **Behavior more typically found in adolescents and teens:**

- Self-injury (cutting, burning)
- Inadequate personal hygiene
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Sexual promiscuity
- Running away from home
- Depression, anxiety
- Suicide attempts
- Fear of intimacy or closeness
- Compulsive eating or dieting

# Responding To Sexual Abuse

When a student tells an adult that he or she has been sexually abused, the adult may feel uncomfortable and may not know what to say or do. The following guidelines should be used when responding to the teen or child who says she or he has been sexually abused:

## What to Say

If a teen or child even hints in a vague way that sexual abuse has occurred, encourage her or him to talk freely. Don't make judgmental comments.

Show that you understand and take seriously what he or she is saying. Child and adolescent psychiatrists have found that children who are listened to and understood do much better than those who are not. The response to the disclosure of sexual abuse is critical to the minor's ability to resolve and heal the trauma of sexual abuse.

Assure the youth that he or she did the right thing in telling. A teen or child who is close to the abuser may feel guilty about revealing the secret. He or she may feel frightened if the abuser has threatened to harm the youth, or other family members as punishment for telling.

Tell the youth that she or he is not to blame for the sexual abuse. Most teens or children in attempting to make sense out of the abuse will believe that somehow they caused it or may even view it as a form of punishment for imagined or real wrong- doings.

Finally, offer the youth protection, and promise that you will promptly take steps to see that the abuse stops.

## What to Do

Report any suspicion of child abuse. If the abuse is within the family, report it to the local Child Protection Agency. If the abuse is outside of the family, report it to the police. Personnel at your child's school will also report to the SRO (School Resource Officer). Individuals reporting in good faith are immune from prosecution. The agency receiving the report will conduct an evaluation and will take action to protect the minor.

Parents should consult with their pediatrician or family physician. The examining doctor will evaluate the child's condition and treat any physical problem related to the abuse, gather evidence to help protect the teen/child, and reassure the teen/child that he/she is all right.

Children who have been sexually abused should have an evaluation by a child and adolescent psychiatrist or other qualified mental health professional to find out how the abuse has affected them, and to determine whether ongoing professional help is necessary for the child to deal with the trauma of the abuse. The child and adolescent psychiatrist can also provide support to other family members who may be upset by the abuse.



**1 in 4 girls is sexually abused before the age of 18.**

**1 in 6 boys is sexually abused before the age of 18.**

**The median age for reported sexual abuse is 9 years old.**

**More than 20% of children are sexually abused before the age of 8.**

**Over 30% of children victimized never disclose to ANYONE.**

**Two-thirds of teenagers never tell.**

**More than 70% of child sex abuse cases involve a relative, friend, or someone close to the child.**

**Children only fabricate ½% of the time!**



**FRISCO**  
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Student Services-Guidance and Counseling

469-633-6583

[www.friscoisd.org](http://www.friscoisd.org)

For more information on child sexual abuse please see: <https://www.nsopw.gov/en/Education/RecognizingSexualAbuse#child>.