

Child Abuse and the Church: Prevention and Response

Possible Symptoms of Child Sexual Abuse

Remember, with few exceptions such as physical trauma to the genital area, no one sign or symptom indicates that sexual abuse has occurred. Rather, those who minister to children should be alert to clusters of symptoms or patterns, which might suggest abuse.

Pre-School Children

Excessive clinging or need for constant reassurance.

Sleep difficulties including nightmare, fear of the dark, and fear of sleeping alone.

Changes in appetite.

Changes in personality.

Stomach aches.

Headaches.

Regressive behaviors, such as thumb sucking.

Unusual behaviors such as making gagging sounds or inappropriate touch in their own or other children's genital areas.

Any sexually transmitted disease.

Evidence of physical trauma in genital area.

Complaints of pain around genital areas, which cannot be explained by common causes such as diaper rash.

School Age Children

Unusually seductive behavior with either children or adults.

Sudden changes in school performance.

Sudden changes in sleeping or eating patterns.

Bed wetting or somatic complaints.

Unexplained money or gifts.

Unusual knowledge or interest in sexual acts or terminology, based on child's age.

Unusual or bizarre sexual themes in play, stories, or art work.

Being late for school or being taken out early on a regular basis, especially if the same person regularly writes the excuses or picks Any sexually transmitted disease.

Evidence of physical trauma to genital area.

Complaints of pain around genital areas.

Adolescents

Pseudomature behavior, such as a girl assuming functions in her family normally performed by a mother.

Self-mutilation such as cutting their body.

Refusal to dress for physical education.

Regressive behavior.

Personality changes.

Sudden increases in acting out or antisocial behavior.

Any sexually transmitted disease.

Pregnancy, especially if the female will not give information about the biological father.

 **Hotline number**

(800) 533-7018

