

## FACT SHEET

### CHILD ABUSE

*"They think it's ok after witnessing it over and over. It doesn't stop until people get right help. If a child is abused, they might end up in a violent relationship or become abusers themselves"*

*- Age 20, Ontario*

#### Behavioural Signs of Sexual Abuse

##### In a Young Child

- Sexual knowledge or language that is inappropriate for the child's age or development
- An unusual interest in or preoccupation with sexual matters
- Hints about sexual activity through actions or comments that are inappropriate to the child's age or developmental level
- Inappropriate sexual play or behaviour with dolls/toys, other children or themselves
- Art that shows abuse
- Excessive masturbation
- Persistent urinating or defecating in clothes
- Regressive behaviour: baby talk, thumb sucking
- Fear or avoidance of any aspect of sexuality
- Sexually suggestive behaviour with adults or older children
- Consistent psychosomatic complaints or frequent depression
- Poor social boundaries
- Starting fires or fascination with fire

##### In an Older Child

- Sexual knowledge or language that is inappropriate for the child's age or development
- Hints about abusive sexual activity through actions or comments
- Sexually suggestive behaviour with adults or older children
- Consistent psychosomatic complaints or frequent depression
- Difficulty concentrating, withdrawn, overly obedient
- Seeming accident-prone
- Starting fires or fascination with fire
- Running away
- Promiscuity or prostitution
- Refusing to undress for gym, often wearing layers of clothing
- [Creating] stories, poems, or artwork about abuse
- Suicidal feelings or attempts
- Destroying property, hurting or mutilating animals



## Physical Signs of Sexual Abuse in Children

- Bruising, bleeding, swelling, tears or cuts of genitals or anus
- Unusual vaginal odour or discharge
- Torn, stained, or bloody clothing, especially underwear or itching in genital area, difficulty going to the bathroom, walking or sitting
- Sexually transmitted disease, especially in a pre-adolescent child
- Pregnancy

*Note: Behavioural and physical indicators may of course relate to matters other than sexual abuse, and the presence of any one of them does not necessarily mean that a child is being abused.*

## Guidelines for Responding to a Child

- Take the child seriously and stay calm
- Reassure and support the child. Say things like:
  - “I’m glad you told me; it was the right thing to do.”
  - “It’s not your fault.”
  - “This happens to other children.”
  - “I believe you.”
  - “I’m sorry this happened to you.”
  - “I’ll try to make sure you are safe.”
- Respond to the child’s questions and concerns, but don’t try to investigate
- Children’s testimony can be tainted by well-meaning people who try to probe for information about what happened. Leave that to the authorities.
- Don’t make promises you can’t keep. Don’t tell a child that you will be able to keep this secret; don’t say “your parents won’t be upset;” don’t promise that the person who abused the child will be punished.
- Report the matter in confidence to the Board President or person or committee designated to deal with such matters.
- Any person, including a person who performs professional or official duties with respect to children, has an obligation to report promptly to a children’s aid society if he/she has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is in need of protection.
- The Act also penalizes the failure of a person with professional or official duties to report their suspicion, where the information upon which their suspicion is based was obtained in the course of their professional or official duties.

*(From the Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion: Making It Safer:  
Preventing Sexual Abuse of Children, A Guide for Ontario Sport Organizations)  
<http://www.mhp.gov.on.ca/english/sportandrec/1-overview-handouts.pdf>*

