



10 Signs of Child Abuse

It can be difficult to recognize when a child is being abused; below are 10 common signs to watch for. Learning these signs and discussing them with those close to you is the first step in breaking the pattern of violence that hurts us all.

1. **Unexplained injuries.** Visible signs of physical abuse may include unexplained burns or bruises in the shape of objects. You may also hear unconvincing explanations of a child's injuries.
2. **Changes in behavior.** Abuse can lead to many changes in a child's behavior. Abused children often appear scared, anxious, depressed, withdrawn or more aggressive.
3. **Returning to earlier behaviors.** Abused children may display behaviors shown at earlier ages, such as thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, fear of the dark or strangers. For some children, even loss of acquired language or memory problems may be an issue.
4. **Fear of going home.** Abused children may express apprehension or anxiety about leaving school or about going places with the person who is abusing them.
5. **Changes in eating.** The stress, fear and anxiety caused by abuse can lead to changes in a child's eating behaviors, which may result in weight gain or weight loss.
6. **Changes in sleeping.** Abused children may have frequent nightmares or have difficulty falling asleep, and as a result may appear tired or fatigued.
7. **Changes in school performance and attendance.** Abused children may have difficulty concentrating in school or have excessive absences, sometimes due to adults trying to hide the children's injuries from authorities.
8. **Lack of personal care or hygiene.** Abused and neglected children may appear uncared for. They may present as consistently dirty and have severe body odor, or they may lack sufficient clothing for the weather.
9. **Risk-taking behaviors.** Young people who are being abused may engage in high-risk activities such as using drugs or alcohol or carrying a weapon.
10. **Inappropriate sexual behaviors.** Children who have been sexually abused may exhibit overly sexualized behavior or use explicit sexual language.

Protect a Child

Some signs that a child is experiencing violence or abuse are more obvious than others. Trust your instincts. Suspected abuse is sufficient to contact the authorities. You do not need proof.

If you suspect a child has been abused...

- DO:**
- Keep calm.
 - Tell the child you believe them.
 - Show interest and concern.
 - Reassure and support the child.
 - Take action. It could save a child's life.

- DON'T:**
- Panic or overreact.
 - Pressure the child.
 - Confront the offender.
 - Blame the child or minimize the child's feelings.
 - Overwhelm the child with questions.

- REMEMBER....**
- Suspicion of abuse is all that is necessary to file a report
 - Your information can be given anonymously
 - You will be asked to describe your concerns about the child and it will be helpful if you can provide: the child's name, age, address, gender, school attended (if possible), and names of parents.

Information from www.joyfulheartfoundation.org

In 2007, 32 Australian teenagers from the state of Victoria were prosecuted as a result of sexting activity.

Child pornography charges were brought against six teenagers in Greensburg, Pennsylvania in January 2009 after three girls sent sexually explicit photographs to three male classmates.

In Ohio, high school senior, Jessica Logan, 18, sent a nude photo to her boyfriend. After they split, the boyfriend allegedly forwarded the photo to his friends. Jessica learned that the photo circulated among students at seven high schools throughout the greater Cincinnati area. Other students harassed her, calling her "whore" and "porn queen". Jessica subsequently hanged herself in her bedroom.

In Fort Wayne, Indiana, a teenage boy was indicted on felony obscenity charges for allegedly sending a photo of his genitals to several female classmates.

Another boy was charged with child pornography in a similar case.

Philip Alpert, and 18-year-old from Florida, emailed nude photos of his ex-girlfriend to 70 people. Philip received 5 years probation, got thrown out of college, and he is labeled a sex offender until he turns 43.

Ohio Legislative response A county prosecutor and two lawmakers proposed a law that would reduce sexting from a felony to a first degree misdemeanor, and eliminate the possibility of a teenage offender being labeled a sex offender for years. The proposal was supported by the parents of Jesse Logan.

THAT PICTURE'S NOT AS PRIVATE AS YOU THINK

Important Information For Parents

- Kids sext to show off, to flirt with someone, or show someone that they are interested in them.
- Even if a photo was taken and sent as a 'token of love' for example, technology makes it possible for anyone anywhere in the world to see it.
- Remind your kids that once an image is sent, they lose control of it and it can never be retrieved.
- Ask teens how they would feel if their teachers, parents, or the entire school saw the picture. It happens all the time.
- Talk about pressure to send revealing photos. Let teens know that you understand how they can be pushed or dared into sending something. Tell them that no matter how big the peer pressure is, the potential humiliation can be hundreds of times worse.
- Teach your children that the buck stops with them. If someone sends them a photo, they should delete it immediately. It's better to be part of the solution than the problem. Besides, if they do send it on, they're distributing pornography and that is against the law!
- Be Proactive. Your kids could be just a "click away" from big trouble. Don't wait. It's better to have the talk before something happens.

Feeling Pressured?

The next time everyday pressures build up to the point where you feel you've lost your patience, try any of these simple alternatives. You'll feel better ... and so will your child.

- Take a deep breath...and another. Then remember you are the adult.
- Close your eyes and imagine you are hearing what your child is about to hear.
- Press your lips together and count to 10...or better yet, count to 20.
- Put your child in a time-out chair. (Remember this rule: one time-out minute for each year of age.)
- Put yourself in a time-out chair. Think about why you are angry. Is it your child, or is your child simply a convenient target for your anger?
- Phone a friend.
- If someone can watch the children, go for a walk.
- Take a hot bath or splash cold water on your face.
- Hug a pillow.
- Turn on some music and sing along.
- Write down as many helpful words as you can think of. Save the list.
- Call for prevention information.

What is Sexting?

Three out of five teenagers in the 21st century are armed with a technological device that could ruin their lives and land them in jail. According to Harris Interactive, 17 million teenagers in the United States carry a cell phone capable of taking photos, sending short messages and –the obvious—making and receiving phone calls. Fifty-seven percent of teens say cell phones are key to keeping up with their social lives.

Sexting is the act of sending sexually explicit messages or photographs, primarily between mobile phones. The term was first popularized around 2005, and is a portmanteau of sex and texting, where the latter is meant in the wide sense of sending a text possibly with images.

The first known published mention of the term "sexting" was in a 1997 article in the Sunday Telegraph Magazine. It has since been described as taking place worldwide.[4] It has been reported in the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, the U.S., and Canada.

Sexting (sending of sexually explicit messages/photos via cell phone or instant messenger) is illegal under federal law. It falls under the creation, distribution and possession of child porn and is a felony offense. The law makes no distinction based on the age of a person charged—minors can be charged with having nude pictures of girlfriends, boyfriends, or even of themselves.

Studies suggest that 20% of teens (ages 13-19) have shared nude or semi-nude pictures of themselves either by text or posting online. 11% of young teen girls (ages 13-16) admitted sending 'suggestive' photos of themselves! 39% of all teens have sent sexually suggestive messages; 48% of teens say they have received them.

What teens don't realize is just how serious the consequences can be.

Sexting has lasting emotional and legal consequences. In most states, teens can face felony child pornography charges and be listed on sex offender registries. Kids have committed suicide because they could no longer take the name-calling and harassment following their photos ending up widespread. Hopefully knowing the possible consequence ahead of time will help teen to think before they send.

Need Help? Need Support? Need More Information?
Call us 24/7 at Family Support Center (a program of Rural Resources). 684-6139

While teens may view sexting as an innocent practice, the results can have lasting negative effects. Many teens feel shame, regret, and embarrassment once they realize what they have done during a momentary lapse in judgment. Teens should think twice before clicking 'send'.