

Childhood Sexual Assault

...behavioral warning signs¹

Some of these behavioral signs can reveal themselves at other stressful times in a child's life such as divorce, the death of a family member, friend or pet, or when there are problems in school, as well as when abuse is involved. Any one sign does not necessarily mean a child has been abused, but several signs indicate a need to ask further questions.

Behavioral warning signs that a child may have been abused

- Nightmares, trouble sleeping, fear of the dark, or other sleeping problems.
- Extreme fear of “monsters”.
- Disassociation (“spacing out”) at odd times.
- Loss of appetite, difficulty eating or swallowing.
- Sudden mood swings: rage, fear, anger, or withdrawal.
- Fear of certain people or places (e.g. a child may not want to be left alone with a baby-sitter, a friend, a relative, or some other child or adult; or a child who is usually talkative and cheery may become quiet and distant when around a certain person).
- Chronic stomach illness with no identifiable origin.
- An older child regressing (e.g. bed-wetting or thumb sucking).
- Sexual activities with toys or other children, such as simulating sex with dolls or asking other children/siblings to behave sexually.
- New words for private body parts.
- Refusing to talk about a “secret” he/she has with an adult or older child.
- Talking about a new older friend.
- Suddenly having money.
- Cutting or burning herself or himself as an adolescent.

If you have any questions about these or other signs and symptoms, call the Virginia Family Violence & Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-838-8238 for more information.

¹*From: Stop It Now!
The Campaign to Prevent
Child Sexual Abuse
www.stopitnow.org*

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