

## Prevention Tip #2

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### Stay Alert for Possible Signs in Children

*"Sex offenders only rarely sneak into a house in the middle of the night. More often they come through the front door in the day, as friends and neighbors, priests, principals, teachers, doctors and coaches. They are invited into our homes time after time..."*

Anna C. Salter, PhD, Sex Offender Specialist and Author



Child sexual abuse can include a variety of touching and non-touching behaviors. Many of these behaviors do not leave any physical signs so we cannot reliably tell when a child is being sexually abused. Some of the physical and behavior changes listed below can be present in cases of sexual abuse. However, sexual abuse may or may not be the source of those changes. For the most part though, these changes are signs that a child or teen is under stress or has experienced some sort of trauma. In any case, when you spot any of these changes, it is a good idea to take them seriously and try to understand what is causing them.



### Physical Changes

Any irritation, abrasions, swelling, skin tears, bleeding or infection of the child's genitals or anus, or any unexplained injuries around the mouth, should be brought to the immediate attention of the child's pediatrician. In babies and young infants, any roughened or calloused area between the baby's buttocks may signal chronic rubbing of the area from sexual abuse. Confirmation of a sexually transmitted disease in a child is a strong sign of sexual abuse.

Headaches, stomach pain, loss of appetite, and sleeping problems are some of the ways children may respond physically to the anxiety, confusion, anger, fear and shame that can be brought on by sexual abuse. These physical symptoms, however, can also be associated with many other stresses that children experience as a result of family or school problems so don't immediately conclude that sexual abuse has occurred if you see them.



### **Behavior Changes**

Changes in a child's or teen's behavior can sometimes be clues that sexual abuse has occurred. However, just like physical signs, these changes can be brought on by other stresses and events. Again, there is no foolproof checklist of signs that will flag for you whether a child has been sexually abused. Still, vigilant parents and caretakers should be aware of some of the behaviors that have been reported in children who have been previously sexually abused.

Have you seen these behaviors in children?

- Expressed unwillingness or fear to be left in the care of a particular person or to play with a particular child;
- Change in the child's behavior when a particular person is present, e.g. a usually outgoing child becomes quiet or withdrawn or an easygoing child becomes agitated and unruly;
- The use of new words to describe genitalia or sexual behavior;
- Involving other children in sexual behaviors or using toys or dolls to act out sexual scenarios;
- Having money, new clothes, CDs or other personal items and you are unaware how the child or teen received these and from whom;
- Discomfort or reluctance in giving details about time spent with another adult or child.

If you do observe these signs and are concerned that your child might have been sexually abused, please call OCS at 1-855-352-8934 or Alaska State Troopers at 822-3263.

You can also find information about child abuse at these web pages

[www.akchildrensalliance.com](http://www.akchildrensalliance.com)

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

<http://www.enoughabuse.org/>