

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is far more likely to be carried out by someone a child knows, such as a relative or friend of the family, than by a stranger. And sometimes older children abuse younger children. Here are some indications that abuse may be taking place.

Signs of sexual abuse

There's no easy way to tell if a child has been sexually abused. Some children may show changes in behaviour or emotional symptoms.

Children who have been, or are being, abused will often be very confused and uncertain about what to do and who to tell. Some children may not realise what has been done to them is abuse.

Things to be alert to

Any of the following may be a sign of sexual abuse if your child:

- Brings up the subject of sexual abuse or drops hints, possibly testing your reaction
- Mentions an adult has asked him or her to keep a secret
- Is secretive about relationships with older children or adults
- Shows sexually explicit behaviour or uses sexual language inappropriate for their age
- Seems very withdrawn or depressed for no obvious reason
- Has physical complaints with no obvious explanation, for example soreness or redness in the genital area
- Starts bedwetting or has very disturbed sleep
- Refuses to go to school
- Behaves very aggressively
- Self-harms
- Becomes reluctant to be with particular adults, or to go to activities he or she previously enjoyed
- Seems very clingy
- Tries to avoid being left alone with an adult in the family
- Shows fear of an adult or older child

Remember other things can cause these reactions too, so it's important not to panic. If you're genuinely concerned, seek professional help.

Why do some children conceal abuse?

Abusers are likely to go to great lengths to keep their behaviour secret. They may threaten the child, or other family members, if the child tells. They may also play on a child's guilt and persuade them it was their fault and really they wanted it to happen.

Some abusers may pretend abuse is normal and a way of showing love in families.

Disclaimer

MOSAC is unable to screen all these resources for professional soundness, effectiveness or suitability for individual cases. Therefore this information is provided as an aid to you, rather than a recommendation by us. We hope it is useful. We welcome any positive or negative feedback you may have. If you know of any other resources that may be of help please do let us know. Some resources may require a fee.

If your child tells you about abuse

If your child tells you she or he has been abused it's important to:

- Believe your child - children almost never lie about abuse
- Let your child talk - encourage them to talk about it with you, but don't force them to go into details if they don't want to
- Make it clear the abuser's to blame and the abuse isn't their fault
- Stress they've done the right thing by telling you and give constant reassurance that telling you was the best thing to do and they're safe now
- Get professional help to deal with the situation - call the police or the NSPCC, or talk to your GP, health visitor or social services (see below for contact numbers)
- Get support for yourself - talk to a trusted friend or relative about your own feelings, or get **professional support** to help you deal with your feelings if you need to

What to do if you think a child's being abused

If you have any concerns about the safety of a child, it's better to trust your instincts and take action to make sure any abuse is stopped.

- Call the **NSPCC** child protection helpline on 0808 800 5000 or textphone 0800 056 0566 to discuss your concerns
- Call the police - if a child's in danger contact them immediately
- Talk to your GP, health visitor or social services for advice on what to do next