

## **SIGNS OF ABUSE**

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Abuse is categorized into five groups: physical, neglect, emotional, sexual, and substance abuse. It is rare however, for one form of abuse to occur alone. For example, often times, a child who is sexually abused is will also suffer from physical and emotional injuries. All children who are abused suffer from emotional scars. Emotional abuse is the only abuse that can occur unconnected to another form of abuse, but is also the hardest to identify. Neglect is the most common type of abuse, however instances of all types of abuse are on the rise. In 2011, four children died each day as a result of abuse.<sup>1</sup> Children from birth to age four are most likely to be injured from abuse; however, emotional injuries can last well into adulthood.<sup>2</sup> Abuse can sometimes be hard to identify, therefore, if a child is displaying abnormal behavior in conjunction with any one of the below signs of abuse, check it out.

### **Signs of any type of abuse:**

- disturbing, destructive, or illegal behavior
- depression, anger, rage or extreme sadness
- nightmares, anxiety, extreme fear, or flashbacks
- changes in a child's behavior or school performance
- drug and alcohol abuse
- lack of interest in surroundings
- passive or withdrawn behavior
- poor self-image
- bed wetting
- self-destructive or self-abusive behavior, suicidal thoughts
- school problems or failure
- the child seems guarded and startles easily
- the child loiters at school or friends' houses
- the child seems reluctant to go home
- developmental delays by preschool age
- difficulty trusting
- delinquency

### **Abusers often show signs as well:**

- extremely protective or jealous of child

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<sup>1</sup> According to Child Welfare, a service of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2011 Report. Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2013). *Child abuse and neglect fatalities 2011: Statistics and interventions*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau; page 2; <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/fatality.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Children under the age of five are most vulnerable due to their dependency and size. Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2013). *Child abuse and neglect fatalities 2011: Statistics and interventions*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau; page 4; <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/fatality.pdf>.

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- alcohol and/or drug abuse by the parent
- low tolerance for normal childlike behavior
- history of abuse in the family
- marital problems, job layoffs, other stressors
- frequently absent from home

**SPECIFIC SIGNS OF EACH FORM OF ABUSE:**

1. Physical Abuse:

- a. legal definition<sup>3</sup>: skin bruising, bleeding, burns, malnutrition, fracture of any bone, subdural hematoma, soft tissue swelling, or death *and either*:
  1. *such condition is without a reasonable or justifiable explanation;*
  2. *the history given concerning such condition is inconsistent with the degree or type of condition or death;*
  3. *accidental occurrence is ruled out.*
  
- b. Further indications of physical abuse may include but are not limited to:
  - frequent and severe bruises (in various stages of healing) from being choked, grabbed, shaken, slapped, or squeezed;
  - wounds and scars from being scalded or burned;
  - lacerations around the mouth; cuts;
  - old and new bone fractures;
  - eye and head injuries;
  - intra-abdominal injuries;
  - bite marks;
  - hard-to-believe stories about how accidents occurred;
  - \*bruises and burns are the most frequent physical symptoms.

2. Neglect:

- a. Legal definition<sup>4</sup>: any case in which a child is in need of services because the child's parents, legal guardian, or custodian fails to take same actions to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, supervision that a prudent parent would take; or any other care necessary for the child's health, guidance, or well-being. Neglect can also occur when a child's parents, legal guardian, or custodian allow another to mistreat or abuse the child without taking lawful means to stop the mistreatment or abuse and prevent it from recurring.
  
- b. Further indications of neglect may include but are not limited to:
  - soiled diapers or frequent diaper rash;

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<sup>3</sup> C.R.S. 19-1-103(1)(a)(I)

<sup>4</sup> C.R.S. 19-1-103(1)(a)(III) & (V); C.R.S. 19-3-102

- dirty hair, head lice, unwashed and shabby clothes, body odor, poor hygiene;
- lack of supervision;
- constant fatigue or lethargy;
- unattended physical needs or medical problems;
- abandonment;
- decayed or painful teeth;
- begging or stealing for food, repeated requests for food from neighbors, teachers and others;
- states that there is no caretaker;
- constant hunger or thirst;
- low birth weight or stunted growth;
- emaciated appearance;
- lack of protective clothing and footwear during cold weather;
- frequent colds and runny noses;
- complaints from neighbors about children being left alone or begging for food
- homelessness

3. Emotional Abuse:

- a. Legal definition<sup>5</sup>: an identifiable and substantial impairment of the child's intellectual or psychological functioning or development or a substantial risk of impairment of the child's intellectual or psychological functioning or development.
- b. Emotion Abuse is the hardest form of abuse to identify. Further indications of emotional abuse may include but are not limited to:
  - children often become quiet;
  - lack of self-esteem;
  - overly compliant, passive, undemanding;
  - appears very anxious or depressed;
  - attempts suicide;
  - avoids doing things with other children;
  - behaves younger than his or her age;
  - finds it difficult to make friends;
  - is extremely aggressive, demanding or enraged;
  - lags in physical, emotional, and intellectual development;
  - is very demanding or very obedient;
  - behaves very adult-like;

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<sup>5</sup> C.R.S. 19-1-103(1)(a)(IV)

- wets or soils bed

#### 4. Sexual Abuse:

- a. Legal definition<sup>6</sup>: any case in which a child is subjected to sexual assault or molestation, sexual exploitation, prostitution, child trafficking, pandering, or whole promotion of obscenity to a child.
  
- b. Further indications of sexual abuse may include but are not limited to:
  - stained torn or bloody underclothing;
  - pain or itching in the genital area;
  - bruises or bleeding in external genitalia, vaginal or anal regions;
  - has a sexually transmitted disease;
  - has a swollen or red cervix, vulva, or perineum;
  - has semen around the mouth or genitalia or on clothing;
  - pregnancy;
  - inappropriate sexual behavior;
  - fears certain persons or certain places;
  - gives unusual or unexpected responses when asked if he or she was touched by someone;
  - unreasonable fears of physical exams;
  - drawings that show sexual acts or overly focused on sexual parts;
  - knowledge about sex than is normal for age group;
  - pain, bruising, or bleeding in the genitals;
  - preoccupied or overly concerned with sexual acts and words;
  - running away;
  - nightmares;
  - either hyper vigilance about being touched or clinging;
  - eating disorders;
  - sexual abuse of other children;
  - excessive or inappropriate masturbation;
  - promiscuity or prostitution;
  - withdrawal or hyperactivity;
  - age-inappropriate thumb sucking

#### 5. Use of Controlled Substance:

In 2012, Colorado voters passed Colorado Amendment 64. This allows adults 21 years of age and older to legally consume, grow, and travel with a certain amount of cannabis/marijuana. Governor Hickenlooper signed the bill into law on May 28, 2013. While cannabis is still a

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<sup>6</sup> C.R.S. 19-1-103(1)(a)(II); C.R.S. 16-22-102(9)

federally controlled substance, the Obama Administration stated it would not oppose state laws on recreational use of cannabis/marijuana.<sup>7</sup>

Colorado law further defines child abuse as any case in which, in the presence of a child, or on the premise where a child is found or where a child resides, a controlled substance is manufactured or attempted to be manufactured.<sup>8</sup> Marijuana, for now, is still considered a controlled substance under Colorado Law as well; however, bills have been introduced to address this situation.<sup>9</sup>

The Colorado Alliance For Drug Endangered Children identifies several physical signs of exposure to drugs, which include<sup>10</sup>:

- Burning and watery eyes
- Blurred vision
- Skin irritation and redness
- Burns on the skin
- Sneezing and coughing
- Difficult breathing, shortness or breath
- Chest pain
- Nausea and vomiting
- Stomach pain
- Diarrhea
- Headaches
- Fever
- Yellow jaundice
- Hallucinations
- Extreme irritability

As more research develops on the potential dangers of exposure and side effects of cannabis/marijuana on children, the above list may expand.

It is important to realize that there cannot be a complete list for signs of abuse nor does a child need to possess every symptom to be suffering from a certain type of abuse. Children can be very different in the way they handle, react, process, and display the stress and symptoms of abuse. Use of common sense and sensitivity toward the child is essential. If a child is demonstrating abnormal behavior in conjunction with one of the above signs of abuse, check it out.

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<sup>7</sup> The Drug Enforcement Agency classifies Marijuana, or cannabis, as a Schedule I controlled substance. <http://www.justice.gov/dea/druginfo/ds.shtml>; Schedule I controlled substances are drugs or other substances that have a high potential for abuse, the substance has no currently accepted medical use in treatment, or there is a lack of accepted safety for use of the substance under medical supervision. 21 U.S. Code §812 (b)(1).

<sup>8</sup> C.R.S. 19-1-103(1)(a)(VI)

<sup>9</sup> C.R.S. 18-18-102(5)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.coloradodec.org/aboutus/definitions.html>

## **REPORTING ABUSE**

When you have reasonable cause to know or suspect abuse of a child, the next step is to report that abuse as required by law<sup>11</sup>. The law provides that the report must be made to the local law enforcement agency or to the county department. The contact information for both should be accessible and readily available at any time, day or night. Also, each organization should create and update forms to use when reporting abuse.

These forms should include:

1. As much information as you have on the child such as: name, address, sex, and race.
2. The name and address of the person suspected of the abuse and the alleged abuser's relationship to the child.
3. A description of what is known about the abuse. The description should include the nature and extent of the child's injuries and the signs the child had displayed which led to the report of the abuse.
4. Information on the person reporting the abuse including name, address, occupation, and position at the organization, i.e staff member, volunteer.
5. The family composition of the child (i.e. how many siblings, parents marital situation);
6. Any action taken by the person reporting;
7. Any other helpful information.

Creating and using various forms to report abuse helps protect the organization and reporter from liability; assists the agency or local law enforcement in its investigation; and creates a protocol for the organization.

It should be noted that there are no consequences for reporting. The law provides that only people who intentionally make a false report or those who are mandatory reporters that do not report suspicions or knowledge of abuse will face charges<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> C.R.S. 19-3-304

<sup>12</sup> C.R.S. 19-3-304 contains the list of all people who are "Mandatory Reporters", those persons that are required by law to report child abuse.