

The Professional's Role

The first step in helping abused or neglected children is learning to recognize the signs of child abuse and neglect. The presence of a single sign does not prove child abuse is occurring; however, when these signs appear repeatedly or in combination, you should take a closer look at the situation and consider the possibility of child abuse.

The following signs *may* signal the presence of child abuse or neglect:

The Child:

- Shows sudden changes in behavior or performance
- Has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to the parent's attention
- Has learning problems (or difficulty concentrating) that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes.
- Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen
- Lacks adult supervision
- Is overly compliant, passive or withdrawn
- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones or black eyes
- Offers conflicting explanations as to how the injury occurred
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school
- Is frightened of the parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home
- Shrinks at the approach of adults
- Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver

The Parent or other Adult Caregiver:

- Shows little concern for the child
- Denies the existence of- or blames the child for- the child's problems in school or at home
- Asks providers to use harsh physical discipline if the child misbehaves
- Sees the child as entirely bad, worthless, or burdensome
- Demands a level of physical or academic performance the child cannot achieve
- Looks primarily to the child for care, attention and satisfaction of emotional needs
- Offers conflicting, unconvincing or no explanation for the child's injury
- Describes the child as "evil" or in some other very negative way
- Uses harsh physical discipline with the child

The Parent and Child Together:

- Rarely touch or look at each other
- Consider their relationship entirely negative