

## **Warning Signs in Children and Adolescents of Possible Child Sexual Abuse**

Any one sign doesn't mean that a child was sexually abused, but the presence of several suggests that you begin asking questions and consider seeking help. Keep in mind that some of these signs can emerge at other times of stress such as:

- During a divorce
- Death of a family member or pet
- Problems at school or with friends
- Other anxiety-inducing or traumatic events

### **Behavior you may see in a child or adolescent**

- Has nightmares or other sleep problems without an explanation
- Seems distracted or distant at odd times
- Has a sudden change in eating habits
  - Refuses to eat
  - Loses or drastically increases appetite
  - Has trouble swallowing.
- Sudden mood swings: rage, fear, insecurity or withdrawal
- Leaves "clues" that seem likely to provoke a discussion about sexual issues
- Writes, draws, plays or dreams of sexual or frightening images
- Develops new or unusual fear of certain people or places
- Refuses to talk about a secret shared with an adult or older child
- Talks about a new older friend
- Suddenly has money, toys or other gifts without reason
- Thinks of self or body as repulsive, dirty or bad
- Exhibits adult-like sexual behaviors, language and knowledge

### **Signs more typical in adolescents**

- Self-injury (cutting, burning)
- Inadequate personal hygiene
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Sexual promiscuity
- Running away from home
- Depression, anxiety
- Suicide attempts
- Fear of intimacy or closeness
- Compulsive eating or dieting

### **Physical warning signs**

Physical signs of sexual abuse are rare. If you see these signs, bring your child to a doctor. Your doctor can help you understand what may be happening and test for sexually transmitted diseases.

- Pain, discoloration, bleeding or discharges in genitals, anus or mouth
- Persistent or recurring pain during urination and bowel movements
- Wetting and soiling accidents unrelated to toilet training