

Staying Safe: Recognizing the Signs of Physical and Sexual Abuse



What is abuse?

- Physical abuse happens when someone hurts you on purpose in ways that cause injury or pain.
- Sexual abuse is when someone touches you in ways or places that make you feel uncomfortable.

Who are abusers?



- You can be abused by a stranger or by someone you know.
- This can sometimes make it hard to tell whether you are being abused.

If you have a developmental disability, you are at special risk.

- You may depend on others to help with your personal physical needs—like bathing and dressing.
- You may have trouble:
 - Understanding what is happening right away, or
 - Making others understand that you have been abused.

It may be hard for you to tell when someone else is being abused.

- They may be afraid to tell you.
- They may not know what words to use to tell you what has happened.
- By watching out for the signs of abuse, you can help yourself and others who may be abused, even if you are not sure abuse has happened.

Here are some reasons to believe that someone is being abused:

- A person who is being abused may:
 - Act upset for a long time
 - Change their behavior or mood
 - Seem frightened of people or places
 - Become violent
 - Not want to talk to anyone

Here are some signs of physical abuse:

- Reasons to believe that someone is being physically abused include:
 - Unexplained burns, bites, or broken bones
 - A person harming himself, or herself
 - Aggressive behavior
 - Problems at school or work
 - Depression

Here are some signs of sexual abuse:

- Reasons to believe that someone is being sexually abused include:
 - Bruises around breasts or genital areas
 - Unexplained sexual infections
 - Torn, stained, or bloody clothing
 - Nightmares and bed wetting
 - Fear of sexuality
 - Self-injury

There are things you can do to be safe.

- If you have good reason to believe that you, or someone you know, is being abused, **tell someone you trust!**
- You can tell anyone who you think will help you:
 - A family member or friend
 - A direct support professional
 - Your service coordinator
 - The police
 - A doctor or nurse