

When you're not sure what to say or do, remember:

This child has identified you as a person they can trust. Remain calm and patient with the child. Report any suspected abuse to the MA Child Abuse Emergency line:

1-800-792-5200

Boston Police:
617-343-4000

Chelsea Police:
617-466-4855

Revere Police:
781-284-1212

Winthrop Police:
617-539-5800

IN AN EMERGENCY, CALL 911

When you have questions about what to do, ask us!



CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER
of suffolk county
Healing starts here.
617-779-2146

**The Children's
Advocacy Center of
Suffolk County
supports children and
families impacted by
violence and abuse.**



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**Learn the signs.
Talk about it.
Know how to
respond.**

Protecting
children from abuse
through awareness,
communication,
and action.



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Learn the Signs

Children who have been abused may display a wide variety of emotional, behavioral, or physical signs and symptoms. And, sometimes they may not display any symptoms at all.

The signs below* do not necessarily mean abuse is happening, but can serve as a guide to understanding an abused child's behavior.

Behavioral Signs

- Withdrawn or detached behavior
- Excessive clinginess
- Changes in eating patterns
- Advanced sexual knowledge
- Acting out
- Running away
- Self-injury

Emotional Signs

- Fear of being alone
- Trouble regulating emotions
- Easily startled
- Fear of going to a certain place or to visit certain people

Physical Signs

- Pain or injuries
- Difficulty sitting, standing, or moving
- Torn or stained clothing
- Nightmares
- Acting younger
- STDs or pregnancy
- Unexplained money or gifts

Relationship (Adult or older teen toward child)

- Gives child excessive time or attention
- Tries to spend time alone with child
- Asks child to keep secrets
- Gives gifts or special privileges
- Has poor boundaries (physical, verbal, or online)

*This is not an all-inclusive list.

Talk About It

Very few children who are sexually abused come forward to report it. Often, children are too afraid, don't know that boundaries have been crossed, and don't have language to tell you that something is wrong.

Talking openly about personal safety and boundaries can **increase** safety.

Helpful Tips

- **Teach medically correct names for body parts** (*penis, vagina, etc.*) - this helps them tell if someone ever crosses a boundary.
- **Explain that some body parts are private.** You might describe that the parts a bathing suit covers are private.
- **Define safe and unsafe touch.** Any touch that makes them feel sad, nervous, confused, or *just not right* is unsafe.
- **Empower them to say no and tell you about unsafe touches** - while knowing that this can be difficult for children to do.
- **Set clear boundaries.** Tell them that nobody besides the adults you designate should touch or see their private parts - *even if your child knows them really well.* Nobody can ask your child to touch or see anyone else's private parts, either.
- **Teach them to never keep secrets from you.** A secret is different from a surprise. A surprise makes someone happy and we plan to tell people about it! A secret is when someone asks, threatens, or forces you not to tell about something.
- **Be open and available to all questions and conversations your child might want to have, including difficult topics.**



Know How to Respond

If you ever learn that a child may have been abused, it's important to know what to do.

DO:

- Speak with the child privately, one time.
- Remain calm and listen carefully.
- Use simple, open-ended prompts and allow the child to use their own words.
 - "Tell me about more about that."
 - "Help me understand what you mean when you say..."
- Thank them for telling you, reassure them the abuse wasn't their fault, and let them know you have a responsibility to tell other adults to make sure they're safe.
- File a report with local law enforcement immediately to get support.

AVOID:

- Asking the child to speak to multiple people or repeat themselves.
- Expressing shock, overwhelming sadness, or anger - the child may think they are in trouble and feel less open to telling you what happened.
- Asking the child for details. Trying to investigate on your own can be harmful.
- Asking leading questions or making guesses about what happened.
 - "Did [person's name] do that?"
 - "Did they touch your [body part]?"
- Asking "Why?" questions, which can make a child feel they made a mistake.
- Making judgmental comments about the suspect or contacting the suspect.