

HOW TO RECOGNIZE ABUSE: SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS



Below are common signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect. Remember that everyone responds differently to their experiences. The presence of individual signs or symptoms does not necessarily mean someone has been abused. Some who have been abused may not show any of these signs. It can be helpful to look for patterns or unexplained changes in health, behaviors, and attitude instead of focusing on specific signs.

PHYSICAL SIGNS

- » Changes in appearance
- » Chronic pain or illness
- » Stress-related symptoms (ulcers, repeated stomachaches, headaches, etc.)
- » Unexplained or uncommon injuries
- » Dehydration
- » Pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections (especially for children under age 14)
- » Difficulty walking or sitting

PSYCHOLOGICAL SIGNS

- » Loss of enthusiasm for sport or competition
- » Depression
- » Anxiety
- » Withdrawal
- » Decreased self-esteem
- » Suicidal thoughts or attempts
- » New or different fears/phobias
- » PTSD-related symptoms
- » Sudden mood changes or emotional outbursts
- » Self-harm

BEHAVIORAL SIGNS

- » Skips or makes excuses to not attend school or practice
- » Performance declines in school or sport
- » Isolates self from others or avoids contact with a specific person
- » Complains about treatment by coach or teammates or refuses to talk about them
- » Nightmares or bedwetting
- » Sexual knowledge or behavior that is not age-appropriate
- » Frequent unexplained absences from school or practice
- » Talks about not having enough food to eat at home
- » Is consistently dirty or has severe unaddressed body odor
- » States that no one is at home to provide care
- » Excessive substance use

Be aware of the following coach and parent behaviors.

SIGNS COACHES MIGHT EXHIBIT

- » Gives gifts or special treatment to a specific athlete and not the whole team
- » Severely punishes misbehavior or poor performance (e.g., pulling hair, throwing equipment)
- » Makes unrealistic demands for athletic success
- » Demonstrates little concern for athlete well-being
- » Forces athlete to play despite signs of an injury
- » Asks a young athlete to arrive early or stay late when others are not around
- » Sends messages (e.g., email, text, social media) to a minor athlete directly (rather than to the full team) without copying a parent or another adult

SIGNS PARENTS MIGHT EXHIBIT

- » Blames the child for problems in school or at home
- » Tells you that the child is bad, worthless, or burdensome
- » Frequently leaves child without age-appropriate supervision
- » Often forgets or refuses to pick child up from practice

If you notice or suspect any type of abuse or misconduct, report it: uscenterforsafesport.org.

REFERENCES:

- » Childhelp. (2021). Recognizing Signs of Child Abuse.
- » Mountjoy, M., et al. (2016). *International Olympic Committee Consensus Statement: harassment and abuse (non-accidental violence) in sport*. British Journal of Sports Medicine, 50, 1019-29.

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