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# Indicators of Child Sexual Assault

Children often lack the words to describe sexual assault, therefore finding it exceptionally difficult to disclose. The fear of a negative reaction and possible punishment can also stop them from speaking out.

Children may try to subtly open the conversation by asking "Do you like so and so?... I don't" or "I've got a secret". Unfortunately, the more severe the degree of abuse the less likely it is that the child/young person will disclose. This is why it is important for parents, teachers, carers, child protection workers, counsellors etc., to be vigilant for symptoms of sexual assault.

There are a number of physical and behavioural symptoms that indicate a child or young person may have been harmed.

The possible signs of harm should be viewed as "red flags" - a sign that something may be worrying the child. It should not be automatically assumed that abuse is occurring, talking to the child may reveal something quite innocent. It is important, however, not to dismiss significant changes in behaviour, fears, or physical symptoms.



## Common Indicators in Children

- Fear of being hurt during nappy change or dressing
- Loss of concentration
- Development of eating disorders
- Fear of being alone with a particular person
- Sexual themes in artwork, stories, play etc.
- Showing a knowledge of sexual behaviour beyond their years
- Bedwetting or soiling after being toilet trained
- "Acting out" behaviours; for example, aggression, destructive behaviours, truanting behaviour
- "Acting in" behaviours; for example, withdrawal from friends, depression
- Vaginal, penile or anal soreness, discharge or bleeding
- Problems with friends and schoolwork
- Vague symptoms of illness such as headache or tummy ache
- Self-harming
- Inappropriate displays of affection or sexualised play
- Over attention to adults of a particular sex

**Facts:**

Boys and girls of all cultures, ethnic backgrounds and ages may be sexually assaulted

Child sexual assault occurs in all kinds of families

The offender in the majority of cases is known to the child.

## Common Indicators in Offenders

- Paying particular interest to a child
- Isolating a child from other children
- Engaging in inappropriate/unwanted close physical contact with a child
- More interested in children than adults
- Suspicious behaviour in relation to children (watching/following/photos/gifts)
- Often has a special 'child friend'
- Encourages secrets in children
- Links sexuality and aggression in language or behaviour
- Makes reference to or makes fun of children's bodies
- Describes children with sexual words
- Seems unclear about what is appropriate with children and what is not
- Has an interest in sexual fantasies involving children
- Looks at or downloads child pornography
- Asks adult partners to actor dress like a child or teenager during sexual activity