

Child Injury Laws *Blog*

Signs Of Childhood Abuse May Not Always Be Apparent

Posted by **Jonathan Rosenfeld** on June 06, 2011

It is not uncommon for children to have scrapes and bruises from learning to walk or playing games. But, many common injuries can also be caused by abuse or neglect. There is no one injury that makes it obvious that abuse is occurring. Instead, it is often the regularity of injuries or location or grouping of injuries that are indicators of abuse.

Indicators of child abuse include situations where the child:

- Has bruises, broken bones, burns, or black eyes that they cannot explain
- Has injuries that are healing after they have missed school or child care
- Seem unwilling to go home or is afraid of parents/caretakers
- Recoils at the touch of a parent/caretaker
- Reports a suspicious injury/scenario

A parent or caretaker can also display **indicators** of abuse. These include:

- Offering unconvincing or conflicting explanations for a child's injuries
- Describing the child in overly negative terms
- Disciplining the child in a harsh manner
- Having a history of abuse

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Signs of Sexual Abuse:

Sexual abuse is difficult because in some situations, such as fondling, there is no physical evidence. In these situations, it is even more important that adults in the child's life, especially mandated reporters, look for a child's behavioral changes. The child's testimony is one of the most important factors in these cases because **childhood sexual abuse** is conducted in private.

Children may display the following **signs** if they were the victim of sexual abuse:

- Sudden refusal to participate in physical activity
- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Demonstrates unusual or sophisticated sexual behavior or knowledge
- Sudden change in appetite
- Contracts an STD
- Becomes pregnant
- Runs away from home
- Reports sexual abuse

Parents or adult **caregivers** who are sexual perpetrators may exhibit the following signs:

- Unusually protective of the child
- Limit the child's interaction with other people
- Jealous or controlling with family members
- Secretive and isolated

Signs of Neglect:

For **children**, signs of neglect include:

- Recurrent school absences

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- Appearance is dirty or has severe body odor
- Lacks necessary medical or dental care
- Begs/ steals money for food
- Lack of appropriate clothing
- Abuses drugs and alcohol
- Reports that they are not receiving adequate care

Signs that a parent or caregiver may be neglecting a child include:

- Indifference to the child
- Is apathetic/depressed
- Irrational behavior
- Alcohol or drug abuse

Signs of Emotional Abuse:

It is difficult to determine if a child is being emotionally abused, but you can look for the following signs:

- Extremes in behavior (overly demanding, aggressive, compliant, or passive)
- Overly mature or overly childish
- Delays in physical/emotional development
- Has attempted suicide
- Reports a lack of attachment to parent/caretaker

Signs that a parent/caretaker is emotionally abusive:

- Overly cold and unconcerned about child
- Belittles / berates / blames child consistently

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- Openly rejects the child

Impact of Child Abuse

Child abuse / neglect can have serious and long-lasting impacts on the child's physical, mental, and behavioral well-being. The effects depend on the **circumstances** of the abuse/neglect including: the child's age, type of abuse, frequency/duration/severity of abuse, and relationship of perpetrator and child. The type of treatment that the child receives after the abuse/neglect can also have a serious impact.

There are direct and indirect social costs associated with child abuse and neglect. These costs include costs associated with child welfare, investigations, and costs associated with subsequent criminal activity, substance abuse, domestic violence, and mental illness.

Physical health consequences of abuse/neglect are injuries (bruises, cuts, broken bones, brain injuries, death, recurring health complications, and poor development. **Behavioral** consequences include teen delinquency and pregnancy, poor academic performance, drug use, alcohol and drug abuse, and subsequent abusive behavior. **Mental** consequences include emotional effects, low self-esteem, depression, withdrawal, cognitive difficulties, and social problems.

When choosing a child care facility, it is important to make a list of priority features and thoroughly investigate prospective facilities. And, almost as important is to keep up with your child's care, visiting the facility and keeping an open dialogue with the caretakers.

As a parent, you want to surround your child with a network of adults who have your child's best interest in mind. **Public awareness**, education, and prevention are the best tools in preventing child abuse and neglect. If your child has suffered injury, abuse, or even death, while under the care of a caretaker, you may be entitled to compensation and at the least, hold that person responsible.

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Sources:

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DHHS: Child Care Development Fund (CCDF)

DHHS: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

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Injury Prevention Policy: Child Care Safety

National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education National Association of Child Care Resources & Referral Agencies

About.com: Child Care Illinois Department of Children and Family Services: Day Care & Early Childhood

Illinois Early Learning Project: How Do I Start a Child Care Center in Illinois?

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