PREVENTION

SIGNS OF ABUSE OR SEXUAL ABUSE

GENERAL

Definitions of Abuse

Physical
Non-accidental injury, including striking, kicking, beating, biting or any action that leads to physical injury

Neglect
Failure to provide for a child’s basic needs such as adequate guardianship, food, clothing, shelter, education, emotional comfort or medical care, whether done intentionally or unintentionally

Sexual
Unwanted sexual activity with perpetrator using force, making threats or taking advantage of victims

WHY ARE PEOPLE WITH AUTISM AT SPECIFIC RISK FOR SEXUAL ABUSE?

- Social isolation
- Need help using the toilet, bathing, or dressing
- Belief that people with autism are easier to trick, bribe, or coerce
- Often trained to follow directions/comply with authority
- Lack of sexual education
- Stereotype that people with autism lack intelligence and are not credible witnesses
- Changes in behavior following abuse are often assumed to be related to symptoms of autism
- Expressive communication deficits
- Trouble identifying their emotions (not able to tell that something is “not right”)
# Signs of Abuse or Sexual Abuse

## General

### Increased Anger
- Younger children – more temper tantrums or crying
- All ages – More destructive of things
- Yelling, hitting, or throwing things

### More Fears
- Fear of going to school, going home, being in the dark, riding the bus, or certain people or places
- Stop wanting to be with someone in their life

### Increased Risk Taking
- Experiment with drugs, alcohol, sex, self-abusive behaviors, or run away

### Increase in Sexual Behaviors
- Sexual acting out
- Draw sexual pictures that don't fit developmental age
- Sexual aggression with others

### Physical Signs
- Injuries that cannot be explained (e.g., broken bones, burns, cuts, bruising, missing teeth)
- Pain from injuries or abrasions
- Bleeding in the genital or rectal areas
- Blood on sheets or underwear
- Yeast or bladder infections
- STDs or pregnancy

### Changes in Mood
- More scared, anxious, upset, angry, depressed, aggressive
- More withdrawn or outgoing
- More destructive, angry, or easily upset (especially in nonverbal individuals)

### Changes in Functioning
- Eat less or eat more
- Suddenly lose or gain weight
- Sleep more, sleep less, have nightmares, trouble going to sleep at night, scared to go to sleep
- Do not wash hair or body, wear same clothes over and over
- Refuse to take baths or take too many baths
- More headaches or stomachaches
- Suck thumb, wet the bed, act more clingy to parent or caregiver

### Increased Obedience
- More eager to please

### Changes in Communication
- Withdraw or communicate less, or communicate more
- Draw violent art to communicate distress

### Changes in School or Daycare Behavior
- Difficulty concentrating or less cooperative
- Younger kids = Stop playing and exploring
- Older kids = Skip school

### Increase in Intensity or Frequency of Self-Stimulating, Self-Injurious, or Repetitive Behaviors, or Development of New Behaviors

## Prevention

Contact Pennsylvania Childline at 1-800-932-0313 to report suspected abuse of a child, or Pennsylvania Adult Protective Services at 1-800-490-8505 to report suspected abuse of an adult.

[www.paat.org/BeSafe](http://www.paat.org/BeSafe)

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