

Identifying sexual abuse

Symptoms due to local trauma or infection

Children might:

- Be sore around their bottom.
- Have vaginal discharge, urinary tract infections, anal pain or bleeding.

You could also check for bruising, lacerations, burns, bites, or scratches on the inner thighs, breasts, genital or anal region.

Symptoms of emotional distress

Look out for:

- Loss of concentration, resulting in poor performance at school.
- Bed-wetting.
- Soiling.
- Eating disorders.

Self-harm

Victims of sexual abuse often self-loath and are unable to tell on their abuser, as it is often a close family member or friend. To ease the pain, they might act out their distress through:

- Drug or alcohol misuse.
- Prostitution.
- Cutting, burning or scarring themselves, making themselves sick.
- Suicide attempts.

Sexualised behaviours or inappropriate sexual knowledge

This may be acquired by watching others have sex, porn or reading pornographic literature.

Children who have been sexually abused might also describe pain or other features such as the texture or taste of semen, which cannot be acquired by observation only.

They might also abuse other children.

Sexually transmitted infections (STI)

Some child victims of sexual abuse may have sexually transmitted infections.

Pregnancy

A young girl that is either unable to explain her pregnancy or refuses to identify the father could have been abused and raped.

