

Behavioral Indicators of Abuse

Tips For Working With Secondary Students

- Students that have been abused are most likely not in a position to advocate for assistance because the person that is abusing them has taken their power/voice. Therefore, few students will speak directly about abuse.
- We must work together to create a safe environment for students to come forward.
- It is crucial to become aware of the possible indicators of abuse and assist students with respect and non-judgment. Getting help reduces the chances of future victimization of self and/or others.
- The indicators below are offered with caution against overzealous case identification. Any of these indicators alone does not necessarily mean there is abuse. However, several indicators may warrant an exploration of the source of the problem.

Physical Indicators:

- Evidence of trauma to the mouth or genitals
- Bleeding
- Wounds: Cuts, Scars, Burn Marks, Bruises, Red Marks, Broken Bones
- Complaints of pain
- Torn or blood stained clothing
- Venereal disease, or other STD's
- Unusual or offensive odors
- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Pregnancy

In many cases, there are no visible signs of abuse. The following is a list of some common behavioral indicators of someone who has been abused.

Behavior Indicators/Symptoms of Prior Abuse:

- Sudden, drastic changes in appearance, behavior, personality and/or habits
- Poor Schoolwork/Grades (although this is an indicator, some students who are abused will compulsively excel in their schoolwork to draw attention away from the abuse)
- Eating/Body Image disorder (Severe Negative Body Image)
- Self Mutilation (cutting, burning, bruising, hitting themselves)
- Depression
- Drug and Alcohol abuse (including smoking)
- Teen pregnancy
- Homelessness, truancy, attempts to run away from home
- Promiscuity, Sexual contact at an early age, Presence of STD's
- Inappropriate sexual language
- Wearing many layers of clothing, regardless of the weather or tight/revealing clothing
- Sexual drawings and/or stories (Journal)
- Participation in gang and/or gun activity
- History of past abuse
- Family isolation from community, friends and support systems
- Extreme over-protectiveness by family
- Extreme parental/family member dominance
- Extreme reaction to sex education or prevention education material
- Parent/Guardian lying and/or acting jealous of the child
- Dropping out of school

- Sleeping in class
- Continual avoidance of bathrooms
- Reluctance to go to a particular place or to be with a particular person
- Frequent absence and/or late arrival at school, especially if the excuse notes are always written by the same person
- Anxiety, irritability, constant inattentiveness
- Regression, (behavior)
- Aggression, anger directed behavior, bullying
- Sleep disturbances, insomnia, constant tiredness/sleep
- Denial of a problem with a marked lack of expression
- Withdrawal, excessive crying
- Reluctance to go home, or constant early return to school
- Marked decline in interests
- Short attention span, Hyperactivity
- Compulsion about cleanliness
- Unexplained delinquency
- Poor peer relationships, isolation from peers
- Suicide discussion and/or attempts
- Low self esteem
- Extreme over-involvement in school and/or activities
- Inability to express emotions, especially sadness

Note: It is vital that these indicators be taken seriously. Abuse may worsen if left untreated. When we observe a student participating in a negative behavior we must first try to understand why and have empathy so that we may solve the problem by addressing the source. Quite often when someone hurts themselves and/or others, it is because they have been hurt. Help and support, not blame, judgment and harsh punitive measures are needed to reduce future victimization.

If you suspect abuse, you may request an investigation. You are not determining guilt and will not be held legally responsible. Fear of legal ramifications has stopped others from reporting abuse. You cannot be sued for requesting an investigation or reporting abuse in good faith.

If you have any questions feel free to contact Peer Solutions @ 602.225.0942 or RespectPSI@aol.com