



RECOGNIZING SEXUAL TRAUMA IN CHILDREN

One of the worst fears that a parent has is that their child will be sexually abused. In order to protect our children, it's crucial to teach them about the difference between good touch and bad touch as well as about characteristics of potential perpetrators and dangerous situations when the sexual abuse can happen. Not everything is in our control and no matter how hard we try to keep our children safe, bad things can happen.

It's important to recognize signs of sexual abuse and stop it as soon as possible. Sexual abuse has a tremendous impact on child's life. In most serious cases, children who are victims of sexual abuse often also exposed to a variety of other stressful and traumatic events. The effects of abuse range from separation anxiety to post-traumatic stress disorder. Those effects can eventually lead to a spiral of serious health problems, emotional issues, substance abuse and addiction problems, behavioral and social difficulties.

In order to stop the chain of traumatic events in your child's life and ensure them a better future, get support from an appropriately trained health professional as soon as possible.

Health Problems:

- Evidence of physical traumas to the genital or anal area
- Exhibiting symptoms of genital infections or sexually transmitted diseases
- Complaining of pain while urinating or having a bowel movement
- Developing frequent unexplained health problems
- Loss of appetite
- Other eating problems including unexplained gagging
- Beginning to wet the bed (after they have passed this developmental stage)

Emotional and Cognitive Changes:

- Waking up during the night sweating, screaming or shaking with nightmares
- Unexplained periods of panic, which may be flashbacks from the abuse
- Exhibiting sudden reluctance to be alone with a certain person
- Wanting to wear multiple layers of clothes including when going to bed
- Showing unusual fear of a certain place or location
- Decline in academic performance
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities including school and hobbies

Behavioral Changes:

- Masturbating excessively
- Engaging in repetitive sexual play with friends, toys or household animals
- Asking an unusual amount of questions about human sexuality
- Regressing to behaviors too young for the stage of development they already achieved
- Self-mutilations such as cutting themselves, burning themselves with a cigarette
- Unusually aggressive behavior toward family members, friends, animals, and toys