

## Indicators or Reactions to Abuse or Neglect

Many abuse survivors demonstrate a marked change in behavior. Although no single behavior is an absolute indicator of abuse, the following list includes some *possible* indicators of abuse or neglect. A person who has any of the possible indicators of abuse should have medical attention right away.

### Possible indicators of abuse:

- ◆ Bruises – bruises in several different areas of the body, bruises in various stages of healing, regular bruising, bruise(s) in the size or shape of a familiar object
- ◆ Burns – scalding burns, burns in the shape of a cigarette or cigar butt, burns the shape or size of a familiar object
- ◆ Abrasions from rope or other restraints on the arms, legs, or torso
- ◆ Cuts, scratches, lacerations, punctures, wounds, bite marks, or spots from hair pulling
- ◆ Sprains, dislocations, fractures, broken bones, or missing teeth
- ◆ Internal injuries – unexplained reported pain, difficulty with normal functioning of organs, bleeding from body orifices
- ◆ Vaginal or rectal pain, bleeding, tear(s), scarring, itching, swelling, infection or discharge; unusual or inappropriate expression of affection; fear of being touched; stained or bloody underclothing; difficulty walking or sitting; sexually transmitted disease; pregnancy

### Examples of Neglectful Conditions:

- ◆ Poor hygiene
- ◆ Unclothed or improperly clothed for weather
- ◆ Untreated medical or mental conditions; bed sores
- ◆ Overmedicated or medications not given at prescribed times or as prescribed by physician
- ◆ Lack of necessary adaptive aids such as wheelchair, oxygen, dentures, hearing aids, walker,
- ◆ Dehydration or malnourishment
- ◆ Animal or insect infestation
- ◆ Crowded living space, architectural barriers, and/or fire hazards
- ◆ Inadequate sanitation or substandard cleanliness; hazardous substances
- ◆ Mismanagement of finances by caregiver or relative



P.O. Box 19454  
Austin, TX 78760  
(512) 267-SAFE  
(512) 482-0691  
(Business TTY)

[www.austin-safeplace.org/](http://www.austin-safeplace.org/)

# INDICATORS OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT

(CONTINUED)

## Possible behavioral indicators or reactions to abuse:

- ◆ Asks to be separated from the caregiver/abuser
- ◆ Speaks of the caregiver in glowing terms despite apparent abuse/neglect
- ◆ Regression in behaviors (bedwetting, thumb sucking, or rocking)
- ◆ Feeling angry, overwhelmed, numb, withdrawn, detached, or crying for no apparent reason; experiencing mood swings and/or emotional outbursts
- ◆ Fear of being alone or being with a particular person
- ◆ Fear of being touched or shying away from being touched
- ◆ Alcohol or substance abuse
- ◆ Eating disorders, stomachaches or a sudden increase or decrease in eating
- ◆ Nightmares, restlessness, or difficulty sleeping
- ◆ Sudden change in work or school performance or participation in social, educational, or vocational activities
- ◆ Unusual or inappropriate expression of affection
- ◆ New or detailed interest in or knowledge of sexual matters
- ◆ Expresses a desire to die and/or hopelessness or a loss in faith
- ◆ Talks about the past and avoids talking about the present
- ◆ Expresses unrealistic expectations that she/he will receive adequate care or will not be abused again; denies problem despite evidence
- ◆ Exhibits stress-related illness (physical complaints including headaches)
- ◆ Shakes, trembles, or cowers in presence of caregiver/abuser
- ◆ Hesitates to speak while others are in the room; exhibits distrust of others
- ◆ Hyper alert, vigilant in watching actions of caregiver/abuser
- ◆ Exhibits an exaggerated, startled response to sudden movement
- ◆ Obsesses, worries or is anxious about her/his own performance; overly compliant; anxious to please caregiver/abuser
- ◆ Self-injurious behavior; considers or attempts suicide
- ◆ Constant criticism of the caregiver—cursing, hitting or scratching the caregiver
- ◆ Incontinent, malodorous, unpleasant to be around
- ◆ Resistant to taking medication, bathing, eating or allowing a caregiver to provide personal care
- ◆ Experiences a rapid progression of physical deterioration
- ◆ Runs away from home, rehabilitation center, or school

In Texas, it is mandatory to report suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a child or adult with disabilities or an older adult over age 65 to the Texas Department of Protective & Regulatory Services (PRS) or other investigative authority. If you live outside Texas, check with your state's protective agency.

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