

During COVID-19, many changes are impacting families and children – school closures, jobs losses, sheltering in place. During these times of crisis and economic instability, rates of child abuse cases and neglect may increase, but go unreported. It's important that adults keep an eye out and report suspected abuse.

Signs a Child is Not Safe

While children may not be around their typical trusted adults as often, there are other ways adults can keep an eye out to ensure children are in safe and healthy environments. This includes looking for changes when you might see the child out in public and monitoring the child's appearance during home video calls.

There are a variety of signs adults should keep an eye out for:

Physical Appearance:

Signs of bruises, burns or markings

Environment:

Signs of violence, drugs and alcohol, family dysfunction

Behavior & Affect:

Change in mood or presentation, distress, outcries of abuse

Engagement:

Changes in participation, interactions, and communications

Supervision:

Access to a responsible adult and their level of involvement

Types of Abuse

Children can experience abuse and neglect in a variety of ways. Additionally, child abuse can occur in a child's home, or in the communities the child interacts with.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse includes anything that harms a child's body. This includes anytime anyone hits, burns, ties up or shakes an infant or child. This type of abuse may result in signs of bruises, marks, or other injuries and may sometimes include the child or caregiver attempting to hide these indicators of abuse by avoiding contact with others or hiding the injuries with attire inappropriate for the weather or environment. Children ages 0 to 5 are at a higher risk of physical abuse. Bruises or marks on babies, especially on their abdomen, buttocks, arms, legs, cheeks, and ears are significantly concerning for abuse.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse includes any sexual activity or behavior with a child, not just physical contact. This can include forcing a child to take part in pornographic photos/videos, sexual contact, showing the child someone else's genitals or other "grooming" behaviors. This type of abuse may result in knowledge of sexual behavior beyond developmental expectations, regressive behavior, sudden fear of specific things/people/places or mood swings, including depression.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is a pattern of behaviors that harm a child's emotional well-being and development. This can include domestic violence or abusing others when the child is around (such as a parent, sibling, or pet). Emotional abuse also includes situations where a caregiver doesn't show love or affection, doesn't provide the child emotional support or guidance, shames/belittles/criticizes, teases or bullies a child.

Neglect

Neglect is when a caregiver doesn't give the child basic care or protection. This can include not providing clothing, food, heat during cold weather, housing with clean living conditions and medical care.

Making a Report

To report concerns about child abuse or maltreatment, contact your local child protection agency. Contact information and additional resources can be found at valleychildrens.org/childadvocacy.

If a child is in immediate danger, call 911.