

IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child sexual abuse is likely the most prevalent health problem children face. Immediate consequences can be seen in a variety of ways, including emotional and behavioral issues.

Signs that a child is being sexually abused are often present, but they can be indistinguishable from other signs of child stress, distress, or trauma. Signs of child sexual abuse can be physical and/or emotional, with physical signs being less common. Emotional signs can range from “too perfect” behavior to withdrawal, depression, or unexplained anger. It’s important to remember that some children may show no signs at all.

EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Emotional and mental health problems are often the first indicators of child sexual abuse. These include:

- Behavioral problems, physical aggression, non-compliance, and oppositionality
- Anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts
- “Too perfect” or overly compliant behavior

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Substance abuse problems are some of the most common consequences of child sexual abuse and can arise during childhood or adolescence.

- Alcohol use/dependence is 2 to 3 times more likely among adolescent sexual abuse victims.
- Drug abuse is more common than alcohol abuse for abused adolescents.
- Onset of non-experimental drug use occurs at a much younger age for child sexual abuse victims.

ACADEMIC BEHAVIOR

Many academic problems can arise due to child sexual abuse, including:

- High absenteeism and change in attitude towards school
- Lower performance on tests measuring cognitive ability, academic achievement, and memory assessment
- Lack of interest in friends, sports, and other activities





SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

Children who have been sexually abused have over three times as many sexual behavior problems as non-victimized children. Indicators include:

- Age-inappropriate sexual behaviors or language
- Advanced knowledge of sexual behaviors
- Sexual promiscuity

TEEN PREGNANCY

The risk of teen pregnancy is much higher for child sexual abuse victims.

- 45% of pregnant teens report a history of child sexual abuse.
- Males who are sexually abused are more likely than their non-abused peers to impregnate a teen.
- Several studies indicate that the sexual abuse of boys is a stronger risk factor for teen pregnancy than the sexual abuse of girls.

DELINQUENCY AND CRIME

Delinquency and crime problems, often stemming from substance abuse, are more prevalent in adolescents with a history of child sexual abuse.

- Sexually abused adolescents have 3 to 5 times higher risk for delinquency.
- Victimized adolescents were more likely to be arrested than their non-abused peers.
- Sexually abused children were nearly twice as likely to run away from home.

For more information about how to protect the children in your life from sexual abuse, visit www.D2L.org.