



What Should Adults Be Watching For?



1720 Peachtree Street, N.W., Suite 600, Atlanta, GA 30309
Phone: 404-870-6565 ♦ Fax: 404-870-6541

What Can I Do if I Notice a Warning Sign?

"Warning sign" is really just another way of saying "opportunity for prevention" – a chance for caring adults to recognize possible risk and to take action to protect children. Read the behavioral descriptions contained in this fact sheet. Some are serious violations. But many may suggest that an adult, adolescent or child is struggling to control potentially harmful impulses.

- Create a Safety Plan. Don't wait for "proof" of child sexual abuse.
- Look for patterns of behavior that make children *less* safe.
- Keep track of behaviors that concern you. The Sample Journal Page can be a helpful tool.
- See our Let's Talk guidebook for tips on speaking up whenever you have a concern.
- If you have questions or would like resources or guidance for responding to a specific situation, contact Prevent Child Abuse (PCA) Georgia's **HELPLINE, 1-800-CHILDREN (244-5373)**.

Remember, the most effective prevention takes place *before* there's a child victim to heal or an offender to punish.

Behaviors to Watch for When Adults Are With Children

Have you ever seen someone playing with a child and felt uncomfortable with it? Maybe you thought, "I'm just over-reacting," or, "He/She doesn't really mean that." If you are uncomfortable, but don't see these signs, be sure to trust your instincts and ask questions. Below is a list of behaviors that might be cause for concern.

Do you know an adult or older child who:

- Makes others uncomfortable by ignoring social, emotional or physical boundaries or limits?
- Refuses to let a child set any of his or her own limits? Uses teasing or belittling language to keep a child from setting a limit?



HELPLINE: 1-800-CHILDREN (244-5373) ♦ www.ppageorgia.org ♦ www.stopitnowga.org

- Insists on hugging, touching, kissing, tickling, wrestling with or holding a child even when the child does not want this physical contact or attention?
- Turns to a child for emotional or physical comfort by sharing personal or private information or activities normally shared with adults?
- Frequently points out sexual images or tells dirty or suggestive jokes with children present?
- Exposes a child to adult sexual interactions without apparent concern?
- Has secret interactions with teens or children (e.g. games, sharing drugs, alcohol, or sexual material) or spends excessive time emailing, text messaging or calling children or youth?
- Is overly interested in the sexuality of a particular child or teen (e.g., talks repeatedly about the child's developing body or interferes with normal teen dating)?
- Insists on or manages to spend uninterrupted time alone with a child?
- Seems "too good to be true," i.e. frequently baby sits different children for free; takes children on special outings alone; buys children gifts or gives them money for no apparent reason?
- Frequently walks in on children/teens in the bathroom?
- Allows children or teens to consistently get away with inappropriate behaviors?

If you answered "yes" to some of these questions, talk to that person. For more information and guidance about starting a conversation with someone, please call our confidential, toll-free **HELPLINE at 1-800-CHILDREN (244-5373)** or visit www.ppageorgia.org or www.stopitnowga.org.

Signs That an Adult May Be At-Risk to Harm a Child

Someone you care about may be acting in ways that worry or confuse you. The behaviors below may indicate a possible risk of sexual abuse to a child, but may also be a way for this adult to ask for help. Many people with sexual behavior problems wish that someone had asked them what was going on or had told them where to call to get help.

Do you know someone who:

- Misses or ignores social cues about others' personal or sexual limits and boundaries?
- Often has a "special" child friend, maybe a different one from year to year?
- Spends most of his/her spare time with children and shows little interest in spending time with someone their own age?
- Encourages silence and secrets in children?

- Links sexuality and aggression in language or behavior, e.g. sexualized threats or insults, like “whore” or “slut”?
- Makes fun of children's body parts, describes children with sexual words like “stud” or “sexy” or talks again and again about the sexual activities of children or teens?
- Masturbates so often that it gets in the way of important day-to-day activities?
- Has an interest in sexual fantasies involving children and seems unclear about what's appropriate with children?
- Was physically, sexually or emotionally mistreated or abused as a child and has not adequately dealt with the possible effects?
- Has been known to make poor decisions while misusing drugs or alcohol?
- Looks at child pornography or downloads/views Internet pornography and is not willing to show whether children are involved?
- Asks adult partners to dress or act like a child or teen during sexual activity?
- Justifies behavior or finds reasons to explain poor choices or harmful acts; blames others as a way to refuse responsibility for behaviors?
- Minimizes hurtful or harmful behaviors when confronted; denies harmfulness of actions or words despite apparent impact?

If you need guidance about how to talk to someone or you need other support, please call our confidential, toll-free **HELPLINE at 1-800-CHILDREN (244-5373)** or visit www.ppageorgia.org or www.stopitnowga.org.

Signs That a Child or Adolescent May Be At-Risk to Harm Another Child

As much as one-third of all sexual abuse of children is committed by someone under the age of 18. Children, particularly younger children, may engage in inappropriate interactions without understanding the hurtful impact it has on others. For this reason, it may be more helpful to talk about a child's sexually “harmful” behavior rather than sexually “abusive” behavior.

Do you know a child or adolescent who:

- May experience typical gestures of friendliness or affection as sexual?
- Explores his or her own natural sexual curiosity with younger children or those of differing size, status, ability, or power?
- Seeks out the company of younger children and spends an unusual amount of time with them rather than with peers?

- Takes younger children to “secret” places or hideaways or plays “special” games with them (e.g. playing doctor, undressing or touching games, etc.)?
- Insists on physical contact with a child when the child resists the attention?
- Was physically, sexually or emotionally abused and has not been offered adequate resources and support for recovery?
- Links sexuality and aggression in language or behavior (e.g. makes sexual threats or insults)?
- Seems to be crying for help, i.e. behaves as if they want to be caught; leaves “clues” or acts in ways that seem likely to provoke a discussion about sexual issues?
- Tells you they do not want to be alone with a child, or group of children, or becomes anxious about being with a particular young person?
- Is unable to control inappropriate sexual behaviors involving another child after being told to stop?
- Engages in sexually harassing behavior?
- Shares alcohol, drugs, or sexual material with younger children or teens?
- Views sexual images of children on the Internet or elsewhere?
- Forces sexual interaction, including direct contact and non-contact (like exposing genitals) on another adolescent or child?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, consider talking to the young person and seeking help. If you would like more information or guidance on options for next steps, call our confidential, toll-free, **HELPLINE at 1-800-CHILDREN (244-5373)** or visit www.pcageorgia.org or www.stopitnowga.org.

Common Age-Appropriate or Developmentally-Expected Sexual Behavior

The chart below shows some examples of common sexual behavior that we might anticipate seeing in our children as they pass through different stages of development from pre-school to adolescence. Remember that each child develops at his or her own pace. Not every child will show all these behaviors at the same stages, or necessarily experience any of these behaviors at all. The chart also describes kinds of behavior that are less common in a given developmental stage, and which may give cause for concern.

PRESCHOOL AGE (0 to 5 yrs.)

Common: Sexual language relating to differences in body parts, bathroom talk, pregnancy and birth. Genital self-soothing touch at home and in public. Showing and looking at private body parts.

Uncommon: Discussion of specific sexual acts or explicit sexual language. Adult-like sexual contact with other children.

SCHOOL-AGE (6-12 years)

This group may include both pre-pubescent children and children who have already entered puberty, when hormonal changes are likely to trigger an increase in sexual awareness and interest.

Pre-pubescent children

Common: Questions about relationships and sexual behavior, menstruation and pregnancy. Experimentation with same-age children, often during games, kissing, touching, exhibitionism and role-playing. Genital self-soothing touch in private.

Uncommon: Adult-like sexual interactions, discussing specific sexual acts, genital self-soothing touch in public.

After puberty begins

Common: Increased curiosity about sexual materials and information, questions about relationships and sexual behavior, using sexual words and discussing sexual acts, particularly with peers. Increased experimenting including open-mouthed kissing, body-rubbing, fondling. Masturbating in private.

Uncommon: Regular adult-like sexual behavior, including oral/genital contact and intercourse; masturbating in public.

ADOLESCENCE (13 to 16)

Common: Questions about decision making, social relationships, and sexual customs; masturbation in private; experimenting between adolescents of the same age, including open-mouthed kissing, fondling and body rubbing, oral/genital contact. Voyeuristic behaviors are common in this age group. Intercourse occurs among approximately one third of children in this age group.

Uncommon: Masturbating in public. Sexual interest directed toward much younger children.

Adapted from Wurtele, S.K. and Miller-Perrin, C.L. Preventing Sexual Abuse. University of Nebraska Press. Lincoln, NE. 1992

Child Sexual Abuse Includes Touching and Non-Touching Behaviors

Harmful touching behaviors include:

- Touching a child's genitals (penis, testicles, vulva, breasts, or anus) for sexual pleasure or other unnecessary reason.

- Making a child touch someone else's genitals, or playing sexual ("pants-down") games.
- Putting objects or body parts (like fingers, tongue or a penis) inside the vulva or vagina, in the mouth, or in the anus of a child for sexual pleasure or other unnecessary reason.

Harmful non-touching behaviors include:

- Showing pornography to a child.
- Exposing a person's genitals to a child.
- Photographing a child in sexual poses.
- Encouraging a child to watch or hear sexual acts either in person or digital, computer or video images.
- Watching a child undress or use the bathroom, often without the child's knowledge (known as voyeurism or being a "Peeping Tom").

If you would like more information or guidance on options for next steps, call our confidential, toll-free, **HELPLINE 1-800-CHILDREN (244-5373)** or visit www.ppageorgia.org or www.stopitnowga.org.

Behavioral Warning Signs of Possible Child Sexual Abuse

Some of these behavioral signs can show up at other stressful times in a child's life such as divorce, the death of a family member, friend or pet, or when there are problems in school, as well as when abuse is involved. Any one sign doesn't mean the child was abused, but several of them suggest you should begin asking questions.

Do you notice some of the following behaviors in children you know?

- Fear of certain people or places (e.g., a child may not want to be left alone with a baby-sitter, a friend, a relative, or some other child or adult; or a child who is usually talkative and cheery may become quiet and distant when around a certain person).
- Nightmares, trouble sleeping, or other extreme fears without an obvious explanation.
- Play, writing, drawings or dreams may include sexual or frightening images.
- Spacing out at odd times, seems distracted or distant, "checked out."
- Loss of appetite, or trouble eating or swallowing or sudden changes in eating habits.
- Sudden mood swings: rage, fear, anger, insecurity or withdrawal.
- Leaves "clues" that seem likely to provoke a discussion about sexual issues.

- Stomach illness all of the time with no identifiable reason.
- An older child behaving like a younger child, such as bed-wetting or thumb sucking.
- Adult-like sexual activities with toys or other children, such as simulating sex with dolls or asking other children/siblings to behave sexually.
- New words for private body parts.
- Shows resistance to bathing, toileting, or removing clothes even at appropriate situations.
- Refusing to talk about a "secret" he/she has with an adult or older child.
- Talking about a new older friend.
- Suddenly having money, toys or other gifts for no apparent reason.
- Cutting, burning or otherwise intentionally harming herself or himself, i.e. drug use, alcohol abuse, sexual promiscuity, running away from home.
- Has negative self image, i.e. thinks of self or body as repulsive, dirty or bad.

If you would like more information or guidance on options for next steps, call our confidential, toll-free, **HELPLINE 1-800-CHILDREN (244-5373)** or visit www.ppageorgia.org or www.stopitnowga.org.

Physical Warning Signs of Possible Child Sexual Abuse

Does a child close to you have:

- Unexplained bruises, redness, or bleeding of the child's genitals, anus, or mouth?
- Pain at the genitals, anus, or mouth?
- Genital sores or milky fluids in the genital area?

If you said "yes" to any of these examples bring your child to a doctor. Your doctor can help you understand what may be happening. If you have any questions about these or other signs and symptoms, please call our confidential, toll-free **HELPLINE 1-800-CHILDREN (244-5373)**.

This fact sheet was adapted from Stop It Now![®]. PCA Georgia's program, Stop It Now! Georgia, is a member of the national Stop It Now! network. To learn more about Stop It Now!, please visit www.stopitnow.org. If you need help and are outside of Georgia, please call the national Stop It Now! Helpline at 1-888-PREVENT.