

Why we need to get involved

Most victims of molestation are unable to speak up or report the abuse because:

- They are children
- They are vulnerable
- They don't have a cognitive understanding of what is happening to them
- They don't have the words to explain what is happening to them
- They don't feel like they have someone to share this with
- They are ashamed
- They are confused
- They are scared the abuser will harm their family
- They are scared of disappointing their parents and ruining their family
- They are scared of speaking lashon hara
- The abuser is a member of their family, and they are scared speaking up will ruin the family
- They are scared they will not be believed
- They are told by the abuser that what is happening is normal and healthy
- They feel that it is their fault because they may have broken a rule, initiated some of the contact, experienced positive feelings from the abuse, or view themselves as otherwise complicit in their own abuse
- They love the abuser and are scared of getting them into trouble
- They are taught from a very young age to respect their elders and it is extremely hard for them to speak up against an older child or adult, especially one that is violating them so deeply
- They are often lonely and isolated and may be afraid to lose the special connection and companionship that the abuser provides.

As such, it is unfair and unrealistic to rely on children to stop abuse and speak up, but rather, **it is the responsibility of adults to be sensitive and attentive**, and pay attention to signs that may indicate that a child is being harmed.



What to look out for

Most children who are being abused show at least a few symptoms of distress and trauma.

Note: The presence of these signs does not mean for sure that a child is being abused. These are indicators of abuse OR other forms of emotional distress and require further assessment. Take particular note in cases where multiple indicators are present.

- Developmental regression - behaving younger than their age
- Wetting and soiling accidents that are unrelated to toilet training
- Exhausted and constantly falling asleep during the day
- Difficulty focusing on concentrating
- Disconnect from family or friends
- Loss of interest in activities that they previously enjoyed
- Sudden mood swings – rage, fear, insecurity or withdrawal, excessive crying
- Distracted or distant a lot and at odd times, dozing off or spacing out
- Decreased energy
- Afraid of specific people or going to specific places
- Jumpy, easily startled and skittish
- Thinks of and talks about themselves or their body as repulsive, dirty, or bad
- Gets sick a lot – many absences from school
- Anxiety, depression
- Aggressive oppositional or disruptive behavior
- Shuts down from family and/or friends
- Withdrawals into themselves
- Self destructive
- Destructive towards others
- Sudden change in eating habits
- Sudden weight gain or loss
- Changes in sleep patterns - insomnia or excessive sleeping
- Changes in dress - e.g. wears many layers of clothing in an inappropriate time (e.g. many layers and sweaters in the summer)
- Draws *untznius* images
- Begins acting *untznius*, displaying a level of intimate knowledge not suited for their age
- Begins acting inappropriately with other children (e.g. pulling down pants, forcing touch, etc.)
- Shrinks from appropriate and usual physical contact (e.g. a hug from a parent, a game that includes touch with their siblings or friends, etc.)
- Won't a secret shared with them by an adult or older child

- Talks about a new older friend
- Nightmares or flashbacks
- Difficulty concentrating
- Sudden intense attachment to a specific person
- Suddenly has money, toys or other gifts without reason
- Becomes ultra-frum and virtuous – super tznius, etc. using it as an escape
- Becomes hyper-focused on studies – uses it as an escape, doesn't want to go home
- Physical symptoms – ongoing stomach aches, vomiting, unexplained physical symptoms, bleeding or pain in the private areas, recurring genital infections, difficulty walking or sitting.

Many of these signs may indicate other things the child is going through that are a result of natural development (e.g. puberty) or challenges (e.g. learning challenges, family conflict, death of a loved one etc.).

You won't necessarily know for sure what the indicator you have observed means, so **make sure not to jump to any conclusions**. But pay attention, note the behaviors, **and consult with professionals** because if a child is struggling (as a result of abuse or another trauma) **they need your help**.

