Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect:
Signs and Symptoms

During this COVID-19 pandemic, the closures of schools and social distancing efforts have limited mandatory reporters' access to children and youth. Making it harder to detect abuse or neglect, leaving many children at risk. That is why we are relying on the public more than ever to report child abuse and neglect by calling **866-363-4276**.

The first step you must take to is learn how to recognize the signs of child abuse or neglect. The presence of a single sign does not prove child abuse is happening in a family; however, when signs appear repeatedly or in combination, you should take a closer look at the situation and consider the possibility of child abuse.

The following signs may signal the presence of child abuse and neglect.

The Child:

- Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance.
- Has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to the parent's attention.
- Has learning problems (or difficulty concentrating) that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological problems.
- Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen.
- Is overtly compliant, passive or withdrawn.
- Comes to school or other activities early, stays late or does not want to go home.

Consider the possibility of PHYSICAL ABUSE when:

The Child:

- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones or black eyes.
- Offers conflicting explanations as to how the injury occurred.
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school.
- Is frightened of the parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home.
- Shrinks at the approach of adults.
- Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver.

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CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

Consider the possibility of NEGLECT when:

The Child:

- Is frequently absent from school.
- Begs or steals food or money. Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations or glasses.
- Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor.
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather.
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs.
- States that there is no one at home to provide care.

Consider the possibility of SEXUAL ABUSE when:

The Child:

- Has difficulty walking or sitting.
- Suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities.
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting.
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite.
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior.
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under age 14.
- Runs away.
- Reports of sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver.

More likely recognizable signs of child abuse during a video call:

You may see:

- Unexplained bruises or marks on a child.
- A parent, caregiver or adult using harsh physical discipline.
- Safety hazards such as unsecured weapons within children's reach, drugs or unsanitary conditions.
- The absence of food or family members appear to be losing weight.
- Perishable food sitting out after multiple days.
- Aggressive or repeated shouting.
- Hearing hitting or things being broken.
- Children crying for long periods.
- The caregiver appearing intoxicated and unable to provide care.

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*If you would like copies of this document in an alternative format or language, please contact DCYF Constituent Relations (1-800-723-4831 | 360-902-8060, **ConstRelations@dcyf.wa.gov**).*

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