



Red Flags of Abuse and Supporting Children

What are “red flags”?

Children who have been sexually abused respond and react differently to trauma. Reactions or “red flags” of abuse are often sudden and unexplained changes in behaviors.

“Red flags” may include:

- Fear of specific persons, places, or situations.
- Changes in sleep- nightmares, waking up during the night
- Sudden changes in behavior- angry outbursts, fear, bed wetting
- Anxiety
- Changes in behaviors at school or grades
- Sexualized behaviors with others
- Eating a lot or not eating much
- Sexual knowledge, language, or behaviors that are not appropriate for the child’s age
- Requests to be alone
- Not wanting to visit or be with certain persons

What should you do if you notice a “red flag”?

If a child shows one or more than one of these signs it does not mean they were sexually abused. The “red flags” are warning signs to an adult that a child may need help.

Adults should talk with the child and could say:

- “Is there anything I can do to help?”
- “If you need to talk to someone, I’m here to listen”.

If a child tells you they are being abused, you can support them by:

- Staying calm- “I am happy to help you.”
- Believing- “It is not your fault. I believe you.”
- Listening to what they have to say without asking too many questions
- Reporting- Report the suspected abuse by calling Childline at 1-800-932-0313.

This message is brought to you by the Plain Communities Task Force. If you have questions on your role in keeping children safe, please contact Brittany at 717-869-5009 or Mary at 717-627-1611.

