

# Recognizing Signs of Child Abuse during COVID-19

Research tells us that child abuse and neglect can increase during times of disaster and emergency. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in social isolation, increased stress, and limited access to services. These challenges can make it hard for parents to care for their children and for communities to recognize and report abuse.

With schools and community services closing their doors, interactions have shifted to video conference calls, emails, and online platforms. In these new circumstances with fewer eyes on children, your role as a mandated reporter of child abuse and neglect has never been more important. During your interactions with children, be alert to the following signs that may indicate cause for concern.

## They may tell you, on a call or in writing, that:

- They have been physically or sexually abused by someone
- Someone in the home is being abused or is at risk of physical violence
- They are frightened of an adult in the home
- They are experiencing suicidal thoughts
- They are a young child who is left alone or in charge of caring for younger siblings in the home for long periods of time without an adult present
- They are a young child who talks about sex with more knowledge than is normal for their age

## On a video call, you may see:

- Unexplained bruises or marks on a child
- A parent, caregiver, or adult using harsh physical discipline
- A dangerous object, such as an unsecured gun

List adapted from [Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect: Signs and Symptoms](#) and [Recognize the Signs of Child Abuse](#)

To learn more about child abuse and neglect, check out [How You Can Help Someone Who is Being Abused or Neglected](#) from the Children's Bureau and a [resource on recognizing the signs of abuse](#) from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS).

**You have a unique opportunity to support families!** Consider sharing these resources with your families:

- Tips for parents: [Family Guide to Thrive](#); [Parenting in the time of COVID-19](#); and [10 Strategies for Parents and Caregivers](#)
- Community resources: [Help for Parents. Hope for Kids.](#); [211 Texas](#); [SAMSHA Crisis Counseling](#); [Child care options for frontline workers](#); or call the Texas [COVID-19 Mental Health Support Line](#) (833- 986-1919).

## A stressful time for children and families

It is important to be aware that families are facing some challenges that are **NOT** signs of abuse or neglect.

- A child may be frequently absent from class due to a **lack of technology or internet access**.
- A child may not complete assignments because his caregiver **does not speak English and cannot help him**.
- A child may act disruptive or withdrawn because a **family member is ill**.
- A child may be dirty or disorganized because her caregiver is **juggling work and other child care obligations**.

## What should I do if I am concerned about a child?

Report your concerns to DFPS. All adults in Texas are mandated reporters, and professionals, like teachers, must report abuse within 48 hours. All reports of suspected abuse are anonymous. DFPS will handle any necessary investigation of child abuse or neglect. Call DFPS at (800) 252-5400 or report suspected child maltreatment online at [www.txabusehotline.org](http://www.txabusehotline.org).