

# Recognizing the Signs of Abuse and Neglect

*A Checklist for Foster Parents, Caregivers, and Advocates in Massachusetts*



**Guardians  
Unseen**

Protecting kids. Exposing the system.

**This checklist is not meant to diagnose, but to help you observe, document, and act.** Abuse and neglect can take many forms—some visible, some deeply hidden. Trust your instincts. If something feels off, it's worth noting.

## Physical Abuse

- ✓ Unexplained bruises, burns, or welts (especially in unusual places)
- ✓ Injuries in different stages of healing
- ✓ Frequent “accidents” with vague or inconsistent explanations
- ✓ Child flinches when touched or avoids physical contacts

## Emotional Abuse

- ✓ Extreme behaviors (withdrawal, anxiety, fearfulness)
- ✓ Delay in emotional development or regression
- ✓ Constant criticism, belittling, or rejection by parent/guardian (if witnessed or disclosed)
- ✓ A child who feels “worthless” or says they are “bad” or “unloveable”

## Neglect

- ✓ Frequent hunger, hoarding food, or appearing malnourished
- ✓ Poor hygiene (body odor, unwashed clothes, untreated medical needs)
- ✓ Excessive absences from school or lack of supervision
- ✓ Talking about unsafe home conditions (e.g., drug use, no food, sleeping on floor)

## Behavior Red Flags

- ✓ Sudden drop in school performance
- ✓ Aggression or bullying
- ✓ Running away or self-harm
- ✓ Age-inappropriate caregiving roles (“parenting” siblings, excessive fear of punishment)

## What to Do if You Notice These Signs

- ✓ **Document** the behavior or disclosure immediately (date, time, quotes, people present)
- ✓ **Report** the concern if you believe a child is at risk (see Reporting Guide)
- ✓ **Trust your gut.** Your voice could be the one that protects them.

**Contact Us Now**



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