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# Indicators of Sexual Assault

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*Physical indicators* are abnormal physiological occurrences that point to the possibility that a sexual assault has occurred. However, these indicators serve only as possible *red flags* that require more investigation. You should always tell someone anytime there is a noticeable change in a client's physical condition.

## Physical indicators include:

- Bleeding, bruising, infection, scarring, irritation to a person's genitals, rectum, mouth or breasts
- Genital pain or itching
- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Ongoing unexplained medical problems such as stomach aches and headaches

*Behavioral indicators* are seemingly unexplained changes in the behavior of an individual. An person with a physical, sensory, or cognitive disability may regularly exhibit some of the behaviors described below; therefore, a behavioral indicator of possible sexual assault/abuse would involve a significant change in behavior.

## Behavioral indicators include:

- Sudden change in mood: acting out, aggression, attention-seeking behaviors
- Depression, withdrawal, and suicidal feelings
- Suddenly avoiding specific people, specific genders, or situations
- Inability to concentrate or difficulties with learning
- Resisting examination by doctors
- Shying away from being touched
- Sexually inappropriate behaviors, compulsive masturbation, promiscuity

## A perpetrator may display warning signs which could indicate that he/she may be abusive:

- Treats the person like an object
- Does not follow directions when providing personal care
- Is overly intrusive during personal care
- Exhibits "grooming" behaviors

**Grooming** involves "testing the waters" to see how a potential victim might react. Possible grooming behaviors include: giving the person gifts or treats, giving massages, and setting up "private time" when others might not be around.

**Harmful genital practices** involve unwarranted, intrusive, and/or painful procedures in caring of genitals or rectal area. This includes applications or insertion of objects when not medically prescribed and unnecessary for the health and well being of the individual. The practices do not meet the health or hygiene needs of the client. Individuals with disabilities that render them unable to independently bathe, use the toilet, and attend to other personal needs are vulnerable to these practices.

Information for this handout was provided by the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
[www.wcasa.org](http://www.wcasa.org)