

# Warning Signs for Teens

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**If you are involved in the lives of adolescents, you can learn to recognize warning signs that a teen has been sexually assaulted or abused. If you can learn how to spot sexual assault or abuse, you can do something to help.**

## Signs that a teen may have been sexually abused

Some of the warning signs that a teen has been sexually assaulted or abused can easily blend in with the everyday struggles teens face as they learn how to relate to their bodies, peers, and environments. If something doesn't seem right, trust your instincts. It's better to ask and be wrong than to let a teen struggle with the [effects of sexual assault](#). Remind the teen that if they come to you, you will believe them—and that if something happened, [it is not their fault](#).

**If you notice the following warning signs in a teen, it's worth reaching out to them:**

- Unusual weight gain or weight loss
- Unhealthy eating patterns, like a loss of appetite or excessive eating
- Signs of physical abuse, such as bruises
- [Sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\) or other genital infections](#)
- Signs of [depression](#), such as persistent sadness, lack of energy, changes in sleep or appetite, withdrawing from normal activities, or feeling “down”
- Anxiety or worry
- Falling grades
- Changes in self-care, such as paying less attention to hygiene, appearance, or fashion than they usually do
- [Self-harming behavior](#)
- Expressing thoughts about suicide or suicide behavior
- [Drinking or drug use](#)

## Warning signs that a teen may be in an abusive relationship

It can be challenging for teens, who are new to dating, to recognize that sexual assault and abuse may be part of an abusive relationship. As someone outside of the relationship, you have the potential to notice warning signs that someone may be in abusive relationship or at risk for sexual assault.

### Look for signs that a teen’s boyfriend, girlfriend, or partner has done or said the following:

- Tries to get them to engage in sexual activity that they aren’t ready for
- Sexually assaults them or coerces them into unwanted sexual activity
- Refuses to use contraception or protection against STIs during sexual activity
- Hits them or physically harms them in any way
- Doesn’t want them spending time with friends or family
- Makes threats or controls their actions
- Uses drugs or alcohol to create situations where their judgement is impaired or compromises their ability to say "yes" or "no"

## Using technology to hurt others

Teens may also experience sexual harassment or other unwanted behaviors through technology and online interactions. Some people use technology—such as digital photos, videos, apps, and social media—to engage in harassing, unsolicited, or non-consensual sexual interactions. It can leave the person on the other end feeling manipulated, unsafe, and exposed, like when someone forwards a text, photo, or “sext” intended only for the original recipient. The laws pertaining to these situations vary from state to state and platform to platform, and they are evolving rapidly. Learn more about these how people [use technology to harm others](#).

## Taking action isn’t easy, but it’s important

Open communication can be a challenge with teens, but it’s an important part of keeping them safe. As teens become more independent and spend more time with friends and other activities, it’s important to keep the lines of communication open and let your teen know they can trust you. Learn more about [talking to kids and teens about sexual assault](#).

**Remember, you are not alone.**

**If you suspect sexual abuse you can talk to someone who is trained to help. Call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800.656.HOPE (4673) or chat online at [online.rainn.org](https://www.rainn.org).**