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PRESS RELEASE FROM THE AMERICAN RED CROSS

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Wednesday, April 1, 2009 – 12:00 PM CST

THE UNSPOKEN HORROR: CHILD ABUSE

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. This week we begin a series of articles concerning this topic and information on how you can recognize and prevent child abuse to help our children **‘BE SAFE’**. We’ll begin by defining child abuse, then discussing the signs of an abused child or of an abusing adult.

Child abuse can take on several different forms:

- **Physical abuse** is when a child is purposely injured by someone else through an act of direct physical harm or an act of omission that leads to injury.
- **Sexual abuse** is when a child is involved in any sexual activity including fondling, oral-genital contact, intercourse and exposure to child pornography.
- **Emotional abuse** includes verbal and emotional assault such as continually belittling or berating a child as well as isolating, ignoring or rejecting the child.
- **Neglect** is failure to provide a child with adequate food, shelter, affection, supervision or medical care.

Unfortunately, most child abuse is inflicted by someone the child already knows and trusts such as a parent, a babysitter or another relative.

We’ve all seen or thought what we suspected to be “child abuse” going on. It’s the parent that hits their infant who won’t stop crying or the child that won’t behave in the grocery store; the teenager that won’t have eye contact or is afraid of being left alone with men. It is an unspoken horror that happens way too often, but which people ignore or allow to continue equally as much.

Symptoms of child abuse that occur in the child:

A child who is being abused may feel guilty, ashamed or confused. He/she may be afraid to tell anyone about the abuse, especially if the abuser is a parent, loved one or sibling. This is why it's vital to watch for red flags such as:

- . Sudden changes in behavior or in school performance.
- . Untreated medical or dental problems.
- . Unexplained bruises, cuts, burns or other injuries.
- . Blood in the child's underwear.
- . Inappropriate sexual behavior for the child's age.
- . Behavior extremes, from overly aggressive to unusually passive.
- . Nightmares or unusual fears.
- . Withdrawal from friends or usual activities.
- . Low self-esteem.
- . Poor personal hygiene.
- . Frequent absences from school.

Symptoms of a child abuser:

Following are some symptoms that are "red flags" that may indicate a child abuser:

- . Shows little or no concern for the child.
- . Denies the existence of problems at home or school, or blames the child for the problems.
- . Refuses offers of help to resolve problems the child is having at school.
- . Consistently blames, belittles or berates the child.
- . Describes the child in negative terms.
- . Uses harsh physical discipline or asks teachers or others to use it on the child.
- . Demands an inappropriate level of physical or academic performance.
- . Severely limits the child's contact with other children or adults.
- . Offers conflicting or unconvincing explanations for a child's injuries or no explanation at all.

Keep in mind that these are just warning signs – they don't necessarily mean the person is a child abuser. However, when they are coupled with multiple symptoms within a child close to the potential child abuser, they could signal a real problem that should be investigated.

Join us next week when "**BE SAFE**" will continue this series on child abuse.

This information is sponsored by the Marshall Independent and brought to you by the American Red Cross and taken from information provided by the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN. If you have any questions or need further information on the topic covered in this article, please contact your local American Red Cross Chapter at 1-507-532-5565.