Every parent knows that raising a child can be difficult at times. No one ever achieves “perfection” when it comes to parenting. On the other hand, there’s a big difference between normal parenting mistakes and serious abuse or neglect. Here are some common warning signs that abuse or neglect may be happening.

Warning Signs of Physical Abuse

• Unexplained bruises, welts or cuts
• A pattern of injuries over time
• Fearful behavior by the child
• Caregivers who are physically abusive or often angry
• Inappropriate child clothing, which may be used by the child or caregiver to hide signs of injury

Warning Signs of Emotional Abuse

• Excessively fearful or shy behavior
• Persistent anti-social behavior (e.g., very aggressive)
• Children who constantly try to “parent” other kids
• Regression – older children acting much younger
• Harsh, belittling or manipulative caregiver behavior

Warning Signs of Sexual Abuse

• An STD or pregnancy before age 14
• Stained, bloody or torn underclothes
• Injury to the genital area
• Children who have age-inappropriate knowledge about sex or interest in sexual acts
• Extreme passive or aggressive behavior
• Self-destructive behavior such as substance abuse, self-mutilation or suicide attempts
• Caregivers who limit the child’s contact with others

Warning Signs of Neglect

• Chronically bad hygiene, such as very dirty or matted hair, persistent body odor, etc
• Poorly fitting clothes that are dirty and disheveled
• Children who appear to be unsupervised
• Substance abuse or reckless disregard by caregivers