



Child Protection Policy Saplings Nature School August 2022

Rationale

Saplings Nature School is committed to the prevention of child abuse and the enhancement of the well-being and safety of the students entrusted to its care. This commitment is made first and foremost as an ethical and legal responsibility but is also recognized as a response to government and societal expectations for the well-being and safety of students. The role of a teacher or staff member is to be aware of, and alert to, signs of child abuse or neglect. If one has reason to suspect that a child or youth has been, or is likely to be, at risk for abuse or neglect, they have a duty to report your concern to a child welfare worker.

Saplings believes that cases of physical or sexual abuse of children which come to the attention of Board employees must be dealt with quickly and efficiently according to the governing legislation. The school's approach must be consistent and prudent. The procedures must be understood clearly by all employees and great caution must be taken to protect the privacy and reputation of child abuse victims and those accused of child abuse who are not convicted.

Policy

We all share responsibility for the safety and well-being of children and youth in B.C. Child welfare workers have the lead responsibility for responding to suspected child abuse or neglect in cases where the parent is unwilling or unable to protect the child or youth from harm. It is important that school personnel report all situations where they think a child or youth has been or is likely to be abused or neglected — even if they know that a child welfare worker is involved. Child welfare workers need to be aware of all situations where a child or youth's safety and well-being might be endangered in order to provide the most appropriate response.

Saplings closely follows protocol and procedures as outlined [here](#) in the BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect. Detailed scenarios are included in this online document.

As someone who works with children, you have opportunities to speak with them, observe their behaviour and possibly notice changes over time. The term "service providers" refers to everyone working with children and families as an employee, contractor or volunteer. As a service provider, your role is to be aware of, and alert to, signs of child abuse or neglect. If you have reason to suspect that a child has been, or is likely to be, at risk for abuse or neglect, you have a duty to report your concern to a child welfare worker. If the child is in immediate danger, call police first.

Depending on the kinds of services you offer, you may also have an important role to play in responding to child abuse or neglect. This is usually determined on a case-by-case basis.

Guiding Principles

Saplings requires employees to recognize the importance of a collaborative approach among independent school authorities, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), and the police for an effective response to incidents of suspected child abuse and neglect. The following guiding principles are provided to inform all parties

serving children and families.

- The safety and well-being of children are the paramount considerations.
- Children are entitled to be protected from abuse, neglect, harm or threat of harm.
- A family is the preferred environment for the care and upbringing of children and the responsibility for the protection of children rests primarily with the parents.
- if, with available support services, a family can provide a safe and nurturing environment for a child, support services should be provided
- the child's views should be taken into account when decisions relating to a child are made
- kinship ties and a child's attachment to the extended family should be preserved if possible
- the cultural identity of Aboriginal children should be preserved, and decisions relating to children should be made and implemented in a timely manner.

Annual Training

The Head of School will carry out an annual training for all staff. This training will include:

- i) a review of staff responsibilities
- ii) a review of prevention strategies and warning signs of child abuse
- iii) a review of when action is required and the consequences of not taking action. Including a review of how to handle a child's disclosure, reporting protocols and follow-up protocols.

All staff will sign off annually that they have read the [BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect](#) (For Service Providers).

Each school shall maintain an up to date copy of the BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect that is available to all school employees. The Protocol provides direction to all school personnel regarding actions to take in all circumstances. Amendments to the Protocol may occur from time to time and will be considered the procedure to follow, superseding the policies set out here. It is very important that all persons involved with a report of abuse cooperate in the best interests of the child. If school personnel have questions or complaints about the manner in which a case of child abuse is managed by the MCF or the police, they shall inform the Saplings Board immediately. Only by correcting misunderstandings and mistakes can the necessary close cooperation be maintained.

Appointed School Official

Saplings has two 'Appointed School Officials', the Head of School (primary) and the Program Director (alternate) who are responsible for working with child care workers to determine whether a child has been harmed by someone who works or volunteers at the school, or works on contract for the school. The alternate appointed official is to take over in order to ensure the continuity of the reporting and investigation process in the event that the primary appointed official is implicated in a matter that falls under section 14 of the CFCSA.

In fulfilling the role as a school's Appointed School Official, a person may be required to:

- investigate where appropriate on behalf of the school authority;
- consult with the child welfare worker and/or police;
- ensure a safe school environment during investigations;
- consult with no school employee interferes with any investigations;
- communicate with parents with respect to actions taken by the school authority;
- report to the Commission for Teacher Regulation, Teacher Regulation Branch, Ministry of Education, when the School Authority dismisses, suspends or otherwise disciplines a certified teacher or Head of School (Independent School Act section 7 and 7.2); and,

- refer student(s) for counseling.

The school will protect personal information regarding the investigation, including the reporter's identity, against improper or unauthorized disclosure or use. School personnel should not share information with outside agencies about child abuse investigations, particularly if the police are involved.

The Appointed School Official will keep records of the following information:

- protection/abuse prevention training
- referral, assessment, treatment and care plans and related correspondence, for those who are or have been registered students
- a record of your historical liability and/or abuse insurance policies.

Where there are allegations of child abuse by a staff member, volunteer, contract service provider or other persons, the School Authority has the authority to issue a "No Trespass Order" prohibiting the volunteer's attendance at school. The order, provided orally or in writing, to the volunteer, contracted service provider or other person, and copied to the police, must specify the date of issue, the reason for the order and the termination date of the order (Such orders may be re-issued on an annual basis if required). This authority is provided under the Trespass Act, s. 4 (1), (b)(c).

Procedures

1. Stay Calm and Listen

Be relaxed and casual. If you appear anxious or exhibit strong feelings, the child or youth may withdraw. An abused or neglected child or youth needs to know that you are calm and available to help. If you react with shock, outrage or fear, you might inhibit the child or youth and make them feel more anxious or ashamed. A calm response supports the child or youth to tell you what has happened. It also provides some reassurance that what the child or youth is experiencing can be talked about and worked through together.

- NOTE: The police must be contacted immediately if the child is in any immediate danger.

2. Go Slowly

Choose your approach carefully. The child or youth may be fearful or reluctant to talk about what happened. It is normal to feel inadequate or unsure about what to do or say when a child or youth tells you about abuse or neglect. Do not let this discomfort rush you into asking questions. Remember to proceed slowly. Gentle questions, such as "Can you tell me more about what happened?" are helpful. School personnel should not actively seek a disclosure of abuse from the child, as the number of interviews undergone by the child must be kept to a minimum.

3. Keep it private

Make sure you have enough time and a private setting with little chance for interruptions. The child or youth is more likely to confide in you in a place where they feel safe.

4. Be supportive

Be a good listener. Pay attention and express your confidence in the child or youth. This shows your genuine concern for their safety and well-being. Reassure the child or youth that they have not done anything wrong. Children and youth need support and reassurance when discussing abuse or neglect. It is helpful to let them know that:

They are not in trouble with you, the child welfare worker or the police (if they are involved);

- They are safe with you;
- You are glad that they have chosen to tell you about this;

- They have done the right thing in telling you about this;
- You are sorry that they have been hurt or that this has happened to them;
- You will do everything you can to make sure they get the help they need; and
- You know others who can be trusted to help solve this problem

5. Get only the essential facts

Be neutral. Express your concerns to the child or youth in a neutral and objective manner and seek or ask for their explanation for the indicators you have observed. Once you have enough information and reason to believe that abuse or neglect has occurred, stop gathering facts and be supportive. The child or youth may be interviewed in depth by a child welfare worker and, if there is a criminal investigation, by the police; to avoid the stress of multiple interviews, limit your discussion to finding out generally what took place. If you need more information, be sure to ask how, when, who and what questions. Avoid using why questions. They can suggest indirectly that the child or youth may have done something wrong and increase the child's or youth's reluctance to discuss the matter.

6. Tell the child or youth what will happen next

Children and youth who disclose their abuse feel anxious and vulnerable about what people think of them and what will happen next. Tell them only what you know (e.g., that they are not in trouble, and that you will help) and avoid making promises. For example, do not promise that the alleged perpetrator won't get into trouble.

- School personnel will support students who are victims of child abuse or neglect.
- School personnel will not contact the parents or guardians who may be involved in allegedly abusing the child; this is the responsibility of the child welfare worker *unless* the abuse is alleged to have been perpetrated by a staff member. In this case;
- Parents of children alleged to have been abused in the school setting must be informed by the Appointed School Official of the allegations and the outcome of the school investigation, unless there are special circumstances, e.g., relating to a child protection or police investigation, or endangerment of the child.

7. Provide only reassurance that is realistic and achievable

Discuss with the child or youth what you think will happen next and who will be involved.

8. Make notes

As soon as possible after the child's or youth's disclosure, write down as much as you can of what the child told you. This will help ensure accuracy when reporting to the appropriate authority. (Direct disclosures may be admissible in court, so accuracy is important.) Staff will record and keep notes on the incident or disclosure in the locked file cabinet.

Throughout an investigation and disposition of the case, the teacher and school administrator shall meet to discuss the steps the school could take to assist the abused and/or investigated child.

9. Timely Reporting

- School personnel will report promptly to a child welfare worker AND both the Appointed School's Officials.
- School personnel will cooperate fully with any resulting investigation, including assisting with the interviews of children and staff as necessary.

When an employee of the Board has reason to believe that a child has been abused or is in need of protection, employees shall inform the Head of School and then immediately inform a Child Protection Social Worker at the Ministry for Children and Families (MCF).

Phone Numbers

911 If the child or youth is in immediate danger, call police first

1 800 663-9122 at any time of the day or night. The person who answers will make sure your concerns are directed to the right place.

310-1234. Helpline for Children. If a child or youth would like to talk to someone, they can call at any time of the day or night and they do not have to give their name. They do not need an area code.

Local After hours calls to MCFD or Delegated Aboriginal Child and Family Service Agencies, please call:

604 660 4927 In Vancouver, North Shore, Richmond

604 660 8180 In the Lower Mainland, Burnaby, Delta, Maple Ridge, Langley

To look up numbers for any additional regions go to: www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/regions/regional_offices.htm

or call Enquiry BC -604-660-2421 Ask for your local MCFD office or Delegated Aboriginal Child and Family Services Agency nearest you.

For the local Delegated Aboriginal Child and Family Services Agency – use the white pages of the phone book or look online at:

www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/about_us/aboriginal/delegated/pdf/agency_list.pdf

Legal Duty to Report

Though this is something that we hope will not be necessary, Saplings staff are required by law to report suspected or disclosed abuse. When we do, we are not permitted to contact the parent unless specifically directed to do so by the Ministry of Students and Family Development. It is not our responsibility to determine if abuse has happened. It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Children and Family Development to investigate and decide if abuse has occurred. These procedures are designed to protect the students from harm. Our concern is for the safety and well being of every student.

The *Child, Family and Community Service Act* requires anyone who has reason to believe that a child (under 19 years) has been or is likely to be at risk has a legal duty to make a report to a child welfare worker or directly to the police if a child is in immediate danger. As “service providers,” it is incumbent upon us all to be aware of and alert to signs of child abuse or neglect and to be knowledgeable about how to respond when concerns about child abuse or neglect arise.

Section 14 of the Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA) requires individuals to report promptly to a child welfare worker if they have reason to believe a child has been or is likely to be:

- physically harmed, sexually abused or exploited, or neglected by a parent, or
- otherwise in need of protection as set out in Section 13 of the CFCSA.

Any person with reason to believe that a child needs protection has a duty to report directly to a child welfare worker. Informing another person (e.g., a colleague or the Head of School) does not discharge one’s legal duty to report directly to a child welfare worker. School personnel do not need to be certain that abuse and/or neglect has, is, or will occur; a child welfare worker will determine this and can discuss options and courses of action.

Keep in mind that:

- You do not need proof — it is the child welfare worker's job to determine whether abuse or neglect has taken place; your role is to report your concern, including any disclosures or indicators you have witnessed.
- It does not matter if you think someone else is reporting the situation — you still must make a report.
- It does not matter if a child welfare worker is already involved with the child or youth — you still must make a report.
- The legal duty to report overrides any duty of confidentiality, except a solicitor-client relationship or where provisions of the Youth Criminal Justice Act apply
- School personnel, who are uncertain about their duty to report, will consult with a child welfare worker who can discuss the options and appropriate course of action.

Failure to report and making false reports

Failing to promptly report suspected abuse or neglect to a child welfare worker is a serious offence under the Child, Family and Community Service Act. So is knowingly making a false report. Both offences carry a maximum penalty of a \$10,000 fine, six months in jail, or both. No action for damages may be brought against individuals for reporting information under the CFCSA unless: they knowingly report false information; or The report was not made in good faith.

Circumstances That Must be Reported

Section 13 of the Child, Family and Community Service Act sets out the circumstances under which a staff member must report to a child welfare worker. Staff must report when they have reason to believe that a child or youth may need protection because:

- A child or youth has been, or is likely to be, physically harmed, sexually abused or sexually exploited by a parent or another person and the parent is unwilling or unable to protect the child or youth;
- The child or youth has been or is likely to be physically harmed because of neglect by the child's or youth's parent;
- The child or youth is emotionally harmed by the parent's conduct; The child or youth is deprived of necessary health care;
- The child's or youth's development is likely to be seriously impaired by a treatable condition and the child's or youth's parent refuses to provide or consent to treatment
- The child's or youth's parent is unable or unwilling to care for the child or youth and has not made adequate provisions for the child's or youth's care;
- The child or youth is or has been absent from home in circumstances that endanger the child's or youth's safety or well-being;
- The child's or youth's parent is dead and adequate provision has not been made for the child's or youth's care;
- The child or youth has been abandoned and adequate provision has not been made for the child's or youth's care; or
- The child or youth is living in a situation where there is domestic violence by or towards a person with whom the child or youth resides.

What To Report To The Child Welfare Worker

Although the primary responsibility for dealing with abuse allegations involving school staff, volunteers or contract workers rests with the school official, there may still be a need to report to a Child Welfare Worker. Where there is

reason to believe that abuse or neglect has taken place outside the scope of the school investigation and the parent is unwilling or unable to protect the child, or there is reason to believe that the parent is unwilling or unable to protect the child with respect to the abuse that is the subject of the independent school investigation, a school official must report this to a Child Welfare Worker in accordance with the Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA).

The employees of the Board will be aware that communities play an integral role in responding to suspected child abuse and neglect. For example, the *Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA)* states that Aboriginal people should be involved in planning and delivery of services to Aboriginal children and their families, and that the community should be involved, wherever possible and appropriate, in the planning and delivery of services to families and children.

Ministry of Children and Family Development In British Columbia, the Ministry of Children and Family Development has lead responsibility for responding to suspected child abuse and neglect. Child welfare workers employed by MCFD are delegated under the *CFCSA* to assess reports, provide support services, investigate as needed and collaborate with other service providers, such as police, school personnel, health practitioners, etc. to help ensure the safety and well-being of children.

Delegated Aboriginal Child and Family Services Agencies The *CFCSA* recognizes the importance of preserving the cultural identity of Aboriginal children and maintaining their kinship ties and attachment to extended family. It also specifically states that Aboriginal people should be involved in planning and delivering services to Aboriginal children and families. Consistent with these principles, MCFD has formal agreements with many Aboriginal communities, enabling them to operate their own child and family services agencies with delegated authority under the *CFCSA*. Delegated Aboriginal Child and Family Services Agencies work to ensure that Aboriginal children and families are served in ways that are culturally appropriate, reflecting their unique needs, strengths and circumstances.

When you report to a child welfare worker that a child or youth may have been abused or neglected, the worker will talk to you about what happens next. That includes:

- The estimated time frames for the response;
- Whether and how you will be advised of the outcome of a child welfare worker's assessment of the case;
- Any ongoing responsibility you may have as a resource for the child, youth and family; and
- Confirmation that your identity is confidential and will not be disclosed without your consent, unless required in a court proceeding or if a criminal offence may have occurred

Child Care Workers upon presenting proper ID will be permitted to interview students at the school during school hours. A social worker from MCF (and a Police Officer in cases of sexual abuse or physical abuse) shall interview the child, usually on the same day the complaint has been made. If an interview is being conducted by a child care worker and the interview goes beyond the length of the school day, it will be up to the Child Care worker to determine if a parent may pick up the student being interviewed. Teachers have no authority to detain a child at the request of a social worker. In the event that an interview is still in process at the end of a school day, it is the social worker's responsibility to contact the parent/guardian and assess whether the child will be allowed to return home.

Child Care Workers upon presenting proper ID will be given access to information in school files that they determine is needed for them to complete their investigation. All parties shall use discretion to protect the privacy of the child.

Child Protection Social Workers and/or the police shall then interview the alleged abuser and other family members. A decision concerning the safety of the child shall be taken by MCF, and a determination shall be made in what manner to proceed.

When making a report to a child welfare worker, it is helpful to include your name, your phone number and your relationship to the child or youth. But you can make an anonymous call if you prefer. You do not need all this information to make a report. Just tell the child welfare worker what you do know. Time is of the essence in responding, so if you have concerns, do not delay. The child welfare worker will want to know:

- The child's or youth's name and location;
- Whether there are any immediate concerns about the child's or youth's safety
- Why you believe the child or youth is at risk;
- Any statements or disclosures made by the child or youth;
- The child's or youth's age and vulnerability;
- Information about the family, parents and alleged offender
- Information about siblings or other children or youth who may be at risk;
- Whether you know of any previous incidents involving, or concerns about the child or youth
- Information about other persons or agencies closely involved with the child, youth and/or family;
- Information about other persons who may be witnesses or may have information about the child or youth;
- Information about the nature of the child's or youth's disabilities, their mode of communication, and the name of a key support person; and
- Any other relevant information concerning the child, youth and/or family, such as language or culture.

As a staff member, you may be well positioned to offer support or assistance to a child or youth who may have been abused or neglected. For example, the child welfare worker may ask you to assist by:

- Offering an appropriate place for the child welfare worker to interview the child or youth;
- Being present during the interview to support the child or youth if requested;
- Offering your support to the child, youth and/or family if they would like to talk with someone;
- In situations involving youth who are on their own, letting the youth know you are a support for them.

While the onus is on the Ministry for Children and Families to report back to the school the school administrator should be prepared to follow the case by contacting the Child Protection Social Worker to learn the results of the investigation as they pertain to the student's educational needs.

When To Call Police

Police can respond quickly to protect children and youth who are in immediate danger. They also play a key role when a criminal offence may have been committed against a child or youth. Not every incident that might constitute an offense if proven will warrant police involvement. School officials are expected to exercise judgment. Where there is reason to believe that the alleged child abuse by employees, volunteers, contract service providers or other persons may constitute a criminal offence warranting police involvement, the school official should consult with the police regarding the matter.

Police and child welfare workers have complementary roles in responding to abuse and neglect. Call your local police detachment or 9-1-1 and ask for the police when:

- A child or youth under 19 years of age is in immediate danger; and/or
- A criminal offence against a child or youth has been or is likely to be committed.

Report your concerns to a child welfare worker after you call the police. Children and youth who are abused or neglected may be victims of criminal offences such as, but not limited to:

- Criminal negligence causing bodily harm;
- Physical and sexual assault;
- Sexual interference or sexual invitation to touch a child under 14;
- Sexual exploitation of a child/ youth; or

- Failure to provide the necessities of life.

When an officer has reasonable grounds to believe that a child's safety or well-being is in immediate danger, the officer has authority to take charge of the child and notify a child welfare worker as quickly as possible. Where a criminal offence against a child is suspected, police may investigate, working in collaboration with child welfare workers.

Allegations of Child Abuse Against School Staff, Volunteers, Contract Service Providers or Others in the School Setting

School personnel who have reason to believe that another employee, volunteer, contract service provider or other person on school property or supervising an independent school activity outside of the school has abused a student, must report the incident or information to the school Head of School or Appointed School Official. It is the responsibility of the Head of School or ASO to investigate the allegations and, in collaboration with the school personnel, determine what action is required. In addition, an authorized person (certificate holder or a person who holds a letter of permission), must promptly provide the commissioner a written and signed report if the authorized person has reason to believe that another authorized person has engaged in conduct that involves sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a student (Teachers Act, s 38 (1)(b)).

According to the MCFD handbook, *"The BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect – For Service Providers"*, p 32, "If the abuse occurs in a setting such as a school, youth custody or child care centre, the head of the organization is responsible for responding." It is the legal responsibility of school officials and employees to provide a safe learning environment for students. If the school officials and employees believe that a child is being abused or at risk, there is a legal duty to report the concern to the local child welfare worker and the police if the child is in imminent danger.

Saplings' officials have the primary responsibility for dealing with allegations of child abuse involving independent school employees, volunteers, contract service providers, or others on independent school property or supervising an independent school activity outside of the school. If a Head of School suspends, dismisses or disciplines an authorized person for misconduct that involves physical harm to a student or minor, or significant emotional harm to a student or minor, the Head of School must without delay send to the commissioner a report regarding the suspension, dismissal or disciplinary action (ISA s. 7.2). If Saplings' Director suspends, dismisses or disciplines an authorized person, the authority must without delay notify the Head of School who must without delay report the matter to the commissioner (ISA s. 7.3).

Staff Member

Where there are allegations of child abuse by a school staff member, the Head of School or ASO is responsible to investigate the allegations and report the matter to a Child Welfare Worker if there is reason to believe that the child is in need of protection, or the police if there is reason to believe the child is in imminent danger or that a criminal offense has been committed. The Head of School has the authority under the Independent School Act (ISA), Section 7 (2) (b) to suspend a school staff member whose presence threatens the safety and welfare of students.

Volunteer

Where there are allegations of child abuse by a volunteer, the Head of School or ASO is responsible to investigate the allegations and report the matter to a Child Welfare Worker if there is reason to believe that the child needs protection, or the police if there is reason to believe the child is in imminent danger or that a criminal offense has been committed. The School Authority has the authority to issue a "No Trespass Order" prohibiting attendance at school by a volunteer whose presence threatens the safety and welfare of students.

Contract Workers and Other Persons

Where there are allegations of child abuse by a contract worker or other person at school or at an independent school activity outside of the school, the Head of School or ASO is responsible to investigate the allegations and report the matter to a Child Welfare Worker if there is reason to believe that the child is in need of protection, or the police if there is reason to believe the child is in imminent danger or that a criminal offense has been committed. The School Authority has the authority to issue a “No Trespass Order” prohibiting from attending at the school a contract worker or other person whose presence threatens the safety and welfare of students.

Recognizing Child Abuse And Neglect

Anyone who provides services to children and/or youth should watch for signs of possible child abuse or neglect. There are two main types of signs — disclosures and indicators. You should be prepared to recognize and respond to both. It is important to note that many indicators — especially those of a behavioural nature — may be signs of other problems. However, a series or cluster of indicators observed over a period of time may be a child’s or youth’s reaction to abuse or neglect, and may appear as dramatic changes from the child’s or youth’s normal behaviour. By themselves, indicators do not prove child abuse or neglect. But they do tell us we need to know more about the child’s or youth’s circumstances. That is why they should be reported to a child welfare worker

Direct Disclosures

Sometimes children or youth will tell you directly that they are being abused or neglected. They might begin with one example and see how you react. Research shows that children often tell about their experiences many times before action is taken to respond.

Indirect Disclosures

In other cases, children or youth do not tell directly, but communicate what they have experienced indirectly — through their behaviours, emotions, art, writing, appearance, inquiries or discussions about fears, concerns or relationships. Children and youth also divulge information through indirect statements, statements with conditions (e.g., “promise not to tell”) or third-party statements (e.g., “my friend’s parent is hurting her”).

Victims of Crime

In cases where a student may be a victim of a crime. Saplings staff should consider the following resource available to families:

*Victim LINK To connect with the victim service program in your community, contact Victim LINK toll-free at **1-800-563-0808** or online at www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/victim_services.*

Victim LINK is a 24-hour, multilingual, province-wide telephone service that provides information and referral services for all victims of crime in British Columbia. It also provides immediate crisis support for victims of family and sexual violence.

Benefits for victims of crime

Benefits are available to victims of crime through the Crime Victim Assistance Program (CVAP, formerly the Criminal Injury Compensation Program). The benefits are intended to assist the recovery of those who have been impacted by crime. Immediate family members may also be eligible for benefits. Benefits can range from counselling to financial remuneration for medical expenses. (Note: An adult who was a victim of crime as a child may be eligible for benefits under CVAP if they apply before they turn 20 or at any time if they were sexually abused as a child.) For

information about how a child or parent may apply for benefits, contact your local victim service agency:

- Victim LINK (toll-free **1 800-563-0808**)
- CVAP directly at **604 660-3888** in the Lower Mainland or toll-free
- **1 866-660-3888** elsewhere in B.C.

Definitions

Defining Child Abuse and Neglect, understanding what child abuse and neglect are, and knowing how to take appropriate action are critical in ensuring the safety and well-being of children and youth. The following plain-language definitions will help you understand and respond to child abuse and neglect. While recognizing that one profession may use a particular term somewhat differently from another profession, the definitions below are intended to support the work of all service providers.

Physical Abuse: a deliberate, non-accidental physical assault or injury by an adult or significantly older or more powerful child that results in, or is likely to result in, physical harm to a child. It includes the use of unreasonable force to discipline a child or youth or prevent a child or youth from harming him/herself or others. The injuries sustained by the child or youth may vary in severity and range from minor bruising, burns, welts or bite marks to major fractures of the bones or skull to, in the most extreme situations, death. The likelihood of physical harm to a child or youth increases when the child or youth is living in a situation where there is domestic violence by or towards a person with whom the child or youth resides. Domestic violence is a pattern of intentionally coercive and violent behaviour toward an individual with whom there is or has been an intimate relationship. It includes physical abuse such as hitting, slapping, pushing, choking, assault with a weapon, locking out of the house or the threat of physical abuse.

Physical Indicators:

- Any injury to an infant who is not yet mobile, especially head/facial injuries;
- Injuries to a toddler or older child for which there is no explanation, the explanation does not fit with the injuries, or the story keeps changing;
- Injuries at different stages of healing;
- Injuries that have a pattern or look like they may have been caused by an object (e.g., hand, stick, buckle, stove element); or
- Bruising in unusual places such as ears, trunk, neck or buttocks. Behavioural Indicators: Afraid or reluctant to go home, or runs away;
- Shows unusual aggression, rages or tantrums;
- Flinches when touched;
- Has changes in school performance and attendance;
- Withdraws from family, friends and activities previously enjoyed;
- Poor self-esteem (e.g., describes self as bad, feels punishment is deserved, is very withdrawn); or
- Suicidal thoughts or self-destructive behaviour (e.g., self-mutilation, suicide attempt, extreme risk-taking behaviour).

Sexual Abuse: the use of a child for sexual gratification by a person in a position of trust and/or authority, or by a significantly older or more powerful child. It includes sexual touching, menacing or threatening sexual acts, obscene gestures, or deliberate exposure of the child to sexual activity or material.

Physical Indicators:

- Unexplained or persistent pain, bleeding or unusual discharge in the genital or anal area;» Pregnancy; or
- Sexually transmitted diseases. Behavioural Indicators:
- Engages in age-inappropriate sexual play or exhibits age-inappropriate sexual knowledge (e.g., through drawing or play);
- Forces or coerces another child to engage in sexual play
- Inserts objects into vagina or rectum;
- Directs sexually intrusive behaviour to adults;
- Has unexplained gifts, new clothes or money;
- Has changes in school performance and attendance;
- Is secretive about “new” friends, activities, phone calls or Internet use
- Has unexplained developmental setbacks (e.g., was toilet trained but reverts back);
- Is involved in sexually exploitive activities, such as performing sex acts for money;

- Is involved in behaviours such as misuse of drugs or alcohol, stealing, fire-setting; or
- Flinches when touched.

Emotional Abuse: a pattern of destructive behaviour or verbal attacks by an adult on a child. Typical behaviours may include rejecting, terrorizing, ignoring, isolating, humiliating, insulting, scapegoating, exploiting or corrupting a child. This is the most difficult type of harm to recognize. Under the Child, Family and Community Service Act, a child or youth is defined as emotionally harmed if they demonstrate severe:

- Anxiety;
- Depression;
- Withdrawal;
- Self-destructive or aggressive behaviour.

Reason to believe that a child or youth needs protection from being emotionally harmed may arise due to emotional abuse from a parent. This may range from the parent ignoring to habitually humiliating the child or youth to withholding life-sustaining nurturing. Emotional abuse may occur separately from, or along with, other forms of abuse and neglect. Emotional abuse can include a pattern of:

- Scapegoating;
- Rejection;
- Verbal attacks on the child;
- Threats;
- Insults; or
- Humiliation.

Emotional harm may also be caused by the child or youth living in a situation where there is domestic violence by or towards a person with whom the child or youth resides. Domestic violence may involve physical abuse, threats, verbal insults or psychological abuse such as stalking.

Physical Indicators:

- Bed wetting and/or frequent diarrhea; or
 - Frequent psychosomatic complaints, headaches, nausea, abdominal pains
- Behavioural Indicators:
- Mental or emotional development lags;
 - Isolated and has no friends or complains of social isolation;
 - Behaviours inappropriate for age
 - Fear of failure, overly high standards, reluctant to play;
 - Fears consequences of actions, often leading to lying;
 - Extreme withdrawal or aggressiveness, mood swings;
 - Overly compliant, too well-mannered;
 - Excessive neatness and cleanliness;
 - Extreme attention-seeking behaviours
 - Poor peer relationships;
 - Severe depression, may be suicidal;
 - Runaway attempts;
 - Violence is a subject for art or writing;
 - Forbidden contact with other children;
 - Shows little anxiety towards strangers; or
 - Unusual severe anxiety or worries.

Neglect: Neglect is the form of abuse most frequently reported to the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Neglect is failure to provide for a child's or youth's basic needs. It involves an act of omission by the parent or guardian, resulting in (or likely to result in) harm to the child or youth. Neglect may include failure to provide food,

shelter, basic health care, supervision or protection from risks, to the extent that the child's or youth's physical health, development or safety is, or is likely to be, harmed.

Physical Indicators:

- Injuries where medical care has been unusually delayed or avoided;
- Injuries resulting from a lack of supervision;
- Medical or dental needs that are consistently unattended to;
- "Failure to thrive" in a child where no medical reason has been found (see table below for further information on failure to thrive);
- Clothing consistently inadequate for weather conditions;
- Persistent hunger;
- Poor or inadequate nutrition; or
- Poor personal hygiene.

Behavioural Indicators:

- Forages for, hoards or steals food;
- Developmental delay or setbacks related to a lack of stimulation;
- Poor school attendance;» Inappropriately takes on a caregiver role for a parent or siblings;
- Tired or unable to concentrate at school;
- Appears sad or has flat affect;
- Reluctant to go home; speaks of being or appears to be left alone at home a lot, unsupervised;
- Is involved in behaviours such as misuse of drugs or alcohol, stealing, fire-setting; or
- Does not respond to affection or stimulation

Sexual abuse: is when a child or youth is used (or likely to be used) for the sexual gratification of another person. It includes:

- Touching or invitation to touch for sexual purposes;
- Intercourse (vaginal, oral or anal);
- Menacing or threatening sexual acts, obscene gestures, obscene communications or stalking;» Sexual references to the child's or youth's body/behaviour by words/gestures;
- Requests that the child or youth expose their body for sexual purposes;
- Deliberate exposure of the child or youth to sexual activity or material; and
- Sexual aspects of organized or ritual abuse.

Sexual Exploitation: permitting, encouraging or requiring a child to engage in conduct of a sexual nature for: stimulation, gratification or self-interest of another person; prostitution; or production of material of a pornographic nature. Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse that occurs when a child or youth engages in a sexual activity, usually through manipulation or coercion, in exchange for money, drugs, food, shelter or other considerations. Sexual activity includes:

- Performing sexual acts;
- Sexually explicit activity for entertainment;
- Involvement with escort or massage parlour services; and
- Appearing in pornographic images.

Children and youth living on the street are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Children and youth in the sex trade are not prostitutes or criminals. They are victims of abuse.

Other Organizations You May Wish To Contact

To contact a Suspected Child abuse or Neglect team in your area, call Children's Hospital at 604 875-2345 and ask for the Child Protection Service Unit

Representative for Children and Youth – Responsibilities of the Representative include advocating and supporting children and youth, protecting their rights, and making the child protection system more responsive, particularly for those who are most vulnerable. Phone: 1 800 476-3933 (Confidential, for all of B.C.) www.rcybc.ca

Ombudsperson – receives questions and complaints about the services provided by public agencies. The Ombudsperson can conduct investigations to determine if a public agency is being fair to the people it serves. Phone: 1 800 567-3247 (all of B.C.) www.bcombudsperson.ca

Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner www.oipc.bc.ca

VictimLink BC – call toll free 1 800 563-0808 or 604 875-0885 (to call collect, dial the Telus Relay Service at 711) the 24 hour a day, multilingual and TTY accessible, province-wide telephone service to locate a victim services program in your community or visit our website.

www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/criminal-justice/victims-of-crime/victimlinkbc

Provincial Office of Domestic Violence www.gov.bc.ca/officeofdomesticviolence