

What Should I Do If I Suspect a Child in My Care Has Been Abused or Neglected?



COMMUNITY CARE FACILITIES LICENSING PROGRAM

In your role as a childcare provider, you may encounter many different aspects of your work that will be challenging and difficult. One such aspect is the possibility that you may be made aware of a child's need to be protected. This could happen in one of three ways:

- **You notice something different about the child;**
- **The child comes to you with information; or**
- **Someone other than the child provides you with information.**

Abused and neglected children almost always show signs of their suffering. Some of the most common signs include:

1. Unexplained bruises especially on face, lower back, thighs and upper arms
2. Unexplained bruises on an infant
3. Different colours of bruises indicating different stages of healing
4. Unexplained fractures
5. Constant complaints such as sore throats or stomach aches that have no medical explanation
6. Lack of proper hygiene
7. Clothing inappropriate to weather conditions
8. Torn, stained or bloody underwear
9. Bruises on breasts, buttocks or thighs
10. Sudden onset of nightmares, bedwetting, and/or fear of the dark
11. Sudden change in attitude towards someone
12. Expressing sexual knowledge not usual for their age in their language, behaviour or play
13. Becoming anxious and fearful after being outgoing and friendly

If the child comes to you with information:

Childcare providers often develop strong, trusting relationships with the children they care for. This trust can promote a communicative openness that comes only within the boundaries of a secure, familiar environment such as daycare or out-of-school care. Childcare providers, therefore, may be the one adult a child feels safe to share their experience with. Known as **disclosure**, the childcare provider must accept the information provided and follow a procedure that will ensure the child's physical and emotional safety.

If a child who is being abused tells you what has happened, do the following:

1. Stay calm
2. Listen to the child
3. Let them know you believe them – state "I believe you"
4. Reassure them – "I'm glad you're telling me this." "It's okay to share this with me"
5. Tell them you're sorry it happened and let them know that it is not their fault
6. Don't promise to keep it a secret
7. Don't say that "everything will be fine now". It may take a lot of time before everything is fine again
8. Do not question the child – this is the job of a skilled social worker
9. Do not advise the parents or emergency contacts of the disclosure

OVER

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|--|--|---|--|
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If the abuse/neglect *did* occur at a licensed child care facility, contact your Licensing Officer immediately. The Licensing program is the investigating agency and must be notified before any investigation begins.

Your Licensing Officer is responsible to investigate the allegations under the *Community Care and Assisted Living Act* and Child Care Licensing Regulation. S/he will determine the level of response required, and may require the assistance of a Social Worker from the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

If the abuse/neglect *did not* occur at your facility, you must report to a child protection Social Worker in either the Ministry for Children and Family Development office, or a First Nations Welfare Agency that provides child protection services.

- Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm – Call the local district office listed in the blue pages of the phone book
- Monday to Friday, 4:30pm to 8:30am, all day Saturday and Sunday, and on statutory holidays – **Call the Helpline for Children 310-1234 (toll-free)**
- When a child is in immediate danger call the police – 911

If someone other than the child provides you with information:

If someone else approaches you with information about a child in your care, for example a co-worker or staff member, encourage him or her to make their report to the Ministry. You should also make a report, even if you believe someone else is reporting, or if you're aware that a child protection social worker is already involved with the child. Time is essential in ensuring the safety and well being of children. Report immediately.

It is important to remember that making a report to the Ministry is not a conviction; it is an allegation that will prompt an investigation by a Child Protection Social Worker. You do not have to be right to make a report.

The protection of children in our care is our top priority.