

## RESPONDING TO SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT

For further information, please see the [BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect for Service Providers](#) and New Westminster School District Administrative Procedure 325 available at (insert link when revised AP has been uploaded to website).

**DUTY TO REPORT** (unless otherwise noted, this document contains quotes from the *BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2017.*)

The *Child, Family and Community Service Act* requires that anyone who has reason to believe that a child or youth needs protection under section 13 of the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* must promptly report the matter to a child welfare worker.

*“Reason to Believe” simply means that, based on what you have seen or information you have received, you believe a child has been or is likely to be at risk. You do not need to be certain. It is the Child Welfare Worker’s job to determine whether abuse or neglect has occurred or is likely to occur.”*

**NOTE: Reporting the alleged abuse to a supervisor or other employee does not remove the legal responsibility of reporting to a Child Welfare Worker.**

Failing to promptly report suspected abuse or neglect to a child welfare worker is a serious offense under the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*.

### Circumstances That Must be Reported

The *Child, Family and Community Service Act* sets out the circumstances under which you must report to a Child Welfare Worker. You must report when you have reason to believe that:

- A child 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;
- The child has been or is likely to be physically harmed because of neglect by the child’s parent;
- The child is emotionally harmed by the parent’s conduct;
- The child is deprived of necessary health care;
- The child’s development is likely to be seriously impaired by a treatable condition and the child’s parent refuses to provide or consent to the treatment;
- The child’s parent is unable or unwilling to care for the child and has not made adequate provisions for the child’s care;
- The child is, or has been, absent from home in circumstances that endanger the child’s safety or well-being;
- The child has been abandoned and adequate provision has not been made for the child’s care.

## WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT?

Child abuse can take different forms. It may be physical, sexual, emotional – or the result of neglect.

**Physical Abuse** is a deliberate physical assault or action by a person that results in, or is likely to result in, physical harm to a child or youth. 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 cases, death.

**Emotional Harm** is the most difficult kind 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; or
- Self-destructive or aggressive behaviour.

**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 or communications, or stalking;
- Sexual references (words or gestures) to the child's body or behaviour;
- Requests that the child expose their body for sexual purposes; or
- Deliberate exposure of the child or youth to sexual activity or material.

**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 activities include:

- Sexual acts;
- Sex for the purpose of entertainment;
- Involvement with escort or massage parlour services, and
- Appearing in pornographic images.

Children in the sex trade are not prostitutes or criminals. They are victims of sexual exploitation.

**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.

## **WARNING SIGNS OR INDICATORS OF 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 – indicators and disclosures. You should be prepared to recognize and respond to both.

### **Indicators**

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. However, they do tell us we need to know more about the child's or youth's circumstances. Some of the most common signs are listed below.

#### ***Physical Warning Signs May Include:***

- Any injury or bruising to a baby who is not crawling or walking yet – especially head or facial injuries;
- Injuries where there is no explanation, the explanation does not seem to fit with the injuries, or the story keeps changing;
- Injuries with a pattern or in the shape of an object like a hand, stick, buckle, stove element, etc.;
- The child is not seeing a doctor or dentist when needed;
- Clothing that does not protect the child from the weather;
- The child looks unwell or hungry, complains of hunger, or is unusually thin or malnourished;
- Poor personal hygiene;
- Unexplained genital or anal injuries.

#### ***Other Warning Signs May Include:***

- Running away from home or being scared to go home;
- In a young child, not responding to affection or positive attention;
- Poor self-esteem (for example, when children call themselves bad or say they deserve to be punished);
- Unexplained setbacks, like toileting problems in a child who has been toilet trained;
- Extreme aggression or withdrawal;
- Suicidal thoughts or self-destructive behaviour (such as self-mutilation, a suicide attempt or extreme risk-taking);
- Foraging for, hoarding or stealing food;
- Problems at school like poor attendance or trouble paying attention;
- Delinquent behaviour like drinking, drug use, stealing, fire setting, etc.;
- Showing sexual knowledge not common for their age or forcing another child into sexual play;
- Withdrawing from family, friends and activities the child used to enjoy.

**Remember:** these are warning signs. They do not necessarily mean a child is being abused or neglected. But if you see one or more of these signs you should be concerned. If you are not sure, call a Child Welfare Worker who will discuss your concerns with you.

## RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURES OF CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT

Sometimes children or youth who are being abused or neglected will disclose information to a trusted adult. If a child discloses information to you, remember that your primary role is to support the child, gather basic information and report it to a Child Welfare Worker as quickly as possible. As a disclosure is beginning, do not promise to keep the information a secret. A suggested response is: "I want to hear what you have to tell me but if it concerns your safety, you need to know that I may have to talk someone else because I want you to be safe." The information below may prove helpful when a disclosure is made.

***If the child is in immediate danger and/or a criminal offense against a child has been or is likely to be committed, call the Police first.***

***Report to the Child Welfare Worker after you have called the Police.***

***Do not interview the child.*** It is the Child Welfare Worker's job to determine whether the child abuse or neglect has taken, or is taking place and to decide on the appropriate action to take.

***Stay calm and listen.*** An abused or neglected child needs to know that you are calm and available to help. A calm response supports the child to tell you what has happened.

***Go slowly.*** It is normal to feel inadequate or unsure about what to do or say when a child tells you about abuse or neglect. Remember proceed slowly.

***Be supportive.*** Reassure the child that he or she has not done anything wrong.

***Get only the essential facts.*** Once you have enough information and reason to believe that abuse or neglect has occurred, stop gathering facts and be supportive. Limit your discussion to finding out generally what took place.

***Tell the child what will happen next.*** Tell them only what you know and avoid making promises. For example, do not promise that the alleged perpetrator won't get into trouble.

***Make notes.*** As soon as possible after the disclosure, write down as much as you can of what the child told you. Accuracy is important. Do not include personal opinions or judgments.

***Notify the Principal*** that a report has been made to a Child Welfare Worker.

***Do not contact the parents or the alleged offender.*** Child Welfare, the Principal or the Superintendent will do this when appropriate.

***Complete Form 325-1*** once the report has been made and send to the appropriate person as indicated on the form.

## **WHAT TO REPORT TO THE CHILD WELFARE WORKER**

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. However, you can make an anonymous call if you prefer. The Child Welfare Worker will likely want to know:

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

*You do not need all this information to make a report. Just tell the Child Welfare Worker what you know. Time is of the essence in responding, so even if you have concerns, do not delay.*

## **HOW TO CONTACT A CHILD WELFARE WORKER**

<p><b>Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.</b></p> <p>Ministry for Children and Family Development, New Westminister      604-660-9495</p> <p><b>Monday to Friday 4:30 p.m. to 8:30 a.m.; Saturdays, Sundays and Statutory Holidays</b></p> <p>Ministry for Children and Family Development, New Westminister      604-660-5211</p>
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*SD No. 40 (New Westminister)*

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