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## Child Abuse and Neglect: Frequently Asked Questions

### WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE AND WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF CHILD ABUSE AND/OR NEGLECT?

Child abuse and/or neglect occurs with alarming frequency. As public awareness of the subject has grown, so has the number of reported and confirmed cases. The following definitions and possible indicators of abuse are adapted from *The BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect - For Service Providers*.

#### PHYSICAL ABUSE

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. It includes the use of unreasonable force to discipline a child or prevent a child from harming him/herself or others. The injuries sustained by the child 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.

#### POSSIBLE INDICATORS 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 (hand, stick, buckle, stove element)
- 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- poor self-esteem (e.g. describes self as bad, feels punishment is deserved, is very withdrawn)
- suicidal thoughts or self-destructive behaviour (e.g. self-mutilation, suicide attempt, extreme risk-taking behaviour)

## SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse occurs when a child 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 body/behaviour by words/gestures
- requests that the child expose their body for sexual purposes
- deliberate exposure of the child to sexual activity or material
- sexual aspects of organized or ritual abuse

## SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse that occurs when a child 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
- appearing in pornographic images

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

POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION
<p><i>Physical Indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- unexplained or persistent pain, bleeding or unusual discharge in the genital or anal area</li><li>- pregnancy</li><li>- sexually transmitted diseases</li></ul> <p><i>Behavioural Indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- engages in age-inappropriate sexual play or exhibits age-inappropriate sexual knowledge (e.g. through drawing or play)</li><li>- forces or coerces another child to engage in sexual play</li><li>- inserts objects into vagina or rectum</li><li>- directs sexually intrusive behaviour to adults</li><li>- has unexplained gifts, new clothes or money</li><li>- has changes in school performance and attendance</li><li>- is secretive about "new" friends, activities, phone calls or internet use</li><li>- has unexplained developmental setbacks (e.g. was toilet trained but reverts back)</li><li>- is involved in sexually exploitive activities, such as performing sex acts for money</li><li>- is involved in behaviours such as misuse of drug or alcohol, stealing, fire-setting</li><li>- flinches when touched</li></ul>

## EMOTIONAL ABUSE

This is the most difficult type of abuse to define and recognize. It may range from ignoring to habitually humiliating the child to withholding life-sustaining nurturing. Generally, it involves acts or omissions by those in contact with a child that are likely to have serious, negative emotional impacts. Emotional abuse may occur separately from, or along with, other forms of abuse and neglect. It includes the emotional harm caused by witnessing domestic violence.

Emotional abuse can include a pattern of:

- scapegoating
- rejection
- verbal attacks on the child
- threats
- insults
- humiliation

### Emotional harm

When emotional abuse is chronic and persistent, it can result in emotional harm to the child. Under the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*, a child is defined as emotionally harmed if they demonstrate severe:

- anxiety
- depression
- withdrawal
- self-destructive or aggressive behaviour

POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE
<p><i>Physical Indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- bed-wetting and/or frequent diarrhea</li><li>- frequent psychosomatic complaints, headaches, nausea, abdominal pains</li></ul> <p><i>Behavioural Indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- mental or emotional development lags</li><li>- isolated and has no friends or complains of social isolation</li><li>- behaviours inappropriate for age</li><li>- fear of failure, overly high standards, reluctant to play</li><li>- fears consequences of actions, often leading to lying</li><li>- extreme withdrawal or aggressiveness, mood swings</li><li>- overly compliant, too well-mannered</li><li>- excessive neatness and cleanliness</li><li>- extreme attention-seeking behaviours</li><li>- poor peer relationships</li><li>- severe depression, suicidal ideation</li><li>- runaway attempts</li><li>- violence is a subject for art or writing</li><li>- forbidden contact with other children</li></ul>

- shows little anxiety toward strangers
- unusual severe anxiety or worries

## NEGLECT

Neglect is failure to provide for a child'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. Neglect may include failure to provide food, shelter, basic health care, supervision or protection from risks, to the extent that the child's physical health, development or safety is, or is likely to be, harmed.

### POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF NEGLECT

#### *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" where no medical reason has been found
- clothing consistently inadequate for weather conditions
- persistent hunger
- poor or inadequate nutrition
- 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
- does not respond to affection or stimulation

## 2. UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS IS THERE A DUTY TO REPORT?

Part 3, Section 13 of the Child, Family and Community Services Act 1996 (amended 2002) clarifies when protection is needed:

Section 13 (1) A child needs protection in the following circumstances:

- (a) if the child has been, or is likely to be, physically harmed by the child's parent;
- (b) if the child has been, or is likely to be, sexually abused or exploited by the child's parent;
- (c) if the child has been, or is likely to be, physically harmed, sexually abused or sexually exploited by another person and if the child's parent is unwilling or unable to protect the

- child; (d) if the child has been, or is likely to be, physically harmed because of neglect by the child's parent;
- (e) if the child is emotionally harmed by the parent's conduct;
- (f) if the child is deprived of necessary health care;
- (g) if 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 treatment;
- (h) if the child's parent is unable or unwilling to care for the child and has not made adequate provision for the child's care;
- (i) if the child is or has been absent from home in circumstances that endanger the child's safety or well-being;
- (j) if the child's parent is dead and adequate provision has not been made for the child's care;
- (k) if the child has been abandoned and adequate provision has not been made for the child's care;
- (l) if the child is in the care of a director or another person by agreement and the child's parent is unwilling or unable to resume care when the agreement is no longer in force.

(1.1) For the purpose of subsection(1)(b) and (c) and section 14(1)(a) but without limiting the meaning of "sexually abused" or "sexually exploited", a child has been or is likely to be sexually abused or sexually exploited if the child has been, or is likely to be,

- (a) encouraged or helped to engage in prostitution, or
- (b) coerced or inveigled into engaging in prostitution.

(2) For the purpose of subsection

- (1)(e), a child is emotionally harmed if the child demonstrates severe
  - (a) anxiety,
  - (b) depression,
  - (c) withdrawal, or
  - (d) self-destructive or aggressive behaviour.

### 3. WHAT SHOULD BE REPORTED?

The person making the report does not need to have all of the following information before making a report, especially if the child is in immediate danger. Provide the information that you can and provide follow-up information as required.

When reporting suspected child abuse or neglect, the child welfare worker may ask about:

- The child's name, age, address, and phone number
- Any immediate concerns for the student's safety
- Why you believe the child needs protection
- Any statements or disclosures the student has made
- The alleged offender's name, address, and relationship to the child, if known. - Any other children, such as siblings, who may be involved or at risk
- Any previous incidents or concerns for the child
- Any other relevant information such as the student's language, culture, disability or special needs

Any school personnel who suspect or have information that a child is being abused or at risk of being abused, must promptly contact the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) (See Appendix) AND the Appointed School Official. If the Appointed School Official is the alleged abuser, then school personnel, after reporting to the previously mentioned agencies, will report to the Director of Education who will immediately inform the chairperson of the Board of Trustees.