



*Trinity Bellwoods Community
Children's Group/C.A.R.E.*

155 Crawford Street, Toronto, Ontario M6J 2V6 ☎ 416-537-9021

CHILD ABUSE / MALTREATMENT POLICY



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Trinity Bellwoods Community Children's Group/CARE is committed to the prevention of child maltreatment.

Every person in Ontario is required under the Child & Family Services Act to report his/her belief that a child may be in need of protection.

Legislation places additional responsibilities on individuals who perform professional or official duties with respect to children, to report suspicions of child abuse/maltreatment.

Included and defined specifically are the "operator or employee of a day nursery" (C.F.S.A. 72 (4)(b)). This definition include ALL child care centre employees.

It is an offense under the Child and Family Services Act to contravene subsection 72(3), reporting child abuse; *"A person referred to in subsection (4) who, is in the course of his or her professional or official duties, has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be suffering or may have suffered abuse shall forthwith report the suspicion and the information on which is it based to Children's Aid Society."*

All persons making a report of suspected child abuse to a Children's Aid Society are protected against civil action, unless that person is proven to have "... acted maliciously or without reasonable ground for the belief or suspicion.." (C.F.S.A. 72 (7)) The only exception to this is solicitor/client privilege.

What is abuse?

"Child abuse" includes physical, emotional and sexual abuse and/or neglect. It also addresses a pattern of abuse and risks of harm.

We don't know all the causes of child abuse and neglect. We do know that parenting is a big responsibility that at times, when combined with other life stresses, can become too much.

Children exhibit signs of abuse and neglect in a many different ways. Often they exhibit a number of behavioural and physical indicators.

Children may exhibit some of the indicators listed below, but this is not necessarily conclusive evidence of abuse.

Some definitions include:

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is any harm to a child caused by the action (or lack of action) of the child's caregiver. Injuries that may occur include: bruising, welts, cuts, fractures, burns or internal injuries. Physical abuse can occur as an isolated incident or continue over a period of time.

Signs of physical abuse include:

- Presence of various injuries over a period of time
- Facial injuries in infants and preschool children
- Injuries inconsistent with the child's age
- Presence of several injuries that are in various stages of healing
- Child cannot recall how injuries occurred
- Offers an inconsistent explanation
- Wary of adults
- May flinch if touched unexpectedly
- Extremely aggressive
- Extremely withdrawn
- Indiscriminately seeks affection

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse includes all acts that result in the lack of a nurturing environment for a child. It occurs when the caregiver treats the child in such a negative way that the child's concept of "self" is seriously impaired. Emotional abuse can be the most difficult to identify and prove.

Emotionally abusive behaviour by the caregiver can include:

constant yelling

demeaning remarks

rejecting, ignoring or isolating the child

terrorizing the child

Signs of emotional abuse can include:

- Severe depression
- Extreme withdrawal
- Extreme aggression
- Extreme attention seeking
- Extreme inhibition
- Bed wetting that is non-medical in origin
- Frequent psychosomatic complaints (headaches, nausea, abdominal pains)
- Failure to thrive

Neglect

Neglect usually results from the lack of knowledge about appropriate care for children or an inability to plan appropriately for the child's needs.

Neglect includes a caregiver failing to provide:
adequate food and shelter
safety
medical or psychological treatment
supervision
adequate sleep
clothing

Signs of neglect include:

- Poor hygiene
- Unattended physical problems or medical needs
- Consistent lack of supervision
- Frequent absence from school
- Engaged in delinquent acts or alcohol/drug abuse
- Frequently arriving at school without a lunch
- Inappropriate clothing for the weather
- Consistently dirty clothes

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is any sexual exploitation of a child by an older person. The Criminal Code of

Canada identifies a number of types of sexual abuse, including:

Invitation to sexual touching

Sexual exploitation

Procuring sexual activity from a child

Caregiver permitting sexual activity

Exposing genitals to a child

Incest

Exposing to or engaging in pornography

Signs of sexual abuse include:

- Age-inappropriate play with toys, self or others
- Unusual or excessive itching in the genital or anal area
- Injuries to the genital or anal areas, e.g. bruising, swelling or infection
- Displaying explicit sexual acts
- Torn, stained or bloody underwear
- Age-inappropriate sexually explicit drawing or descriptions
- Bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual knowledge
- Prostitution
- Seductive behaviour

IF YOU HAVE IMMEDIATE CONCERNS ABOUT A CHILD CALL CHILDREN'S AID IMMEDIATELY.

If you see or have reason to believe a child is in need of protection or is at risk of harm, make the call to your local Children's Aid Society. There is someone available to receive your call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Children's Aid Society of Toronto	416-924-4640
Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto	416-395-1500
Jewish Family and Child	416-638-7800
Native Child and Family Services of Toronto	416-969-8510

It can be hard deciding to place a call to report concerns for a child or youth. We understand the emotions and worries that can come up before calling Children's Aid. Ultimately, the biggest consideration is and should be for the safety and well-being of the child and/or family. If you suspect child abuse or neglect, please call your local Children's Aid Society.

THE PERSON WHO SUSPECTS CHILD ABUSE

- Anyone who suspects child abuse must immediately report the suspicions to a child protection agency. The person who suspects the abuse must call him/herself – **no one else can help you decide if a report should be made or make the report for you.**
- In Ontario, the report can be made to a: Catholic Children's Aid Society, Jewish Family and Child Service, Children's Aid Society, or Native Child and Family Services
- Information on how to reach the nearest child protection agency can be found: in the emergency numbers page at the front of the white-page telephone book; in the important numbers page at the front of the yellow page telephone book; through the yellow pages website <http://www.yellowpages.ca>; through the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies website <http://www.oacas.org/childwelfare/locate.htm>; by calling 411; or by calling the local police department.
- If you have doubts or concerns about making a report of suspected abuse, consult with a worker from a child protection agency. Do not discuss your suspicions with anyone else until you have consulted with a child protection worker. Although anonymous calls can be made, it is more difficult for authorities to follow-up on the case, gather information and protect the child. It is in the best interest of the child that the reporter leaves his/her identifying information.

- You can call a child protection agency any time of the day or night, every day, 7 days a week. After regular business hours, you will probably have to leave a message with your phone number. An after-hours protection worker should call you back soon after. If you feel a child is in immediate danger, do not wait to be called back. Phone the police.
- Leaving a message with a child protection agency is not enough – you must talk to an intake secretary or worker to make a report.
- If this is your first time calling a child protection agency, tell the worker that you are unfamiliar with the process.
- Make sure you write down the name of the person you spoke to at the child protection agency and anything s/he told you to do.

STEPS IN REPORTING SUSPICIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

1. If you work with an agency or program, inform your immediate supervisor of your intention to call a child protection agency. **Do not discuss your suspicions with anyone, including your supervisor,** until you have consulted with a child protection worker. The supervisor should provide support. However, even if s/he does not want you to make the call, you must follow through on your legal responsibility and call a child protection agency.
2. Document the indicators of abuse. If you have more information after the first call was made, you must phone the child protection agency again.
3. Do not tell a parent or caregiver about your suspicions or the report until you have asked a child protection worker if it would be OK to tell. Telling could ruin the investigation or put the child in danger.

REMEMBER

- You can report anonymously.
- *It is not your responsibility to determine whether abuse or neglect has occurred. Children's Aid is responsible for investigating and assessing the need for protection or involvement.*
- Filing a report to Children's Aid does not prove abuse or neglect, but allows authorities to take the appropriate actions to determine the risk of each situation.

- Each report will be investigated and the situation will be evaluated to ensure the child and family receives the support necessary to keep the child safe.

AN AGENCY/PROGRAM

1. If a supervisor of an agency/program receives a call from someone who suspects child abuse, the supervisor is expected to provide support, including allowing the person time to document the incident and privacy to make the call.
2. Parents, caregivers and agency/program staff should know ahead of time how people in the agency/program will proceed if there is a suspicion of child abuse.
4. If you are not sure if you should be reporting suspicions of child abuse, call a child protection agency to discuss your concerns with a worker and ask for guidance.
5. Respect the confidentiality of everyone involved in a suspicion of child abuse. A child protection agency must also respect confidentiality and details of the case cannot be shared.

What happens when you call?

1. An intake worker records the information you give in your report and passes it to a child protection worker.
2. A child protection worker will see if there is any record of the child, the family or the alleged abuser in the child protection system.
3. The child protection agency will decide whether or not the child is in immediate danger.
4. The child protection agency will decide whether or not to begin an investigation.
5. In some cases, a child protection worker will contact the police to share information and a decision will be made whether or not police should investigate.
6. If necessary, a child protection worker will arrange for the child to get medical attention.

When you call, you will speak to a child welfare specialist who is specially trained to listen to your concerns and ask questions before deciding how urgent the situation is and what type of intervention is needed. If a child is in imminent danger, a child protection worker will respond immediately.

Children's Aid workers are professionals who evaluate your information using comprehensive guidelines to determine the risk in each situation. Child protection workers, using clear standards and guidelines, determine the kind of support and service needed to keep children safe in situations involving child maltreatment. A typical response to a child protection concern will include checking a computer database to see if the family or child has been involved with Children's Aid in the past. Many factors are considered when determining how to investigate your concerns, including the age of the child, presence of physical injuries and other red flags that may indicate risk of harm.

Every report received by Children's Aid is reviewed by a child protection worker who then consults with a supervisor to determine the appropriate response time. Individual circumstances and level of risk for the children involved determine the response times.

HOW TO DOCUMENT INDICATORS OF CHILD ABUSE

When documenting any indicators of child abuse or family violence remember to:

1. record the information as soon as possible, including dates and times
2. document the facts without personal judgments, opinions, conclusions, or
3. medical/emotional diagnosis
4. give a clear description of the situation, what was actually seen or heard, and not what you think might be happening
5. include what you did or said and why
6. describe any gestures made by a child (e.g., hitting motions, sound effects);
7. record the words used by a child/parent, even if they are “slang”(especially terms for body parts or sexual behavior)
8. include anything that someone else has said that might be important
9. describe the size, color and shape of any injury (for example, bruises, marks, burns)
10. hand write your own documentation in your own words, using pen
11. cross out and initial any mistakes and continue documenting – do not use white-out
12. document suspicions of abuse in a separate record
13. include the name and phone number of the individual you spoke with at a child protection agency and/or police service, and any advice/direction given
14. make sure the entry is complete, then sign and date it
15. start a new entry if, at a later date, there is new information or further suspicions of abuse

Your first recording of the facts is your documentation:

- do not make a rough copy and then write it over in good;
- do not go back and change any of your original notes; and
- do not shred documentation.

Adapted from: Rimer & Prager, *Reaching Out: Working Together to Identify and Respond to Child Victims of Abuse*, 1998)

DO'S & DON'TS WHEN THERE IS A DISCLOSURE

If you suspect that a child may have been abused or is at risk for abuse, it is not up to you to try to prove your suspicions. Trying to do this may contaminate or ruin the investigation and may put the child at further risk. If you suspect a child is being or has been abused or if a child/adult discloses abuse, you must report this information to a child protection agency. The investigation will be done by people who are experts.

If you have seen or heard something that makes you suspect child abuse, remember to:

Control Your Emotions

- Try to be calm and relaxed

- Do not look shocked, disgusted or say mean things about who you think may have abused the child.
- If you feel that you cannot control your feelings, call your supervisor or a trusted friend to talk.

Offer Comfort

Support children by letting them know that:

- they were very brave to tell
- you are glad they are telling you about this
- you are sorry that this has happened to them
- they are not alone – this happens to other children too
- you will do everything you can to help
- you are there to love and support them
- you want them to tell you the truth – it won't make you mad, shocked or embarrassed

Do not say things like:

- "How can you say those things about ...?"
- "Liar."
- "You must be mistaken."
- "How could you let him/her do those things to you?"
- "Why didn't you tell me this before?"

Children may "take back" what they have said (this is called recanting). These children continue to need your love and support

Be Aware Of The Child's Age & Skills

- 1.** Accept the words a child uses (including "slang" words) to describe what happened. Some children do not know the right words for body parts or sexual behaviours. Do not correct or change the words the child uses – it is extremely important for the investigation that the child's words are used when telling what happened.
- 2.** Do not use words that may frighten the child, for example rape, incest, child abuse, wife assault or jail.

Ask Questions That Let The Person Tell What Happened In His/Her Own Words

- "Can you tell me more about that?"
- "What happened next?"
- "How did you get that bruise?"

Do not:

- ask questions that suggest what happened or who did it, for example "Did you get that bruise because Mommy hit you with a brush?"
- question what the child tells you, for example, by asking "Are you sure it was Uncle Ted?"
- interrupt or add your own words when the child/adult stops talking.

- ask children “why” something may have happened – many children may think you are blaming them for what happened.
- try to change the mind of a child who has recanted or changed his/her story
- keep on asking questions because you want to try to prove or disprove abuse

Respect The Person Who Discloses

- If a child/adult is telling, listen.
- If a child/adult is quiet, do not try to make him/her talk.
- Do not force a child to undress if you suspect s/he may have injuries.
- Do not show off a child's injuries to others.

Tell The Child What Will Happen Next

1. Do not make promises you cannot keep, for example, do not agree to keep what the child said a “secret.” It is important to explain to the child that some secrets must be shared in order to get help, or to keep people from being hurt. Tell the child the information will be shared only with people “whose job it is to help kids.”
2. Answer the child's questions as simply and honestly as possible. Do not make up answers. For example, if a child asks, “Will Daddy have to go to jail now?” you can only say, “I don't know. Other people decide that.”
3. Do not tell the child to keep any of your discussions with him/her secret.

(Adapted from Rimer & Prager, *Reaching Out: Working Together to Identify and Respond to Child Victims of Abuse*, 1998)

If and When The Child Returns To The Centre:

- a) Talk to the child, let him/her know that you are there to help
- b) Keep routines consistent
- c) Continue to monitor the child and document and additional concerns
- d) Teach social skills that encourage age appropriate interactions with others
- e) Encourage the child to have fun
- f) Involve the child in activities that raise self-esteem

ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE AGAINST EMPLOYEES

Suspicious that a co-worker may be abusing a child (ren) in care is a distressing thought. However, as with any suspicion of child abuse, an allegation of abuse against an employee must

be taken seriously and responded to in line with Trinity Bellwoods Community Children's Group/CARE's disciplinary procedure and/or procedure for respond to concerns about child abuse which may lead to dismissal.

Good Practices:

Training will be provided annually to staff, however it is up to the individual employee to read and sign off on this policy and review it annually.

- Treat all children and young people equally, with respect, dignity and fairness.
- Give constructive feedback rather than negative criticism.
- Involve parents wherever possible and reasonable.
- Be vigilant and aware of how actions can be misinterpreted and always work in an open environment.
- Avoid private or unobserved situations with a child or young person unless personal assistance such as toileting or changing is required.
- Ensure the number of adults is appropriate to safely supervise an activity.
- Have two staff members present when in situations with children and young people where it is necessary for staff to change or undress (i.e., swimming) so this activity is not misconstrued.
- Get help from your colleagues when you are having difficulty dealing with a specific child and/or behavioural incident(s). Having another staff step in for you can often defuse the situation.

Practice to be Avoided

In the context of your role, the following practice should be avoided:

1. Spending excessive (i.e., unwarranted) amounts of time alone with children and young people away from others.
2. **Relating to children and young people from programs in non-program activities, such as baby-sitting or weekend visits.**
3. Having "favourites" - this could lead to resentment and jealousy by other children and young people and could be misinterpreted by others.
4. Where possible, doing things of a personal nature for children and young people that they can do for themselves.

Procedures for All Staff and Volunteers (excluding policy, fundraising and board members): For all positions that require regular contact with children and young people the following procedures will apply:

1. All forms of advertising used to recruit and select staff/volunteers to positions involving regular contact with children and young people will include a statement that a Criminal Reference Check – Vulnerable Sector Screening is a requirement for the position. Applicants will be requested to complete an application. The purpose of this is to obtain from the applicant relevant details for the position including any previous youth work involvement.
2. Prior to appointment a Criminal Reference Check – Vulnerable Sector Screening Records Check will be requested for all adult volunteers/staff who will have regular contact with children and young people.

3. Formal interviews, either in person or by telephone, will be required for all positions of trust with questions designed to determine suitability for working with children and young people or vulnerable adults.
4. Potential employees and volunteers will be offered positions conditional upon the production of a satisfactory Criminal Reference Check – Vulnerable Sector Screening and acceptance of the employment obligations e.g., agreement to the child protection policies and procedures of the Trinity Bellwoods Community Children’s Group/CARE
5. New staff and volunteers hired, will be made aware of policies on protecting children and young people, on staff conduct and, all legal requirements in reporting suspected abuse. This orientation will be completed within the first week of starting their position. At this time, all members of staff and volunteers are provided with opportunities to learn about how to recognize and respond to concerns about child abuse.
6. Until the orientation is complete and a satisfactory Criminal Reference Check – Vulnerable Sector Screening is received, the new staff/volunteer will not have unsupervised access to children, young people or vulnerable adults.

Procedure for Handling an Allegation Against An Employee Or Volunteer

It can be very distressing when a staff member is accused of abusing a child.

A Trinity Bellwoods Community Children’s Group/CARE staff member who receives a disclosure of abuse against another staff member or suspects a colleague of abuse has a legal obligation to report to the local Children’s Aid.

Staff must follow the procedures outlined below if a report is made against a colleague.

In many cases, handling a guidance situation in an inappropriate manner can cause an allegation of abuse. Staff should be familiar with and adhere to the Trinity Bellwoods Community Children’s Group/CARE Child Guidance Policies. In general, an allegation against a staff member is usually made by a parent, a child or a colleague. In all cases, there is a legal obligation to report.

In the event that a parent makes an allegation against another staff member:

1. The obligation to report also lies with the parent. The parent needs to be informed of their duty to report and be encouraged to make the report to the local Children’s Aid.
2. The staff member who has been informed of the situation or observed the situation, has the legal duty to report as well even if the parent(s) reports it. The staff member must

follow the standard Children's Aid reporting procedures to report the allegations against another staff member.

3. If an allegation is made against a staff member and there will be an investigation, the staff member will be suspended with/without pay during the course of the investigation.

Reporting Procedures for Staff

Staff must follow these procedures when an allegation or disclosure is made against another staff member or when the abuse by a staff member is witnessed:

1. Treat the allegations seriously and confidential.
2. Report immediately to management (includes direct supervisor) any allegations of abuse against a staff member.
3. Supervisor or Assistant Supervisor will notify Board of Directors of the allegation and report this to the Ministry of Education as a Serious Occurrence.
4. Staff are to keep information confidential and not to discuss the allegation with other staff, volunteers, parents, participants or the media. Any questions regarding the incident should be referred to the Board of Directors.
5. The accuser should document all relevant information.
6. If there are issues or doubts regarding the situation, the supervisor and or accuser may contact Children's Aid to discuss the matter further. It is the responsibility of the person who suspects child abuse to follow through on the report to Children's Aid Society with the support and direction of the supervisor or board member.
7. If the supervisor/board member does not support the reporting of suspicions of child abuse against a staff, the accuser is obligated to report his/her suspicions to a Children's Aid Society, even if this is contrary to the wishes of others. There will be no sanctions or reprimands for such action.
8. The supervisor/board member will not inform the suspected person of the accusation until a Children's Aid worker has been consulted or has directed to do so.
9. Discussing any information with others related to the situation of suspected child abuse outside of the designated individuals involved is a breach of confidentiality. The supervisor / board members in conjunction with Children's Aid Society will give direction regarding the appropriate sharing of information with staff, parents, students, volunteers.

Procedures for Board of Directors

Board of Directors will follow these procedures:

1. Board of Directors will ensure that the appropriate reporting procedures have been followed.

2. Must take immediate steps to ensure that children are safe. This includes taking the necessary steps to ensure that the suspected staff member is not left alone with children and is suspended with/without pay pending the investigation.
3. Any questions and enquiries are to be referred to the CEO or to the General Manager.

Investigation Outcome

The Trinity Bellwoods Community Children's Group/CARE will respond to the outcome of the child abuse investigation in the manner outlined in the current Staffing Policy Manual

The staff member may/may not return to work?