

AP 330 – Reporting of Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect

Purpose

The *Child, Family and Community Service Act* requires anyone who has reason to believe that a child or youth has been or is likely to be at risk of abuse or neglect has a legal duty to make a report to a child welfare worker or directly to the police if a child or youth 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.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) has the lead responsibility for responding to suspected child abuse and neglect. It also delegates authority for child protection and family support to Aboriginal Child and Family Services Agencies, which provide culturally appropriate services to their communities. Police also play a role in responding to suspected child abuse and neglect if it is believed that a child is in immediate danger, or if a criminal offence against a child is suspected.

The District recognizes the need to protect the personal and physical well-being of students. The role of staff is to be aware of, and alert to, signs and symptoms of possible child abuse or neglect – and to respond appropriately if there are concerns about a child's safety or well-being. This is important to ensuring a collaborative response to suspected child abuse and neglect.

DUTY TO REPORT

Under the Child, Family, and Community Services Act, the legal duty to report is the responsibility of every individual. Any person who has reason to believe that a child or youth under the age of 19 needs protection, has a duty to report directly to a Child Protection Social Worker at the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

“Reason to believe” means that, based on what you have seen, or information you have, you believe a child or youth could be at risk of abuse or neglect. If you are unsure about whether a report should be made or have questions around reporting a case, contact a Child Protection Social Worker to seek further advice. Informing any other agency or person (e.g. administration), does not discharge your legal duty to report directly to a Child Protection Social Worker. The legal duty to report overrides any duty to protect privacy, with the exception of solicitor-client relationship or where provisions of the Youth Criminal Justice Act apply.

When Protection Is Needed

Any child or youth under the age of 19 is in need of protection when child abuse and/or neglect are suspected. Child abuse and neglect means physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, negligent treatment or maltreatment as a result of an act or omission by a person who is responsible for the child's care (e.g. parent, supervisor, or legal guardian).

Child abuse includes the following areas:

- Physical Abuse – a deliberate act of physical force or action that results in or is likely to result in physical harm to a child or youth that exceeds what could be considered reasonable discipline or restraint.
- Sexual Abuse and Exploitation – when a child is used or likely to be used for the sexual gratification of another person. It may include any behaviour of a sexual nature towards a child.
- Emotional Abuse or harm – may occur separately from or along with other forms of abuse and neglect and involves acts or omissions that are likely to have serious, negative emotional impacts.
- Neglect – the failure to provide for the child’s basic needs (e.g. physical, emotional, medical) that results in or is likely to result in harm the child.

Procedures for Reporting Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect

(Also refer to the document *Guidelines for Reporting Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect*)

Completing a Report

1. Staff must make a report when there is any reason to believe that a child has been or is likely to be abused or neglected, and that the parent is unwilling or unable to protect the child.
 1. If a child or youth is in immediate danger, call 911 for local police assistance.
 2. If you have reason to believe a child or youth is in need of protection, you must promptly report the incident to MCFD at 1- 800-663-9122 (any time of the day or night, 24 hours/7 days per week).
 3. Inform the Principal that a report has been filed.
 4. Obtain the document *Guidelines for Reporting Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect* from the Principal or staff portal and complete a copy of the Confidential Report of Suspected Abuse and Neglect (Form 330-1).
 5. Return a copy to the Principal for safekeeping. A second copy is to be placed in a signed, sealed, and dated envelope marked Confidential with the student’s first and last name, school and marked “to the attention of the Executive Assistant of the Superintendent”. This envelope must be hand delivered to the office of the Superintendent at the Board Office.
2. If the person suspected of abuse is a District employee or volunteer, inform the Superintendent directly. The Superintendent will work with the appropriate authorities.
3. Reminders
 1. No communication is to be made with the person suspected of abuse. This is the responsibility of the MCFD child welfare worker and/or police.
 2. Schools must provide a private space where an MCFD child welfare worker can interview children if they arrive to the school to investigate.
 3. It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Children and Family Development and the police to investigate and to inform the parents and victims of their concerns. Schools are to direct any inquiries back to these agencies. Schools are not to discuss or release information to any other individuals.

In reporting incidents of suspected child abuse or neglect, staff will be guided by the provisions of the Child, Family and Community Services Act procedures described in *The British Columbia Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect - For Service Providers*.

Training and Review

Each year new teaching staff will be informed of the administrative procedures regarding reporting suspected child abuse and neglect at the new teacher orientation. In addition, principals will review this document with all staff (e.g. teachers, EA's, TA's, custodians etc.) at the beginning of each school year with the assistance of the school counselors if requested. This must be completed before September 30 each year. Volunteers and other itinerant staff (e.g. teachers on call) in the schools will receive a copy of the administrative procedure for their reference.

References

The B.C. Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect –For Service Providers (June 2017)

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/public-safety/protecting-children/childabusepreventionhandbook_serviceprovider.pdf

Responding to Child Welfare Concerns – Your Role in Knowing When and What to Report (March 2017)

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/public-safety/protecting-children/childabusepreventionhandbook_generalpublicbooklet.pdf