



Child Abuse/ Children Exposed to Family Violence Information Sheet

Get Help

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 911 or the Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-387-KIDS (5437).

For help in your community or for more information, please call the 24-hour Family Violence Info Line toll-free at 310-1818 or visit www.familyviolence.alberta.ca.

Violence and Exposure to family violence harms children now and in their future

All across Canada, children are being abused or neglected. They may live in angry and violent homes or in environments where there is substance abuse.

How abuse, neglect and exposure to violence affect children

- Children may become fearful and anxious, believing that the world is a dangerous place
- They may become aggressive, lashing out and bullying others
- They may become passive and withdrawn, thinking they cannot change any part of their lives
- They may have trouble learning, because so much of their brain is busy dealing with the stress of living in an abusive environment
- They may be at greater risk of growing up to be abusive to others, to be abused or both
- Abuse and exposure to family violence affects childrens' brain development.¹ That in turn affects their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual development. It also affects their ability to connect with other people and make friends

If children continue to be exposed to family violence and abuse, the trauma will continue to affect their brains and development.

Types of abuse

NEGLECT INCLUDES:

- Not providing adequate food, clothing, shelter, health care or protection from harm
- Not meeting a child's needs for affection and a sense of belonging

EMOTIONAL INJURY CAN BE:

- Exposure to family violence or severe conflict
- Chronic alcohol or drug abuse by the guardian or anyone living in the home
- Rejection
- Inappropriate criticism, threats, humiliation, accusations or unrealistic expectations of a child

PHYSICAL ABUSE happens when someone uses force against a child on purpose and it results in physical injury.



SEXUAL ABUSE is introducing a child to any sexual contact, activity or behaviour.

- Sexual abuse includes any sexual touching, sexual intercourse, taking advantage of a child sexually or exposing a child to sex
- Sexual abuse can be by a parent, relative, friend or stranger. In most child sexual abuse cases, the sexual abuse is by someone a child knows

Clues that a child or young person may be in an abusive environment

Not all abused or neglected children have the following characteristics. Not all children who show these characteristics live in abusive or violent homes. However, if you observe the following, be aware that the child or young person may be living in an abusive environment where they are getting hurt or are being exposed to family violence:

- A child who is often hungry, dirty or not dressed for the weather
- A young child often left alone
- A child or young person who seems to take on adult responsibilities, like often taking care of younger brothers and sisters, doing household tasks or trying to “look after” a parent
- A child who does not have energy or is very passive
- A child who refuses to participate in or dress appropriately for physical activities
- A child who is often aggressive, angry and hostile to other people
- Unexplained bruises or injuries, especially in places where children do not usually get hurt when they play or move around
- Bruises or injuries where the explanation does not match the nature of the injuries
- Bruises and/or burns that leave a pattern outlining an object may have been used to make the burn, for example, a cigarette, iron or electric stove burner
- A child who knows more about sex than is normal for their age
- A child who behaves sexually around adults or other children
- A child who hints or talks outright about sexual abuse
- A child or youth who runs away from home over and over again
- A child or youth who uses alcohol or drugs

If you suspect child abuse, neglect or exposure to family violence - report it

If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected by a parent or guardian, report your suspicions immediately. Call the police, your local Child and Family Services Authority or the 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline: **1-800-387-KIDS (5437)**.

Do not notify the child's parent or guardian.

If you suspect someone other than a parent or guardian is abusing a child, report your suspicions immediately to the police. Look in the emergency pages of your local telephone directory to find the telephone number of police in your area.

¹ Perry, B., (2005). The destructive impact of domestic violence on children. In Alberta Children and Youth Services, *Family violence it's your business: Community resource guide* (pp. 9-10). Edmonton, AB: Queen's Printer. Retrieved from http://www.child.alberta.ca/home/images/familyviolence/FVP_CommunityResourceGuide_20080528.pdf