

Child Abuse Prevention Month

What is child abuse?

Neglect is any lack of care that causes serious harm to a child's development or endangers a child in any way. Failure to meet the child's day-to-day physical needs includes not providing adequate nutrition, clothing, shelter and health care; appropriate supervision; and protection from harm. Emotional neglect is not meeting the child's ongoing emotional needs for affection and a sense of belonging.

Emotional abuse is verbal attacks on a child's sense of self, repeated humiliation or rejection. Exposure to violence, drugs, alcohol abuse or severe conflict in the home, forced isolation, restraint or causing a child to be afraid much of the time may also cause emotional harm.

Physical abuse is the intentional use of force on any part of a child's body that results in injuries. It may be a single incident or a series or pattern of incidents.

Sexual abuse is the exposure of a child to sexual contact, activity or behaviour. It includes any sexual touching, intercourse or exploitation and can be perpetrated by anyone, including a parent or guardian, caregiver, extended family, friend, neighbour or stranger.

What contributes to child abuse?

Stress, inadequate parenting skills, lack of positive parent-child involvement, criminal or mental health issues, many children in care and poverty are all factors that can lead to child abuse. Family violence, lack of social supports, history of child abuse, and alcohol and drug abuse can also be contributors to abuse.

What are some signs that a child may be neglected or abused?

- A child who is continually hungry, dirty or unsuitably dressed for the weather.
- A young child who is often left alone or is inadequately supervised.
- A child who is extremely withdrawn or is usually aggressive to other people.
- Unexplained bruises or injuries.
- A child who shows knowledge of sexual matters beyond their age of development or who exhibits sexualized behaviour around adults or other children.
- A child who does not want to be at home or runs away from home.

What do you do if a child discloses abuse?

- Listen.
- Allow the child to relay what happened in his or her own words. Do not ask leading questions.
- Remain calm and neutral.
- Do not over-react, show horror or anger, or any other reaction that would lead the child to believe the abuse or neglect was his/her fault.
- Support and acknowledge the child's feelings.
- Reassure the child and tell the child you believe what you have heard.
- Comfort the child by saying that it was a good thing for him/her to tell you.
- Assure the child that you will do something to help.
- Do not attempt to intervene on your own.
- **Contact your local Child and Family Services Office or Delegated First Nations Agency, or call the Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-387-KIDS (5437) or police/RCMP.**

What information will you need to provide?

All reports are confidential and you can remain anonymous; however, you may choose to provide your name and telephone number. In addition, you will need to provide information about:

- How long you have known the child/family.
- What your relationship is to the child/family.
- What your concern is about the child(ren).
- What you have seen/heard.
- What the child or others have told you.
- Where the child is now.
- What you have done to support the child/family.
- What supports (formal or informal) are involved with the family.

What happens once a report is made?

The information provided by the caller will be assessed to determine if the child or family is truly in need of assistance and what supports might be needed to address their immediate needs. The family may be referred to community supports, receive services and supports in their home or the child may need to be placed out of the home while supports are being provided.

Human Services may also become involved in **emergency situations**, including when the parents, youth or child are intoxicated, high, suicidal, or if a child has been abandoned.