



Ministry of
Children and Family
Development

The B.C. Handbook for

Responding to Child Welfare Concerns

For Service Providers

Working Together to Keep Children and Youth Safe

The Ministry of Children and Family Development acknowledges the territories of First Nations across B.C. and is grateful to carry out our work on these lands.

We acknowledge the rights, interests, priorities and concerns of all Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit), respecting and acknowledging their distinct cultures, histories, rights, laws and governments.



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About this Handbook

Our Shared Responsibility for Child and Youth Safety

All of us, families, communities, and service providers share the responsibility for ensuring the safety and well-being of children and youth in British Columbia. Partnerships create safe, supportive environments for children and families.

If you are concerned about the safety or well-being of a child or youth, call Provincial Centralized Screening (PCS) toll-free at 1-800-663-9122. PCS is available 24 hours a day.

In 2020, the federal government passed historic legislation, *An Act Respecting First Nation, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families* (federal Act) which affirmed the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples to exercise jurisdiction over child and family services and set national standards for child and family service delivery.

This legislation along with 2022 amendments to the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* (CFCSA) respects the inherent right of Indigenous communities to provide their own services to children, youth and families under Indigenous child and family service laws.



Child and family services in B.C. now operate within a multi-jurisdictional system. To learn more about Indigenous jurisdiction and self-determination over child and family services, please visit [this website](#).

Purpose

As a service provider, you play a key role in keeping children and youth safe. This Handbook is designed to support you in that role. It will provide an integrated and collaborative response to child abuse and neglect by:

- Providing clear information on how to identify and report suspected child abuse and neglect under the CFCSA.
- Offering an overview of relevant legislation and policies that guide B.C. provincial government child welfare practices.
- Clarifying the roles and shared responsibilities of service providers, including their accountability in responding to suspected child abuse and neglect.

This handbook is organized into the following four sections:

1. **Working Together** explains the roles and responsibilities of various groups and individuals, including service providers. Service providers include a wide range of employees, contractors, and volunteers serving children and families.
2. **Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect** defines what constitutes child abuse and neglect under the CFCSA and offers guidance on responding to disclosures.
3. **Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect** sets out the steps to follow in responding to suspected child abuse and neglect. It includes guidance on talking to the child or youth and reporting your concern. This section also explains what happens after you make a report, including the processes followed by child welfare workers and police.
4. The **For More Information** section provides contact information and links to additional resources.

Thank you for taking the time to read this Handbook and for doing your part to help protect and support children and youth in British Columbia. Your commitment makes a meaningful difference.



Glossary

Several of the terms used in this Handbook have specific meaning in the context of the British Columbia child welfare system. These are defined below to help ensure clarity and support a collaborative response to suspected child abuse and neglect.

An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families (federal Act): is federal child welfare legislation that affirms the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples to exercise jurisdiction over child and family services and sets national standards for child and family service delivery.

The [federal Act](#) is available online.

Caregiver: a person who is legally responsible for a child's day-to-day care, for example, a foster caregiver or a kinship care provider.

Child: in British Columbia, under the CFCSA, a child is anyone under the age of 19.

Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA): is one of the legislative authorities for child welfare in British Columbia. Its fundamental guiding principle is that the safety and well-being of children (including youth ages 16 to 19 years of age) are the paramount considerations.

The [CFCSA](#) is available online.

Child welfare worker: a person who provides child welfare services under the CFCSA, including responses to suspected child abuse and neglect.

Criminal Code of Canada (Criminal Code): legislation that plays an essential role in ensuring the safety and well-being of children and youth is the Criminal Code. The Criminal Code provides the justice system with the legal authority to enforce criminal law as it applies to the abuse and neglect of children and youth. It establishes criminal offences, procedures for investigation and prosecution, and sanctions for offenders.

The [Criminal Code](#) is available online.

Director: a person designated by the Minister of Children and Family Development under the Child, Family and Community Service Act. The director may delegate any or all his/her powers, duties and responsibilities under the Act. The director may delegate any or all his/her powers, duties and responsibilities under the Act.

Indigenous: includes the First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

Indigenous authority: a body or entity that is authorized by an Indigenous governing body to provide Indigenous child and family services under Indigenous law.

Indigenous governing body: an entity that is authorized to act on behalf of Indigenous peoples that hold rights recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

Parent: the mother of a child; the father of a child; a person to whom guardianship or custody of the child has been granted by a court order or agreement; or a person with whom the child resides and who stands in place of the child's mother or father.

Service provider: any of a wide range of employees, contractors and volunteers who provide services for children, youth, and families.

Youth: in British Columbia, under the CFCSA, youth is anyone who is 16 years of age or over but is under 19 years of age.

Note: child abuse and neglect are defined in detail in the **Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect Section** of this handbook.

Working Together

Roles and Responsibilities Under the CFCSA

The primary responsibility for child and youth safety and well-being rests with parents. However, when a parent is unwilling or unable to fulfill this responsibility, whether due to neglect, abuse, or other serious concerns, child welfare workers are legally mandated under the CFCSA to respond.

In British Columbia, one of the laws that governs child protection is the CFCSA. Under this legislation, child welfare workers are delegated on behalf of the Provincial Director of Child Welfare and Indigenous Child Welfare Director to receive and assess child protection concerns in the province of B.C.



Protecting children is a shared responsibility that strengthens families and communities. Communities play a vital role in identifying and responding to suspected cases of abuse and neglect. Timely reporting is essential for staff at the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and Indigenous Child and Family Service Agencies (ICFSAs) to assess and address concerns effectively.

Ministry of Children and Family Development

Under the CFCSA, MCFD is responsible for responding to reports of suspected child abuse and neglect. Delegated child welfare workers assess reports, provide support services, and investigate child protection concerns when necessary.

MCFD collaborates with Indigenous communities, Indigenous authorities, police, schools, health professionals, and other service providers to ensure the safety and well-being of children, youth, and families.

Indigenous and Child and Family Service Agencies

The CFCSA recognizes the importance of preserving the cultural identity of Indigenous children and youth, emphasizing the need to maintain kinship ties and connections to extended family and community. It also affirms that Indigenous peoples should be actively involved in the planning and delivery of services for Indigenous children, youth, and families.

There are currently 24 ICFSAs that provide child and family services, as delegates of the Director, to 117 of the 204 First Nations in B.C. While ICFSAs deliver services under the CFCSA, they do so in ways that reflect and respond to the unique needs of the Indigenous communities they serve.

Indigenous Communities

The CFCSA requires child welfare workers to work with Indigenous communities when they respond to the safety concerns involving Indigenous children and youth.



Your responsibility is to remain alert to signs of abuse or neglect.

Police

Police officers and child welfare workers have complementary roles in responding to reports of suspected child abuse or neglect. Police have authority under the Criminal Code and the CFCSA to respond:

- When a child or youth is in immediate danger; and
- When a criminal offence against a child or youth is suspected.

Service Providers

As someone who works with children or youth, whether as an employee, contractor, or volunteer, you have unique opportunities to observe their behavior and notice changes over time. For the purposes of this handbook, “service providers” refers to anyone in such roles working with children, youth, and families.

Your responsibility is to remain alert to signs of abuse or neglect. If you have reason to believe a child or youth has been, or is at risk of being abused or neglected, you have a legal duty to report your concern to a child welfare worker.

Principles, Protocols and Information Sharing

The CFCSA is guided by the following principles, which, in a collaborative setting, inform all parties serving children, youth and families:

- The safety and well-being of children are the paramount considerations.
- Children are entitled to be protected from abuse, neglect, harm, or threat of harm.
- A family is the preferred environment for the care and upbringing of children, and the responsibility for the protection of children rests primarily with the parents.
- Indigenous families and Indigenous communities share responsibility for the upbringing and well-being of Indigenous children.
- If, with available support services, a family can provide a safe and nurturing environment for a child, support services should be provided.
- The child's views should be taken into account when decisions relating to a child are made.
- Kinship ties and a child's attachment to the extended family should be preserved, if possible.
- Indigenous children are entitled to belong to their Indigenous communities and learn about and practice their Indigenous traditions, customs and languages; and
- Decisions relating to children should be made and implemented in a timely manner.

In addition to the guiding principles above, the CFCSA sets out the following service delivery principles:

- Families and children should be informed of the services available to them and encouraged to participate in decisions affecting them.
- In the planning and delivery of services to Indigenous families and their children, there should be consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples and Indigenous governing bodies.
- Services should be planned and provided in a way that prevents discrimination prohibited by the Human Rights Code and that promotes substantive equity, respect for rights and culture and, in the case of Indigenous children, cultural continuity.
- Services should be planned and delivered in ways that are sensitive to the needs and the cultural, racial, and religious heritage of those receiving the services.
- The impact of residential schools on Indigenous children, families, and communities should be considered in the planning and delivery of services to Indigenous children and families.
- Services should be integrated, wherever possible and appropriate, with services provided by government ministries, community agencies and Community Living British Columbia.
- Services to Indigenous children and families should be provided in a coordinated manner with Indigenous child and family services provided by Indigenous authorities.
- The community should be involved, wherever possible and appropriate, in the planning and delivery of services, including preventive and support services to families and children.
- Services for parents or family members should be planned and delivered in a way that builds on their strengths, trauma-informed, and is led by the family whenever possible. When working with Indigenous families, services should support cultural continuity, connection to the land, and honour the importance of their lived experience.

Protocols

Protocols are written agreements that outline how parties collaborate.

They clarify:

- Roles and responsibilities
- Communication channels; and
- Procedures for responding to concerns.

Protocols provide clear guidance on what to report and how different agencies and organizations work together to respond to suspected child abuse and neglect. As a service provider, you should be familiar with any protocols and/or guidelines your organization has in place.

Following protocols at all levels helps ensure an effective, coordinated response to child abuse and neglect in British Columbia. Where there is any inconsistency between a protocol and the CFCSA, the CFCSA takes precedence.

Protocols may involve multiple organizations and are developed through collaborative discussions that strengthen shared commitments to child protection.

Protocols Between and Among Organizations

In addition to community 92.1 agreements under the CFCSA, many organizations have provincial, regional, or local protocols with MCFD or ICSF Agencies. These community agreements and protocols help clarify working relationships and responsibilities. The discussions that support their development also strengthen shared commitments to working together when there are concerns about child abuse or neglect.

Your Responsibility as a Service Provider

If your employer or professional organization has a protocol in place with MCFD or an ICFSA, you should be familiar with it. Check with your supervisor or organizational lead to ensure you understand your role within these agreements.

As noted throughout this Handbook, everyone has a role to play in keeping children and youth safe. When you believe a child or youth may have been abused or neglected, you may need to notify someone else within your organization in addition to a child welfare worker and/or the police.

If your employer or professional association has a protocol or guideline for reporting abuse and neglect, these may direct you to inform other individuals, such as a manager, supervisor, director, or superintendent within your organization.

These protocols ensure timely and appropriate information sharing, enabling coordinated and effective response to concerns about child safety and well-being.

You cannot delegate the duty to report to someone else (e.g. a supervisor or manager). Reporting to a supervisor does not remove or fulfill your legal obligation to report directly to a child welfare worker. It is essential that you speak directly with a child welfare worker yourself.



Working with Personal Information

Access to personal information is a critical component of a collaborative response to suspected child abuse and neglect. Many organizations that serve children, youth, and families receive information in confidence. However, the health and safety of children and youth must always take precedence.

That is why Section 96 of the CFCSA grants child welfare workers from MCFD or an ICFSA the authority to access any information held by a public body, as defined in the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, when that information is necessary to carry out their duties and meets legislated collection safeguards.

Similarly, the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* (Section 79.2) gives an Indigenous authority the right to access any information held by the director or a public body, where that information is necessary to provide Indigenous child and family services under Indigenous law to an Indigenous child or family and meets legislated collection safeguards.

Generally, as noted above, information may be shared on an as needed basis to ensure a child's or youth's safety and well-being. In many cases, specific guidance on information sharing is provided through protocols and/or guidelines. You should also be familiar with any provisions specific to your workplace.

Collaboration is critically important in cases where there are, or may be, multiple children and/or youth victims, or where an offense against a child or youth will otherwise have an extraordinary impact on the community.

If you become aware of such a case, follow your local protocols and/or guidelines to determine which ministries or agencies should be immediately notified to ensure an effective, coordinated response.

Information sharing is also key in these cases. Everyone involved in the collaborative response will need to continue sharing relevant and updated information while the issues are resolved.



Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect

According to the CFCSA, child abuse and neglect can happen in different ways. It may be physical, sexual, emotional, or it may happen when a child or youth's basic needs for safety, care, and support are not met. The child or youth may also be harmed by witnessing family or intimate partner violence.

Children and youth may also be harmed outside the home, in situations where a parent is not present and cannot reasonably be expected to protect them.

In these cases, other service providers, such as police, school personnel, health care practitioners, or childcare providers, may have a primary role in ensuring the child's or youth's safety and well-being.

The following pages outline various forms of child abuse and neglect defined under the CFCSA and how to identify them.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is when a child or youth has been or is likely to be hurt by a parent. It can include actions such as hitting, kicking, slapping, shaking, burning, pinching, biting, strangling, throwing, shoving, whipping, or using too much force to punish or control a child or youth.

Injuries from physical abuse can range from small bruises and burns to broken bones—and in rare, severe cases, even death.

Reminder

If you have reason to believe that a child or youth may be experiencing abuse or neglect, and the parent or guardian is either unwilling or unable to ensure their safety, you are legally required to report your concerns to a child welfare worker.

"Reason to believe" means that, based on your observations or information you've received, you suspect that the child or youth could be at risk. You do not need to be certain, just a reasonable concern.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse happens when a parent uses words or actions that seriously impact a child or youth's emotional well-being over time. This kind of abuse can cause serious harm and difficulties with anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, or self-destructive behaviour.

Examples of emotional abuse include:

- Constant blaming or scapegoating
- Rejection or isolating the child
- Yelling, name-calling, or verbal attacks
- Threats or intimidation
- Insults or humiliation

Emotional harm and its impacts can be hard to spot. As a result of experiencing neglect or abuse by a parent, a child or youth may show some of the following signs:

- Significant changes in behaviour
- Sudden mood swings, anger, fear, or anxiety
- Depressed mood and low energy
- Withdrawal from friends or activities
- Self-destructive or aggressive behavior

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is when a child or youth has been or is likely to be sexually harmed or exploited by a parent. It includes:

- Sexually touching of a child or youth or asking them to touch someone else
- Sexual acts, including vaginal, oral, or anal intercourse
- Threats of sexual acts, stalking, or making sexual gestures or comments
- Making sexual comments or gestures about a child or youth's body or behavior
- Asking a child or youth to expose their body for inappropriate reasons
- Exposing a child or youth to sexual activity or sexually explicit material

Sexual Exploitation

Sexual exploitation occurs when a child or youth is pressured or manipulated into sexual activity in exchange for money, drugs, food, shelter, or other motivations.

Examples of sexual exploitation include but are not limited to:

- Being sexually abused by an adult
- Feeling pressured to have sex in exchange for a place to sleep, food, or a ride
- Being offered money, drugs, alcohol, gifts, or services in return for sexual acts
- Being trafficked for sexual purposes
- Being manipulated or forced to take sexual pictures or videos of themselves, especially when shared online

Some youth may not realize they are being exploited. They may believe they chose to exchange sexual acts for things they need or want. But sexual exploitation is never a job or a choice, it is a form of sexual abuse.

Neglect

Neglect happens when a child or youth's basic needs are not met by a parent, and they are—or could be—harmed as a result. This may include not providing:

- Enough food
- Safe and stable housing
- Medical or dental care when needed
- Proper supervision (including when a child is left alone or no care is arranged)
- Emotional support and attention
- Protection from dangerous situations or people

Neglect can seriously affect a child or youth's health, development, and emotional well-being.

Family and Intimate Partner Violence and the Harm to Children and Youth

Children and youth are harmed when they are exposed to family and intimate partner violence (or what used to be referred to as domestic violence). It is important to understand that children and youth who experience family and intimate partner violence are impacted directly.

Family and intimate partner violence can include but is not limited to:

- Physical assault or threats of violence, such as hitting, slapping, pushing, strangling, or using a weapon
- Intimidation, like hitting walls or breaking objects
- Threats or harm toward family members or pets
- Locking someone in/out of the home
- Manipulation, humiliation or exploitation
- Controlling behaviour between people in a close relationship.

Children may be hurt physically and/or emotionally by what they see and hear. Their safety and well-being may be at serious risk.

Being Alert to Potential Signs of Harm

Children and youth who are being abused or neglected often show signs—both physical and behavioural—of what they are experiencing. These signs don't always mean abuse or neglect is happening, but they should be taken seriously.

Anyone who works with children or youth has a responsibility to be alert to potential signs of abuse or neglect. It's essential to be prepared to identify and respond appropriately.

If you notice any of the following, consider whether you should report your concerns. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list.



Potential physical indicators:

- Injuries or bruises on a baby who isn't yet crawling or walking—especially on the head, neck, or face
- Injuries with no clear explanation, or where the story keeps changing
- Injuries that look like they were caused by an object or with a pattern (e.g., hand, stick, buckle, stove element)
- Bruises in unusual places like the ears, neck, upper arms, back, thighs, or buttocks
- The child or youth looks unwell, complains of hunger, or appears thin or malnourished
- Poor hygiene (e.g. dirty clothes, body odor, unwashed hair)
- No medical, dental, or other care when needed
- Genital or anal injuries that can't be explained
- Ongoing pain, bleeding, or unusual discharge in the genital or anal area
- Sexually transmitted infections or pregnancy— especially in a young child
- Sudden bed wetting or frequent diarrhea
- Developmental delays with no known cause (e.g., not holding their head up by six months or not walking by 18 months)
- Clothing that's not suitable for the weather
- Delayed or avoided medical care
- Injuries caused by lack of supervision

Potential behavioral indicators:

- Changes in school performance or attendance
- Running away or not wanting to go home
- Talking about being or appearing to be left home alone often
- High-risk behaviors like substance use, theft, or setting fires
- Sexual play or behavior that's not appropriate for their age
- Stealing, hoarding, or searching for food
- Extreme aggression or withdrawal from family, friends, or activities
- Sudden mood swings, anger, fear, or anxiety
- Regression in development (e.g., toileting issues in a child who was previously toilet-trained)
- Low self-esteem (e.g., saying they're bad, believing they deserve punishment, being very withdrawn)
- Suicidal thoughts or self-destructive behaviour (e.g., cutting, self-harm, suicide attempt, dangerous risk-taking)
- Involvement in sexually exploitive activities (e.g., performing sex acts in exchange for money, drugs, food, shelter, or other motivations)
- Forcing or pressuring another child into sexual play
- Sexual behavior directed toward adults
- Constantly seeking attention in extreme ways
- Severe anxiety or excessive worrying
- Appearing very quiet, passive, or undemanding (e.g., a very young child rarely crying)
- Showing little interest in surroundings or movement (e.g., lying still in a crib)

Indicators alone do not confirm abuse or neglect.

These signs do not always mean that abuse or neglect is happening. However, they signal the need to better understand the child or youth's situation.

For this reason, if you suspect that a child or youth may be experiencing abuse or neglect, it is your legal and ethical duty to report your concerns to a child welfare worker.



Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect

Recognizing how children and youth disclose abuse or neglect is essential for responding appropriately and ensuring their safety.

Direct Disclosures

Children and youth may disclose experiences of abuse or neglect directly, often beginning with a single example to gauge the adult's response. Respond with compassion, listen without judgment, and reassure them that their voice matters. These initial disclosures are typically cautious and may be part of a longer process.

Research shows that children frequently attempt to disclose multiple times before their concerns are fully understood, and appropriate action is taken.

If a child or youth chooses to confide in you, your response can have a significant impact.

The following guidelines can help you respond in a trauma-informed way that supports their safety and well-being:

Direct Disclosure Guidelines

Stay calm and listen

Even if you feel shocked or upset, staying calm helps the child or youth feel safe. It shows them it's okay to talk about what happened.

Let them speak at their own pace

Hold space for them to share their story in their own way. You can gently ask, "Can you tell me more?"—but don't push for details.

Be supportive and reassure them

- They did the right thing
- They were brave to tell you
- You're sorry this happened

Get only the basic facts

You don't need every detail—just enough to understand what happened. They may need to tell their story again to a child welfare worker or police, which can be difficult.

Explain what will happen next

- Let them know you'll be contacting a child welfare worker, and possibly the police.
- Answer their questions honestly. If you don't know something, say: "Let's ask the child welfare worker."
- Don't promise to keep it a secret. Explain that getting help means involving people trained to protect and support them.

Indirect Disclosures

In other instances, children and youth may communicate their experiences indirectly. This can occur through changes in behaviour, emotional responses, creative expression (e.g., art or writing), physical appearance, or conversations that reflect fears, concerns, or relationship dynamics.

Indirect disclosures may also take the form of conditional statements (e.g., “promise not to tell”) or third-party references (e.g., “my friend’s parent is hurting her”).

Make notes as soon as possible after the disclosure:

- Write down exactly what the child or youth said, using their own words when possible.
- Include the date, time, and context of the disclosure.

These notes help ensure accuracy when reporting and may be important if the case proceeds to court. Direct disclosures may be admissible as evidence, so clarity and precision are essential.



Vulnerability

While all children and youth experience some level of vulnerability, certain groups face heightened risks. For example, infants and very young children or those with disabilities may lack the ability to protect themselves and rely heavily on adults to ensure their safety and well-being.

As a service provider, it is essential to exercise increased vigilance when there are concerns of abuse or neglect involving these particularly vulnerable children and youth.

Making a Report

Duty to Report

Every person who has reason to believe that a child or youth has been or is likely to be abused or neglected has a legal obligation to report suspected abuse or neglect to a child welfare worker.

When you know something is wrong, under the CFCSA you have a legal duty to that child or youth to respond and act. This legal duty applies to everyone, including service providers, family members and the public.

Whether they're our own children, or someone else's, we all have a role in keeping children and youth safe.

How to Contact a Child Welfare Worker

The fastest, easiest way to report your concern to a child welfare worker is to call **Provincial Centralized Screening: 1-800-663-9122** (toll free), any time of the day or night.

For people who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech-impaired use **Video Relay Service (VRS): 1-800-663-7867** (toll free).

Report even if you:

- Aren't sure what's happening
- Think someone else already reported it
- Believe a child welfare worker is already involved

If you're unsure whether a parent or caregiver can protect the child or youth or meet their basic needs, report your concerns.

It starts with a conversation; the child welfare worker will listen to your concerns and is trained to assess the situation.

Abuse and neglect are crimes under the Criminal Code of Canada. If a child or youth is in immediate danger, the police respond first or when someone has, or is likely to have, committed a crime.

If the child or youth is in immediate danger, call 911 or your local police.

Circumstances That Must Be Reported

Section 13 of the CFCSA sets out the circumstances where a child needs protection. We are all required to report if there is reason to believe that a child or youth may need protection because:

- A child or youth has been, or is likely to be, physically harmed, sexually abused or sexually exploited by a parent or another person and the parent is unwilling or unable to protect the child or youth
- The child or youth has been or is likely to be physically harmed because of neglect by the child's or youth's parent
- The child or youth is emotionally harmed by the parent's conduct
- The child or youth is deprived of necessary health care
- The child's or youth's development is likely to be seriously impaired by a treatable condition and the child's or youth's parent refuses to provide or consent to treatment
- The child's or youth's parent is unable or unwilling to care for the child or youth and has not made adequate provisions for the child's or youth's care
- The child or youth is or has been absent from home in circumstances that endanger the child's or youth's safety or well-being
- The child's or youth's parent has died, and adequate provision has not been made for the child's or youth's care
- The child or youth has been abandoned, and adequate provision has not been made for the child's or youth's care; or
- The child or youth is living in a situation where there is domestic violence by or towards a person with whom the child or youth resides

Legal Protection for Reporting

No action for damages may be brought against you for reporting information under the CFCSA unless you knowingly report false information or the report was not made in good faith.

This legal protection is designed to encourage individuals to report concerns without fear of reprisal, provided the report is made honestly and with genuine concern for the child's safety.

What to Expect

When you call Provincial Centralized Screening to make a report, you'll speak with a child welfare worker, someone trained to respond to concerns about child abuse and neglect. The child welfare worker may also ask for your name and phone number, and how you know the child or youth.

The information you share will be kept confidential, and every effort will be made to protect your privacy. These professionals care deeply about the safety and well-being of children, youth, and families. It's their job to help when problems arise.

Failure to Report and Making False Reports

In British Columbia, everyone has a legal responsibility to help keep children safe. Not reporting suspected abuse or neglect is a serious matter under the CFCSA. So is knowingly making a false report. Both are considered offences.

The CFCSA is in place to protect children and ensure that concerns are taken seriously. If you're unsure, it's better to report and let a child welfare worker assess the situation. You don't need to be certain, just have a reasonable belief based on what you've seen or heard.



The child welfare worker may ask you:

- The child's or youth's name, age, and location
- Any known information about the child's or youth's Indigenous identity, and/or the Indigenous communities they belong to, if this is known
- Any other details about their cultural background or community ties
- Any immediate safety concerns
- The reason you are worried
- What the child or youth said
- Information about the child's or youth's parents or caregivers
- Whether other children or youth may also be affected
- Whether the child or youth has any support needs or speaks a language other than English
- The names of other people or agencies involved with the child, youth, or family
- Whether the family has any supports in place
- What your connection is to the family/child
- Whether you can provide any support to the family/child

You don't need to have all the answers, just share what you know. If you're unsure, it's still important to call—**children and youth are depending on us to use our voice.**

Confirming Indigenous Identity

A child welfare worker will ask if you are aware of the child or youths' Indigenous identity to determine if there are Indigenous communities that should be involved collaboratively in the planning and provision of services under the CFCSA. It also enables the child welfare worker to determine if an Indigenous authority should be assessing the report and providing services under an Indigenous law.



To learn more about Indigenous jurisdiction over child and family services, please visit [this website](#).

When to Call the Police

Police and child welfare workers have complementary roles in responding to child abuse and neglect. You should contact your local police detachment or dial 9-1-1 and ask for police assistance when:

- A child or youth under 19 years of age is in immediate danger, and/or
- A criminal offence against a child or youth has been or is likely to be committed

After contacting the police, you should also report your concerns to a child welfare worker to ensure a coordinated response.

Examples of Criminal Offences Against Children or Youth

Children and youth who are abused or neglected may be victims of criminal offences such as, but not limited to:

- Criminal negligence causing bodily harm
- Physical or sexual assault
- Sexual interference or invitation to sexual touching involving a child under 14
- Sexual exploitation of a child or youth
- Failure to provide the necessities of life

If you suspect child abuse or neglect by a service provider:

If you have reason to believe that a child or youth has been, or is likely to be, abused or neglected by an employee, contractor, service provider, foster caregiver or volunteer within an agency or organization:

- Contact the agency or organization to ensure the appropriate person is informed and able to respond according to their mandate.
 - You may also contact a child welfare worker to discuss the situation and seek guidance.
 - If you believe a criminal offence may have occurred, call the police.
 - If you are unsure whom to notify, review your organization's protocols or guidelines. A child welfare worker can help ensure the information reaches the appropriate authority.
-



What Happens After You Report

When you report that a child or youth may have been abused or neglected, the child welfare worker may speak with you about the next steps such as:

- If the child or youth is Indigenous, whether the report will be referred to an Indigenous authority to be assessed under Indigenous law.
- Any ongoing responsibility you may have as a resource for the child, youth and family.

As a service provider, you may be well positioned to support a child or youth who may have experienced abuse or neglect. A child welfare worker may ask you to assist in the following ways:

- Providing a suitable space for the child welfare worker to interview the child or youth.
- Being present during the interview to offer support, if requested.
- Offering emotional support to the child, youth, and/or family if they wish to talk with someone; or
- In cases involving independent youth, letting them know that you are available as support.

Assessing the Report

After receiving your report, the child welfare worker will assess the situation under the CFCSA. The purpose of this assessment is to gather sufficient information to determine the most appropriate response to the report.

- Family Development Response
- Investigation Response
- Youth Services Response
- Offer Support Services
- No Further Action

The Assessment Process

The process begins with listening and identifying how best to support the child and family.

An assessment includes a careful review of the information provided in the report, along with any other information readily accessible to the child welfare worker, such as records of previous contact with MCFD or ICFSAs.

If there are concerns about possible abuse or neglect, the child welfare worker will work closely with the family and their support network including friends, relatives, and community members to find the best way to help keep the child or youth safe.



Collaborative Planning and Decision Making

Collaborative or shared planning and decision-making includes refers to processes such as mediation, family group conferencing, and traditional decision-making. These approaches bring family and community members together to help make decisions about a child's safety and well-being. They lead to plans and agreements that support children, youth, and families.

Using these collaborative approaches can often prevent the need to go to court. Participation is voluntary and confidential, as set out in the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* (CFCSA).

Protecting the Child or Youth During the Assessment Process

If an assessment determines that a child or youth requires protection, the child welfare worker will take the most appropriate and least disruptive steps to ensure their safety.

These may include:

- Providing support services
- Seeking a court order for essential health care
- Arranging for the child or youth to live outside the home (e.g., with relatives or friends), with the parent's consent
- Securing an agreement or court order to remove an offender from the home, or to prohibit that person from contacting or interfering with the child or youth

In alignment with the CFCSA, children and youth may only be removed from their homes when no less disruptive option is available to ensure their immediate safety. When removal is necessary, every effort is made to place the child or youth with extended family members or close family friends. If these options are not available, a Ministry care home will be identified to provide care and support.



Working Together to Keep Children and Youth Safe

Our Collective Responsibility

We all share responsibility for the safety and well-being of children and youth. The most effective way to fulfill that responsibility is by working together. When everyone understands their role and acts accordingly, we create a comprehensive network of support for children, youth, and families.

Collaboration is essential at every level, recognizing, reporting, and responding to suspected child abuse or neglect, and providing the support and services that build on families' strengths and help them create safe, nurturing environments.

When discussing concerns about a child, youth, or family with your supervisor, it may be helpful to approach the conversation with the following lenses in mind. These considerations support thoughtful and balanced discussions that reflect the broader context of the family's circumstances, including:

- What historical or systemic issues may be influencing the family's current situation, and how might that context shape what I am seeing?
- Are there cultural values, traditions, or practices that are important to this family?
- What is the current level of trust and relationship between our service and the family? How can we maintain or strengthen that relationship to continue supporting them?
- In addition to concerns, what strengths, supports, or opportunities exist that can empower the family and their community?

How You Can Help

Even small acts of support can make a big difference for a parent who's struggling and can lead to better outcomes for children and youth. Maintaining a connection to that family or child/youth demonstrates that the community cares for the safety and well-being of B.C. families.

Here are some ways you can help:

- Offer practical help. Babysit, run errands, or simply be there when a parent needs a break.
- Be a listening ear. Invite them for a walk or coffee and give them space to talk about what's going on. Continue to check in on their well-being and needs.
- Share helpful resources. Learn about local supports and let them know it's okay to ask for help; there are people and services ready to lend a hand.
- Follow up with MCFD/ICFSA if the situation doesn't improve.
- Ask: How can I help you?



More Information

Links

Legislation referred to in this Handbook can be viewed at the following internet locations:

- [*An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*](https://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/f-11.73/index.html)
(laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/f-11.73/index.html)
- [*Child, Family and Community Service Act*](https://bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/00_96046_01)
(bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/00_96046_01)
- [*Criminal Code of Canada*](https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/)
(laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/)
- [*Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*](https://bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96165_00)
(bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96165_00)
- [*Personal Information Protection Act*](https://bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/03063_01)
(bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/03063_01)
- [*Infants Act*](https://bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96223_01)
(bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96223_01)
- [*Victims of Crime Act*](https://bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96478_01)
(bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96478_01)

We appreciate your attention to this material. Reach out to your local MCFD or ICFSA office should you have further questions. **Your actions could protect a child or youth.**

Other Organizations You May Wish to Contact

Here are other places you can contact for support, legal advice, or more information:

To contact a **Suspected Child abuse or Neglect Clinic (SCAN)** in your area, call Children's Hospital at 604-875-2345 and ask for the Child Protection Service Unit.

211 by United Way BC

211 is a free and confidential service that connects people to helpful and vital resources in their community. They provide information and referral to a broad range of community, government, and social services.

Helpline for Children

For children and youth who feel scared, unsafe, or are experiencing abuse or neglect at home, and would like to talk to someone, they can dial the Helpline at 1-877-631-8282 (toll-free). The phone line is available 24/7 across B.C.

Kids Help Phone

Children and youth can call the Kids Help Phone to speak to a counsellor day or night at 1-800-668-6868. Counsellors are available to speak anonymously about concerns with abuse and can help children and youth call the police or child protective services. For more information about the resources and support available, visit: kidshelpphone.ca

Ombudsperson of British Columbia

The Ombudsperson listens to concerns and complaints about how public agencies deliver their services. Although not an advocate, the Ombudsperson can carry out fair and confidential investigations to see whether a public agency is treating people properly.

- bcombudsperson.ca
- 1-800-567-FAIR (3247)

The Public Guardian and Trustee of British Columbia (PGT)

Helps people who can't protect themselves. They manage legal and financial matters for children, support adults who can't make decisions, and handle estates when no one else is available.

- trustee.bc.ca
- 1-604-660-4444
- For more information on responding to child welfare concerns, visit: gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/public-safety/protecting-children/reporting-child-abuse

Representative for Children and Youth (RCY)

The RCY helps young people in B.C. by making sure they get the services they need. They speak up for children and youth, check how well services are working, and investigate serious injuries or deaths to help prevent future harm.

- rcybc.ca
- 1-800-476-3933 (confidential for all of B.C.)

VictimLink BC

Call toll free 1-800-563-0808, 24-hours a day, seven days a week. Multilingual and VRS accessible, province-wide telephone service to locate a victim services program in your community or visit: victimlinkbc.ca

Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner

- oipc.bc.ca

Gender-based violence, sexual assault, and domestic violence

- gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/public-safety/domestic-violence

Independent schools

Are guided by the document, Supporting Our Students: a Guide for Independent School Personnel Responding to Child Abuse which is available online: gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/independent-schools/sos_guide_independent_schools.pdf

Complaint Resolution

MCFD

If you're not satisfied with the services, actions, or decisions made by MCFD, you have the right to file a complaint. Start by:

- Talking directly with your child welfare worker
- If that doesn't resolve the issue, ask to speak with their team leader
- If you're still not satisfied, contact a complaints specialist at:
 - **Toll-free: 1-877-387-7027**
 - **Local (Victoria): 250-387-7027**

Indigenous Child and Family Service Agency (ICFSA)

Each ICSFA has its own complaint process. Contact the ICFSA directly for more information.

You can find contact details online: gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/data-monitoring-quality-assurance/reporting-monitoring/accountability/indigenous-child-and-family-service-agencies



The Handbook is also available online at: gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/public-safety/protecting-children/reporting-child-abuse

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