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# Protecting Yukon Children

We all share the responsibility for making sure every child is safe and cared for. When parents cannot or are unable to care for, supervise and protect their children, we all need to make sure the child's needs are being met according to the *Child and Family Services Act*.

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The Department of Health and Social Services provides child protection services. The department is given the authority to do this by the *Child and Family Services Act*.

According to the *Child and Family Services Act*, a child means a person under the age of 19 years.

## What is child abuse or neglect?

There are many forms of child abuse. Generally, abuse means anything that may be harmful to a child's physical, emotional or psychological health, or that takes advantage of a child.

- **Physical abuse** — any deliberate, non-accidental assault or use of force against a child that results in physical harm. This can include excessive or inappropriate discipline that causes injury to the child's body.
- **Sexual abuse** — any action to involve a child in a sexual activity including sexual touching, exposure, using a child in the making of/or viewing pornography, and/or involving a child in prostitution.
- **Emotional abuse** — can range from habitual humiliation to withholding life-sustaining nurturing. The abuse is persistent and chronic to the point that it harms the child. It can include embarrassing or insulting a child, making hurtful comments about a child's appearance, intelligence, size, ability, etc. It can include living in families where domestic violence is an issue.
- **Neglect** — failing to provide for a child's basic needs, including essential food, appropriate clothing, shelter, health care or supervision.

# Why do people abuse or neglect their children?

Parenting is a tough job. Some people have trouble handling all of the responsibility and pressure that comes with being a parent. Some parents do not understand that their children are not always able to do the things they expect them to do. Sometimes this leads to abuse or neglect, which can result in lifelong difficulties for the affected child.

There are many things that can lead a parent to abuse a child, including:

- personal, relationship or financial problems;
- alcohol, drug or other substance abuse;
- lack of family or friends;
- poor or over-crowded housing;
- lack of knowledge about how children develop;
- inappropriate discipline;
- little or no experience caring for children;
- demands of a child with a special need; and
- having been abused or neglected as a child.

# Can abuse and neglect be prevented?

Yes. Child abuse and neglect can be prevented by helping parents to:

- learn about what is typical in terms of their child's development and what they can expect at certain ages;
- improve their parenting skills, including how to use proper discipline;
- explore their hopes and dreams for their child;
- learn how to settle family conflicts;
- learn to deal with stress; and
- recognize and seek help for drug, alcohol, gambling or other addictions.

**As a parent** — Asking for help does not mean you are a poor parent. Just the opposite — it means that you care about your child and want to do the best job you can.

If you think you may be hurting or harming your child or are afraid you may abuse your child, or if you would like information on supports to help with parenting, call Yukon Health and Social Services, Family and Children's Services (in Whitehorse); or Yukon Health and Social Services, Regional Services office (in Yukon Communities). (See back of document for contact information.)

# How can I help stop child abuse and neglect?

If you have reason to believe a child is being abused or neglected, it is important to remember that **it is NEVER the child's fault.**

**As a member of the community** — If you have reason to believe a child is in need of protective intervention, you have a legal responsibility under the *Child and Family Services Act* to report your concerns. You may report them to Family and Children's Services, your Regional Services office or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

You are only asked to report your suspicions. You are not expected to figure out who may have caused the abuse or neglect.

If you are not sure whether or not you should report a particular situation, you may wish to discuss it with a social worker or the RCMP.

## If I make a report — what happens then?

All reports of abuse or neglect are investigated by trained, professional staff. They will usually discuss the situation with the family and decide what would be the best plan for the child and the family.

As noted above, everyone has a responsibility to report a situation where they believe a child may be in need of protection. Most people who report possible abuse or neglect do so because they have a real concern about the child's safety and well-being.

However, if a person knowingly reports false information out of spite, anger, revenge or a desire to cause problems for a parent, legal action may be taken against them.

If you have reason to believe a child may be neglected or abused, you have a legal responsibility under the *Child and Family Services Act* to report your concerns.

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

There are usually signs that a child is being abused or neglected. These may be physical, which means it is possible to see them. In other cases, the child's behaviour may lead to concerns about abuse. Often, one indicator is not enough to suggest abuse or neglect, but several indicators or a pattern make it more likely that abuse or neglect may exist. Any one of these signs does tell us, however, that we need to know more about the child's circumstances.

The chart on the following pages lists a number of possible physical indicators and behaviours that might suggest abuse or neglect.

# Possible Indicators of Physical Abuse

## PHYSICAL

- injuries (bruises, cuts, burns, bite marks, fractures, etc.) that are not consistent with explanation offered (e.g., extensive bruising to one area)
- the presence of several injuries over a period of time
- any bruising on an infant
- facial injuries in preschool children (e.g., cuts, bruises, sores, etc.)
- injuries inconsistent with the child's age and development
- injuries that form a shape or pattern that resemble the object used to make the injury (e.g., buckle, hand, teeth, cigarette burns)

## BEHAVIOURAL

- cannot recall how injuries occurred, or offers an inconsistent explanation
- wary of adults or reluctant to go home, absences from school
- may cringe or flinch if touched unexpectedly
- may display a vacant stare or frozen watchfulness
- extremely aggressive or extremely withdrawn
- wears long sleeves to hide injury
- extremely compliant and/or eager to please
- sad, cries frequently
- describes self as bad and deserving to be punished



# Possible Indicators of Emotional Abuse

## PHYSICAL

- bedwetting and/or diarrhea which is non-medical in origin
- frequent psychosomatic complaints: headaches, nausea, abdominal pain
- child fails to thrive

*Rarely is any one indicator conclusive proof that a child has been harmed. In most instances, children present a cluster of behavioural and physical indicators.*

## BEHAVIOURAL

- extreme withdrawal or aggressiveness, mood swings
- overly compliant; too well-mannered; too neat and clean
- extreme attention-seeking behaviours
- displays extreme inhibition in play
- poor peer relationships
- severe depression, often suicidal
- running away from home
- constantly apologizes
- fears consequences of actions, often leading to lying

# Possible Indicators of Sexual Abuse

## PHYSICAL

- unusual or excessive itching in the genital or anal area
- torn, stained or bloody underwear (observed if the child requires bathroom assistance)
- pregnancy or venereal disease
- injuries to the vaginal or anal areas (e.g., bruising, swelling or infection)
- self mutilation (cuts or sores made by the child)
- sudden weight change
- difficulty walking or sitting

*While the above are not conclusive indicators of sexual abuse, one or more could be a sign that a child needs help.*

## BEHAVIOURAL

- age-inappropriate sexual play with toys, self, others (e.g., replication of explicit sexual acts)
- age-inappropriate, sexually explicit drawings and/or descriptions
- bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual knowledge
- promiscuity
- prostitution
- seductive behaviours
- fear of home, excessive fear of men or women
- depression
- change or loss of appetite
- sad, cries often, unduly anxious

# Possible Indicators of Neglect

## PHYSICAL

- abandonment
- unattended medical or dental needs
- consistent lack of supervision
- consistent hunger, inappropriate dress for weather conditions, poor hygiene
- persistent and untreated conditions (e.g., scabies, head lice, diaper rash or other skin disorder)
- developmental delays (e.g., language, weight)

## BEHAVIOURAL

- regularly displays fatigue or listlessness, falls asleep in class
- steals food, begs from classmates
- reports that no caretaker is at home
- frequently absent or late
- self-destructive
- school drop-outs (adolescents)
- lack of parental participation
- misuse of alcohol or drugs
- lack of trust in others

# Contact Information

For more information, or to talk to someone about suspected child abuse, contact:

## Family and Children's Services, Yukon Health and Social Services

### Whitehorse

Suite 401, 4114 – 4th Avenue,  
Whitehorse Y1A 4N7 667-3002

## Royal Canadian Mounted Police

667-5555 in Whitehorse,  
or 1-867-667-5555 in Yukon  
communities.

## Regional Services, Yukon Health and Social Services

### Carcross

Box 174, Carcross Y0B 1B0  
821-2920

### Carmacks/Pelly Crossing

Box 95, Carmacks Y0B 1C0  
863-5800

### Dawson

Box 339, Dawson Y0B 1G0  
993-7890

### Haines Junction (including Destruction Bay, Burwash Landing, Beaver Creek)

Box 5445, Haines Junction Y0B 1L0  
634-2203

### Mayo

Box 9, Mayo Y0B 1M0  
996-2283

### Old Crow

Box 11 Old Crow Y0B 1N0  
966-3124

### Ross River/Faro

Box 111, Ross River Y0B 1S0  
994-2749 (Faro)  
969-3200 (Ross River)

### Teslin

Box 69, Teslin Y0A 1B0  
390-2588

### Watson Lake

Box 305, Watson Lake Y0A 1C0  
536-3204 or 536-2232



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