

## **CHILD ABUSE REPORTING POLICY**

We are ultimately committed to provide a safe environment by preventing any harm to children in our care and protect them as much as we can. Our policy is based on zero tolerance for sexual abuse, harassment, molestation, corporal punishment or neglect.

If a person has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection, the person must promptly report the suspicion and the information upon which it is based to the Children's Aid Services. Child abuse is a serious occurrence by definition of the Day Nurseries Act.

The situations that must be reported (Child and Family Services Act CFSA s.72 (1) ) are listed below:

1. The child has suffered physical harm or there is a risk that the child is likely to suffer physical harm.
2. The child has been sexually molested or sexually exploited or there is a risk that the child is likely to be sexually molested or sexually exploited.
3. The child requires medical treatment to cure, prevent or alleviate physical harm or suffering and the child's parent or the person having charge of the child does not provide, or refuses or is unavailable or unable to consent to, the treatment.
4. The child has suffered emotional harm, or there is a risk that the child is likely to suffer emotional harm to be demonstrated by serious:
  - anxiety
  - depression
  - withdrawal
  - self-destructive or aggressive behaviour
  - delayed development
5. The child suffers from a mental, emotional or developmental condition that, if not remedied, could seriously impair the child's development.
6. The child has been abandoned.

It is an ongoing obligation of every person including volunteers, students, or support staff who has contact with a child in a childcare centre to report child abuse.

Persons failing to report the suspicion of child abuse are subject to legal action and a fine if convicted. The law protects people who report child abuse in good faith. A law suit against person for reporting, if it turns out no one has abused the child, would not likely be successful unless that person purposefully made a false or malicious report.

The Principal shall ensure that all staff is familiar with the Child and Family Services Act in reporting cases of suspected child abuse.

### **Recognizing Signs of Abuse**

Children may show many different signs of abuse or neglect. Hasty conclusions should be avoided. All children have scrapes, bruises and birthmarks. The common signs of abuse and neglect:

#### Signs of Physical Abuse

- child has bite marks, unexplained bruises, scars, burns, fractures or head injuries
- child runs away from home or will not go home
- child has repetitive injuries or unattended injuries

#### Signs of Sexual Abuse

- young child has an unusual interest in or knowledge of sexual behaviour
- child has difficulty walking or sitting or says it hurts to go to the bathroom
- child has changed behaviour or acts extremely aggressive or withdrawn
- child makes age inappropriate sexual drawings

#### Signs of Emotional Abuse

- child is often alone (at home and around the school)
- child is passive or acts out aggressively
- child has low self-esteem
- child is depressed or talks of suicide

#### Signs of Neglect

- child often comes to school or daycare hungry
- child is not dressed for the weather
- child looks unkempt and unwashed
- child is kept outside for long periods without appropriate supervision
- child has chronic untreated illnesses

It is reasonable to suspect abuse if a child is exhibiting behaviours associated with abuse or has suspicious physical symptoms, even if the child has not disclosed abuse.

### **Suspected Abuse by another person than staff member**

Staff member will combine his/her professional knowledge of children with the knowledge of individual child when evaluating suspicious cases to ensure that the suspicion of abuse is based on reasonable grounds. Staff members will not seek proof of abuse.

Staff member who suspects the abuse will not discuss his/her suspicions with the child, child's parents or other staff member, unless specifically directed to do so by the Children's Aid Services or the police.

When a staff member has reasonable grounds to believe that the child is abused, he/she will immediately report to the Children's Aid Society and afterwards, he/she will verbally inform the Principal.

It is not the responsibility of employees or the Principal to investigate if abuse has occurred. This investigation is the responsibility of the Children's Aid Society or the police.

### **Suspected Abuse by staff member**

If staff member suspects a colleague of abuse, or if any child discloses him/her that another staff member has been abusive, then he/she will inform the Principal of the intention to call a Children's Aid Society.

The Principal will immediately prepare report containing all information regarding the alleged abuse and forward it to the Board of Directors for consultation.

The Principal will discuss the report with the staff member suspected of abuse. If the Principal has reasonable grounds to suspect a staff member of child abuse, he/she will immediately suspend the staff member, pending outcome of the investigation. Under some circumstances, the Principal may decide to immediately suspend or dismiss a staff member even without an interview.

If the Principal has reasonable grounds to suspect a staff member of child abuse, he/she will consult the case with the counsel for the centre/Ministry of Education, report to the Children's Aid Society and inform the parents about the situation, while this discussion will be documented.

If the nature of the circumstances warrants a criminal investigation, the police will be contacted. Also, considering an individual case, the consultation with a lawyer and reporting to the insurance company is required.

The Principal and staff will do their best to provide serious and compassionate response to allegations without admitting legal liability and will not make any public statements without the aid of legal council.

### **What to do when a child discloses abuse**

#### Stay calm

Avoid conveying your feelings to the child, as reactions of shock, outrage, or fear may make the child feel more anxious or ashamed. A calm response allows the child to tell his/her story and also provides the reassurance that what has happened is not so bad that it cannot be talked about and work through calmly.

#### Go slowly

It is normal to feel inadequate or unsure about what to do or say when a child tells you about his/her abuse. As a result, there is a tendency to rush things. Proceed slowly. Gentle questions such as: "Can you tell me more about what happened?" are helpful. Avoid questions that begin with "why".

#### Make notes

Record time and date and make notes of all comments made by the child about abuse using the child's exact words where possible. Save all drawings and artwork. They may be helpful for the further investigation. Sign the documentation.

#### Reassure the child that they have not done anything wrong

Any questions that are asked are usually associated in the child's mind with getting into trouble. Avoid using "why" questions. For example: "Why did he/she hit you?" suggests indirectly that the child may have done something wrong and increases the child's reluctance to discuss the matter.

Children need support and reassurance when discussing their abuse or neglect. It is helpful to let the child know that:

- they are not in trouble;
- they are safe with you;
- you are glad that they have chosen to tell you about this;
- they have done the right thing telling about this;
- you are sorry that they have been hurt or that this has happened to them;

- you will do everything you can to make sure they are not hurt again; and
- you know others who can be trusted to help solve this problem.

### Get only the essential facts

If this is the first time the child has disclosed abuse or neglect, a full investigation will be necessary. The child will be interviewed in depth by Children's Aid Society worker and, if there is a criminal investigation, by the police. Limit your discussion to find out generally what took place. When you have sufficient information to believe that abuse has occurred, gently stop gathering facts and be supportive.

### Tell the child what will happen next

Children who disclose their abuse feel anxious and vulnerable about what people think of them and what will happen next. It is important to avoid making promises to the child about what may or may not happen next. For example, avoid promises that the alleged perpetrator won't get into trouble. Provide only reassurance that is realistic and achievable.

Do not contact the parents even if there has been a direct disclosure identifying an offender outside of the child's family.

## **How to Make a Report**

The phone number of Children's Aid Society of Toronto is **416 924 4646**. The Children's Aid Services should have emergency service 24 hours a day, so that you can call anytime.

Children's Aid Services workers have the responsibility and the authority to investigate allegations and to provide services to protect children. They may involve the police and other community agencies, if necessary.

## **What to Report**

When you contact the Children's Aid Services, have available all relevant information you may need during the call:

1. The date, your name, the child care setting's name, address and telephone number.
2. The child's name, birthdate and address.
3. The name(s) of the parent/guardian(s), home work telephone numbers.

4. The name and telephone number of the family physician.
5. The time the child usually arrives and departs.
6. A brief statement of your observation and concerns. If the child has disclosed, have on hand your notes of what the child said.
7. Any immediate concerns about the child's safety.
8. Information on siblings or other children who may be at risk.
9. Knowledge of any previous incidents or concerns regarding the child;
10. Information about other persons who may be witnesses or may have information about the child.
11. Any other relevant information concerning the child and/or family, such as language or culture.

Don't delay making a report just because you don't have all this information. Contact the Children's Aid Services immediately with the information you have.

### **Confidentiality**

Becoming involved in an alleged case of child abuse means having access to highly confidential information. The confidentiality for alleged victim and perpetrator has to be maintained. There is an offence to disclose information to anyone except those authorized to carry out the investigation. This information must be kept in a secured location, accessible only to the person making the report or the investigators and should be destroyed upon completion of the investigation.

### **How to Avoid Risky Situations**

1. Show affection and warmth to children by touching them in safe areas like on the shoulder, head or back.
2. Avoid being alone with children. When possible, examine a sick or injured child with another adult present.
3. Talk to a child privately by staying where others can see but not hear you .
4. Keep the door open when a child is with you.

5. Tell parents about situations where you can't help being alone with a child .
6. Respect the child's integrity. Let children back away from well intentioned affection .
7. Meet with parents often and keep them up to date on their child's activities.
8. Know your job or activity and be professional.
9. Implement an open door policy so parents are invited to drop in at any time.