

# Abuse and Neglect

## When to Contact Us

Ontario's Child and Family Services Act recognizes that each of us has a responsibility for the welfare of children. It states clearly that members of the public, including professionals who work with children, have an obligation to report promptly to a children's aid society if they suspect that a child or youth under the age of 16 is or may be in need of protection.

## What is Abuse and Neglect?

Generally, child abuse is categorized into four major conditions: neglect, physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Although these divisions may be useful in principle, child care staff must remember it is more common for a child to suffer more than one form of abuse. For example, children who have been physically abused may also have been told that they are bad or stupid and that they deserve what they are getting.

## Neglect

Neglect is the chronic inattention or omission on the part of the care giver to provide for the basic emotional and/or physical needs of the child, including food, clothing, nutrition, adequate supervision, health, hygiene, safety, medical and psychological care and education. Emotionally neglected children do not receive the necessary psychological nurturance to foster their own growth and development. The consequences of neglect can be very serious, particularly for young children. The child who does not receive adequate emotional, cognitive and physical stimulation, physical care and nutrition may experience lags in development. These lags in development may be irreversible.

*Some examples of neglect are:*

- A lack of adequate food, clothing or shelter
- A child's basic physical needs are not met
- Emotional neglect or lack of supervision
- Lack of medical or dental care
- Deliberate locking children out of the house

- Deliberate locking children in their rooms
- Failure to provide psychological or developmental treatment when required

## Physical Abuse

Physical abuse includes all acts by a caregiver which result in physical harm to a child. Physical abuse may result from inappropriate or excessive discipline and in fact, the caregiver may not have intended to hurt the child. This may involve minor injury (such as a bruise), to a more serious injury causing permanent damage or death (e.g. whiplash, shaken baby syndrome, female genital mutilation). Although cultural factors may play a role in a caring and/or disciplining children, injuring a child is unacceptable.

*Some examples of physical harm (Assault, Abuse) are:*

- Hurting children to control their behaviour
- Deliberate use of physical punishment resulting in injuries, marks or other
- Physical injury that occurs resulting from a lack of care or supervision by an adult
- Physical injuries resulting from shaking infants and toddlers

## Discipline

The Criminal Code of Canada allows corporal punishment that does not exceed reasonable force.

BUT... injuries to a child or using objects to discipline are not acceptable

- Bruising, welts, broken skin
- Belts, electrical cords, other objects
- Handling babies roughly/shaking...

## Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is the involvement by a person who has power over a child, of any form of sexual activity with the child. Sexual abuse includes acts such as: fondling, genital stimulation, oral sex and using fingers, penis or objects for vaginal penetration. The offender may engage the child in the sexual activity through threats, bribes, force, misrepresentation, and other forms of coercion. The power of the abuse can lie in his/her superiority or age, intellectual or physical development, relationship of authority and/or dependency with the child.

*Some examples of sexual harm (Assault, Abuse) are:*

- Coercion
- Using a child for sexual gratification/exploitation
- Touching a child in a sexual way
- Encouraging or forcing a child to participate in any sexual activity
- Encouraging or forcing a child to touch another person in a sexual way
- Telling a child to touch him or herself for an adult's or older child's sexual purposes

## Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is a pattern of overt rejecting, isolating, degrading, terrorizing, corruption, exploiting, denying emotional responsiveness, and punishing a child's attempts to interact with the environment. The caregiver may use any of these tactics in relating to and disciplining the child. Children who witness violence in their home may suffer emotional damage.

*Some examples of emotional harm (Abuse) are:*

- A pattern of attacking a child's self-worth/emotional development
- Criticizing
- Teasing
- Belittling
- Insulting
- Rejecting
- Ignoring
- Isolating and shunning

**Do not wait until the end of the day to call!**

**"a community where all children can grow up safe, healthy, and loved"**

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