



STOPPING CHILD ABUSE - protecting our future

WHY WE NEED YOU:

Unchecked and uncorrected child abuse, leads, at best, to a maladjusted adult and at worst, it may end in a child death. In between these two possibilities are children living each day hungry, neglected, feeling unloved and fearful. Children may react by becoming delinquents, runaways, substance abusers and/or suicide victims. Or, they may become abusive parents themselves and start the cycle all over again. It is clearly time for all of us within the community to work together to help these children who need us. If you do not speak up for their protection -- who will?

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE
NATIONAL FAMILY VIOLENCE / VICTIM
SERVICES CO-ORDINATOR

The following guide is intended to provide you with enough information to determine whether a child you know may need our help.

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

CHILD ABUSE is the mistreatment or neglect of a child by a parent, relative, guardian or caregiver which results in physical, sexual, emotional and/or psychological harm (National Clearinghouse on Family Violence).

TYPES OF CHILD ABUSE

PHYSICAL ABUSE is the use of unreasonable physical force on any part of a child's body that results in a non-accidental injury.

Examples: pushing, slapping, shaking, punching, burning, biting, choking, kicking.

SEXUAL ABUSE is the exploitation of a child for sexual contact and/or behaviour, whether consensual or not.

Children are not capable of giving informed consent since they do not understand the consequences of adult/child sexual contact.

Examples: fondling, exposing sexual organs, oral contact, penetration.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE is any treatment that causes emotional or mental harm to a child.

Examples: excessive yelling, teasing, belittling, threats, insults, pressuring, ignoring, rejection, instilling fear, exposure to violence, forced isolation.

NEGLECT is the failure to provide physical or emotional care which may endanger a child's development.

Examples: failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, attention, supervision, love, security.

WHY DOES IT HAPPEN?

There is no single or simple explanation which can be linked to the cause of child abuse. It can be described, however, as the inappropriate responses by persons who, for various reasons, have not learned how to deal with children appropriately. These people can change by seeking the help which is available.

Factors Contributing To Abuse:

1) Psychological Factors

Abusers may have been abused as children.

Many adults who have been raised in abusive homes or environments have not learned how to interact with children in any other way.

Some adults do not understand child development.

Adults may not know how to meet a child's needs or may have unrealistic expectations of a child and cannot understand why the child cannot meet these expectations.

2) Social Factors

Some adults often believe that it is their right to control children.

Those individuals who abuse children may have an ingrained belief that they should be in control of children. The abuse of power and authority is the underlying factor apparent in cases of abuse.

3) Stress Factors

Stress may contribute to abuse.

Abuse may occur out of feelings of frustration because the adult may not have enough time, money, energy or support to adequately care for the child.

Help is available to assist adults in learning

a) how to understand children and their development and

b) how to cope with their situation in better ways.

ABUSE IS NEVER THE CHILD'S FAULT

CHILD ABUSE AND THE LAW

Within Canada's criminal justice system, child abuse is dealt with as a serious problem. Victims of child abuse receive careful attention and care by those professionals working within the criminal justice system. In keeping with society's sensitivity to the issue of child abuse, the law has significantly progressed in its response to and handling of child abuse situations.

For more information regarding the law, contact your local police service.

DUTY TO REPORT

All children have a right to grow in a safe and nurturing environment. When child abuse is suspected, a person has a moral and often legal responsibility to report it to the social services or the local police force. It takes courage to report suspected abuse.

Reports of child abuse are always confidential and, if necessary, the individual who reports the abuse may remain anonymous. If you are uncertain whether to report, DO SO! It is better to be safe than sorry. No actions may be taken against persons for reporting their suspicions, unless the reporting is done maliciously.

A failure to report a suspected incident of child abuse is an offence which may result in punishment through the criminal justice system and/or by a person's professional organization.

The main goal in child abuse intervention is the safety of the child. More attention is being given to working with entire families in order to ensure that the family provides a happier and more functional environment for all of the individuals involved.

**CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION IS
EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY**

PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INDICATORS

The following indicators may help alert you to the possibility of abuse:

Physical indicators:

- unexplained bruises, welts and burns,
- bruises in various stages of healing, unusual or abnormal physical movements,
- repeated accidents,
- weight gain or weight loss,
- sexually transmitted diseases,
- pain and swelling in genital area,
- sleep disturbances,
- bed-wetting,
- pregnancy,
- consistent hunger, poor hygiene, inappropriate dress,

- unattended physical or medical problems,
- child is often left alone,
- suicide attempts, and
- running away from home.

Psychological indicators:

- unusual or sudden fear of adults or a particular individual,
- age-inappropriate knowledge of sexual behaviour,
- severe depression,
- a lack of trust,
- low self-esteem,
- anger and anxiety,
- attention-seeking behaviour,
- tantrums, and
- fear of being left alone.

EARLY IDENTIFICATION, REPORTING
AND INTERVENTION ARE VITAL

WHAT TO DO WHEN CHILD ABUSE IS SUSPECTED

When a child comes forward to talk about abuse, you should:

1) Talk to the child in private.

- the child has confided in you and may not feel comfortable telling others.
- a comfortable setting, where no other individuals may intrude, should be chosen.

2) Always believe the child.

- it is very difficult for a child to disclose abuse because most struggle with the desire to protect their abuser.
- in cases of sexual abuse, the child is often bound by secrecy which is imposed by the abuser.

3) Listen to the child calmly.

- set your own feelings aside.
- do not demonstrate feelings of shock or strong reactions.
- do not rush the conversation.

4) Reassure them that they are not to blame.

- let the child know that s/he is right to tell about the abuse -- reassure the child that you will do everything you can to help them and, in order to do so, you must contact someone else.

5) Contact the social services or the local police.

- the social services will provide protection to the child as well as counselling and financial support to both the child and family.

ALWAYS BELIEVE THE CHILD

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Canadian culture is comprised of many different ethnic and cultural populations. Each is accompanied by its own cultural beliefs and values relating to discipline, the use of force and role expectations. All initiatives to prevent child abuse must be undertaken with a sensitivity to these cultural differences. It is important to strike a balance between the right to cultural belief and heritage and the child's right to protection under Canadian law.

COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY

Child abuse has far-reaching social and psychological effects upon its victims. The number one goal must be to build a safer environment for our children.

In order to prevent child abuse, efforts must be taken to change some of the inappropriate

attitudes and behaviours toward children which may exist within our communities. In order for communities to succeed in the prevention of child abuse, your personal effort becomes necessary.

Children have a right to live in an environment free from abuse. Public education is necessary in order to make our communities a safer place for our children. We must all take responsibility in **PROTECTING OUR FUTURE.**

WE NEED YOU TO STOP THE ABUSE

CONTACTS

For more information on child abuse, please contact:

RCMP Headquarters
Community, Contract and Aboriginal Policing Directorate
1200 Vanier Parkway
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0R2
Tel: (613) 993-8443
E-mail: victims@rcmp-ccaps.com

To report suspected child abuse, contact:

- local social services,
- any RCMP detachment or local police service,
- Kids Help Line/Jeunesse, J'écoute 1-800-668-6868.

Published by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Public Affairs and Information Directorate for

Community, Contract and Aboriginal Policing Services Directorate.

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JS 62-87-1995
ISBN 0-662-61767-3
PAID .391



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