

Handouts

- 3.1 Behavioural Signs of Sexual Abuse**
- 3.2 Physical Signs of Sexual Abuse in Children**
- 3.3 Guidelines for Responding to a Child**
- 3.4 General Information about Reporting A Child in Need of Protection**
- 3.5 What should an organization do if sexual abuse is alleged or disclosed**

3



3.1

Behavioural Signs of Sexual Abuse

In a Young Child

- Sexual knowledge or language that is inappropriate for the child's age or development
- An unusual interest in or preoccupation with sexual matters
- Hints about sexual activity through actions or comments that are inappropriate to the child's age or developmental level
- Inappropriate sexual play or behaviour with dolls/toys, other children or themselves
- Art that shows abuse
- Excessive masturbation
- Persistent urinating or defecating in clothes
- Regressive behaviour: baby talk, thumb sucking
- Fear or avoidance of any aspect of sexuality
- Sexually suggestive behaviour with adults or older children
- Consistent psychosomatic complaints or frequent depression
- Poor social boundaries
- Starting fires or fascination with fire

In an Older Child

- Sexual knowledge or language that is inappropriate for the child's age or development
- Hints about abusive sexual activity through actions or comments
- Sexually suggestive behaviour with adults or older children
- Consistent psychosomatic complaints or frequent depression
- Difficulty concentrating, withdrawn, overly obedient
- Seeming accident-prone
- Starting fires or fascination with fire
- Running away
- Promiscuity or prostitution
- Refusing to undress for gym, often wearing layers of clothing
- [creating] stories, poems, or artwork about abuse
- suicidal feelings or attempts
- destroying property, hurting or mutilating animals



3.2

Physical Signs of Sexual Abuse in Children

- Bruising, bleeding, swelling, tears or cuts of genitals or anus
- Unusual vaginal odour or discharge
- Torn, stained, or bloody clothing, especially underwear or itching in genital area, difficulty going to the bathroom, walking or sitting
- Sexually transmitted disease, especially in a pre-adolescent child
- Pregnancy

NOTE:

Behavioural and physical indicators may of course relate to matters other than sexual abuse, and the presence of any one of them does not necessarily mean that a child is being abused.



3.3

Guidelines for Responding to a Child

- Take the child seriously and stay calm
- Reassure and support the child. Say things like:
 - “I’m glad you told me; it was the right thing to do.”
 - “It’s not your fault.”
 - “This happens to other children.”
 - “I believe you.”
 - “I’m sorry this happened to you.”
 - “I’ll try to make sure you are safe.”
- Respond to the child’s questions and concerns, but don’t try to investigate. Children’s testimony can be tainted by well-meaning people who try to probe for information about what happened. Leave that to the authorities.
- Don’t make promises you can’t keep. Don’t tell a child that you will be able to keep this secret; don’t say “your parents won’t be upset;” don’t promise that the person who abused the child will be punished.
- Report the matter in confidence to the Board President or person or committee designated to deal with such matters.
- Any person, including a person who performs professional or official duties with respect to children, has an obligation to report promptly to a children’s aid society if he/she has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is in need of protection.
- The Act also penalizes the failure of a person with professional or official duties to report their suspicion, where the information upon which their suspicion is based was obtained in the course of their professional or official duties.



3.4

General Information about Reporting A Child in Need of Protection

1. Anyone who has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection must, by law, immediately report the suspicion and the information on which it is based to a children's aid society. In addition, where appropriate and/or where it is required as a policy, a report should be made to the police.
2. While government is responsible for legislation, regulations, standards and policy which set out minimum requirements for all child protection investigations, the specific process may vary from region to region and is often governed by police/CAS protocols.
3. The child protection worker and the police (if involved) are responsible for planning and conducting the investigation. This will usually include interviewing the child, the child's caregivers, the person who made the report, and others as appropriate. It is vital that organizations do not interfere with this process. Organizations should check with the authorities before disclosing any information about the situation to anyone.
4. Following their investigation, it is the responsibility of the police to determine whether criminal charges should be laid, and the responsibility of the CAS to determine whether the child is in need of protective services.
5. In Canada, a person is innocent until proven guilty. Organizations must remember that. At the same time, they must take steps to ensure the safety of all children involved in the organization until an investigation is concluded. If a member of an organization is under investigation for child sexual abuse, an organization should seek legal advice.



3.5

What should an organization do if sexual abuse is alleged or disclosed?

- A. Normality: Maintain the child's normal place in the group.
- B. Affection: Don't assume that the child doesn't want anyone to touch him or her—ask and express affection in appropriate ways if the child permits and wants it.
- C. Approval: Do what you can to validate the child—but don't make it so obvious or inappropriate that it becomes a reason for other children to comment.
- D. Consistency and Predictability: The child's life may be in chaos because of the abuse. Try and provide whatever consistency and predictability you can on the team or in the group.
- E. Sense of Belonging and Inclusion. Involve the child in the group's activities; make an effort to draw him or her in.
- F. Structure: Structure, just like consistency and predictability, can help a child gain some sense of control over his or her own life. Structure can help provide safety.
- G. Security/Confidentiality: Do not discuss the child's situation with anyone other than the authorities and the appropriate person/group in the organization.
- H. Behavioural Limits: This is as important as structure—the child should not be allowed to be disruptive or to display anti-social behaviour on the team or in the group.
- I. Encouragement and Stimulation: Where appropriate, help the child find resources that can help them or express their feelings in art.

(Adapted from Tools, Child Sexual Abuse Prevention: A Resource Kit)