

5.9

Child Abuse Reporting

School personnel are responsible both for reporting suspected child abuse and neglect and also for cooperating with resulting investigations. Identifying and supporting students who have experienced child abuse and neglect is important in meeting these responsibilities.

As a service provider, your role is to be aware of, and alert to, signs of child abuse or neglect. If you have reason to suspect that a child or youth has been, or is likely to be, at risk for abuse or neglect, you have a duty to report your concern to a child welfare worker. If the child or youth is in immediate danger, call police first.

Responding effectively to incidents of suspected child abuse and neglect may require a collaborative approach between our school, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), and the police.

Legal Duty to Report: Suspected Abuse at home or in Community

Section 14 of the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* (CFCSA) requires individuals to report promptly to a child welfare worker if they have reason to believe a child has been or is likely to be:

- physically harmed, sexually abused or exploited, or neglected by a parent, or
- otherwise in need of protection as set out in Section 13 of the CFCSA.

Any person with reason to believe that a child needs protection has a duty to report directly to a child welfare worker. Informing another person (e.g., a colleague or the principal) does not discharge your legal duty to report directly to a child welfare worker. You do not need to be certain that abuse and/or neglect has, is, or will occur; a child welfare worker will determine this and can discuss options and courses of action with you.

Your legal duty to report overrides any duty to protect the privacy of clients, patients, students or your staff — with the exception of solicitor-client privilege or confidentiality provisions of the federal Youth Criminal Justice Act.

What is Child Abuse and Neglect?

The following definitions are adapted from The BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect (pages 23-25):

Physical Abuse: a deliberate, non-accidental physical assault or injury by an adult or significantly older or more powerful child that results in, or is likely to result in, physical harm to a child.

Sexual Abuse: the use of a child for sexual gratification by a person in a position of trust and/or authority, or by a significantly older or more powerful child. It includes sexual touching, menacing or threatening sexual acts, obscene gestures, or deliberate exposure of the child to sexual activity or material.

Emotional Abuse: a pattern of destructive behaviour or verbal attacks by an adult on a child. Typical behaviours may include rejecting, terrorizing, ignoring, isolating, humiliating, insulting, scapegoating, exploiting or corrupting a child.

Neglect: failure to provide for a child's basic needs: food, clothing, adequate shelter, supervision and medical care. Neglect is the form of abuse most frequently reported to the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

Sexual Exploitation: permitting, encouraging or requiring a child to engage in conduct of a sexual nature for: stimulation, gratification or self-interest of another person; prostitution; or production of material of a pornographic nature.

Appointed School Officials: Suspected Abuse at School

As an Independent school, we are required to nominate at least two ‘Appointed School Officials’, a primary and an alternate, who are responsible for working with child care workers to determine whether a child has been harmed by someone who works or volunteers at the school, or works on contract for the school. The role of the alternate appointed official is to ensure the continuity of the reporting and investigation process in the event of possible involvement of the primary appointed official in a matter that falls under section 14 of the CFCSA. School authorities should delegate duties to the Appointed School Officials. Refer to the bottom of this document for current Appointed and Alternate School Officials, they are typically the Principal and a teacher.

In fulfilling the role as a school’s Appointed School Official, a person may be required to:

- investigate where appropriate on behalf of the school authority;
- ensure a safe school environment during investigations;
- consult with the child welfare worker and/or police;
- ensure that no school employee interferes with any investigations;
- communicate with parents with respect to actions taken by the school authority;
- report to the Commission for Teacher Regulation, Teacher Regulation Branch, Ministry of Education, when the School Authority dismisses, suspends or otherwise disciplines a certified teacher or school principal (Independent School Act section 7 and 7.2); and,
- refer student(s) for counselling according to the school’s policies.

Instruction in child abuse prevention will be provided to all students as part of the Career and Personal Planning curriculum. Information and/or training will be provided to staff/volunteers on an ongoing basis.

When reporting suspected child abuse and neglect, all staff/volunteers are required to complete the Report of Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect form and to follow the guidelines for maintaining confidentiality and security of information.

Contact Numbers:

- Provincial Centralized Screening, intake for reports 1-800-663-9122
- Ministry of Children and Family Development 250 559 4403
- RCMP 250 559 4421

Resources used in the development of this policy:

- *Supporting Our Students: A Guide for Independent School Personnel Responding to Child Abuse*
- *The B.C. Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect*

Current Appointed School Official: Principal Bobbi-Lee Chatelaine

Current Alternate Appointed School Official: Rose Powell