

## 306 Suspected Child Abuse

Adopted: April 4, 2007

### Policy

Understanding child abuse and neglect and knowing how to take appropriate action are critical in protecting our students. Responding to child abuse and neglect is a societal responsibility. Board personnel share this responsibility with parents, child protection social workers, police, and every citizen. Board personnel can help by identifying and reporting suspected child abuse and neglect, cooperating with all investigations, and supporting our students, emotionally and socially, in our classrooms and schools.

Child abuse and neglect means the physical or emotional injury, sexual abuse, negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child under the age of 19 by a person who is responsible for the child's care. Child abuse refers to the non-accidental situations in which a child suffers physical trauma, deprivation of basic physical and developmental needs, or emotional injury as a result of an act or omission by a parent, supervisor, or legal guardian.

There are three major categories of abuse:

1. Physical or sexual abuse (physical injuries, molestation, incest or sexual abuse arising from a failure to properly supervise the child)
2. Physical neglect (gross lack of supervision or abandonment, gross or repeated failure to meet the child's nutritional needs, failure to seek or comply with needed medical advice)
3. Emotional injury or neglect (failure to meet the emotional needs of the child for normal development, refusal to recognize and seek help for a child's emotional disturbance).

The *Child, Family and Community Service Act* imposes a duty on any person who has reason to believe that a child needs protection to promptly report the matter to a child protection social worker at an office of the Ministry for Children and Family Development. Failure to report constitutes an offense under the *Act* punishable by a fine and/or imprisonment.

### Administrative Procedures

#### Legal Duty to Report

1. The legal duty to report is the responsibility of each individual.
2. Any person with reason to believe that a child needs protection, or is likely to need protection, has a duty to report directly to a Child Protection Social Worker at the Ministry of Children and Family Development. ***If Board personnel have any doubts or questions about the Ministry of Children and Family Development term 'reason to believe,' contact the Child Protection Social Worker and seek***

*advice. Also, if Board personnel have any doubts about whether a report should be made, or whether further questions need to be asked, contact the Child Protection Social Worker and seek advice.*

3. Informing another person (e.g. colleague, Principal) does not discharge the legal duty to report *directly* to a Child Protection Social Worker.
4. If a child is in immediate danger, the RCMP/police should also be called. **Dial 911.**

### **Reporting Procedures for Board Employees**

The *Interministerial Agreement for Reporting Suspected Child Abuse* has defined specific roles for Board personnel in cases of suspected child abuse.

1. When the suspected abuser is an adult *outside* the school system:
  - Document the information on a *Report of Suspected Child Abuse Form*
  - Immediately report the incident to a Child Protection Social Worker at the Ministry of Children and Family Development
  - Inform the Principal of the school of the report
  - Do not inform parent(s), suspected abuser, or any other parties. This is the responsibility of the Child Protection Social Worker.
2. When the suspected abuser is a School District employee, contract service provider, or a volunteer:
  - Document the information on the *Report of Suspected Child Abuse Form*
  - Immediately report the incident to a Child Protection Social Worker at the Ministry of Children and Family Development
  - Inform the Superintendent of Schools of the report
  - Do not inform the principal, parent(s), suspected abuser or any other parties. This is the responsibility of the Child Protection Social Worker.
3. When the abuser is a child:
  - Notify and consult with the Principal of the school. It may or may not result in a report to the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

### **Procedures for handling a disclosure from a student:**

1. **Stay calm** and proceed slowly. Listen carefully and be supportive. Leave detailed questioning to the RCMP/police.
2. Reassure that the student has not done anything wrong, that you are sorry it happened, and that you will be talking to someone who can help.
3. Tell the student what will happen next.
4. Document and report immediately.

## **Guidelines for Maintaining Confidentiality**

In cases of suspected child abuse, the *Report of Suspected Child Abuse Form* and any supporting notes and documents should be placed in a confidential and secure place. Do not share this confidential information with anyone other than the Child Protection Social Worker, the RCMP/police, or as required by law.

Under the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*, information collected by Child Protection Social Workers is not governed by the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. Instead, the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* establishes its own laws about confidentiality and disclosure. These laws are intended to address the specific information concerns that arise in the context of child protection and preventive service work.