New Nouveau Brunswick

Child Protection

Be vigilant, report child abuse

Introduction

All children have the right to live free of abuse. Most children grow up in families where they are safe and secure. Others may be abused or neglected — and those children need our help.

Everyone has a role to play in keeping our children safe. This booklet tells you how you can help by:

- knowing the signs of abuse and neglect; and
- knowing what to do when a child may be at risk.

What is the law?

In New Brunswick, the law that protects children from abuse and neglect in the home is the *Family Services Act*.

The *Family Services Act* requires that any person who suspects that a child is being abused or neglected must immediately report those suspicions to an office of Social Development. This must be done even if the person obtained this information through a professional practice or within a confidential relationship.

The *Family Services Act* states that the identity of a person giving information shall not be revealed without that person's written consent, except if ordered by a judge during the course of a judicial proceeding. If a report also leads to a criminal investigation by the police, the identity of the person giving information may be provided to the police if that person is a witness to a criminal act.

What is child abuse and neglect?

Child Abuse can include sexual abuse, physical abuse, physical neglect and emotional maltreatment. All types of abuse identified are subject to intervention under the *Family Services Act*.

All residents of New Brunswick have a DUTY to report suspicions that a child may be abused or neglected. It is mandatory to report suspected child abuse and neglect of children under the age of nineteen (19).

Child abuse can occur in a number of different ways. Following are some examples:

Sexual abuse occurs when a person uses a child for sexual purposes, and refers to any sexual acts involving a child and a parent, caretaker, any person in a position of trust, and/or any other person.

Sexual abuse can include:

- sexually touching a child, or inviting a child to touch;
- intercourse (vaginal, oral or anal);
- threatening sexual acts, obscene gestures or communications, or stalking;
- sexual references (words or gestures) to the child's body or behaviour;
- sexual acts, including fondling, masturbation of another, exhibitionism, voyeurism;
- exposing a child to sexual activity or material, (that is, pornography); and
- asking the child to expose his or her body for sexual purposes.

Physical abuse refers to all actions resulting in non-accidental physical injury or harm. Such abuse is distinguished from reasonable use of force by its severity, inappropriateness for the age of the child, and its lack of healthy corrective purpose regarding the child's behaviour. The child's injuries may range from minor bruises, burns, welts or bite marks, to broken bones or — in extreme situations — death.

Physical abuse can include:

- hitting, kicking, slapping, shaking, pinching, choking;
- burns;
- human bites;
- broken bones;
- internal injuries; and
- superficial bruises and welts.

Physical neglect refers to acts of omission on the part of the parent/caregiver. This happens when a parent or caregiver overlooks a child's basic needs to the point where the child is or could be harmed.

Physical neglect can include failure to provide for the child's basic needs and appropriate level of care with respect to food, clothing, shelter, health, hygiene, supervision and safety, as determined by the community's minimum level of care standards.

Emotional maltreatment refers to both emotional abuse and emotional neglect of the child. These are the most difficult kinds of abuse to define and recognize. Emotional abuse can include overt rejection, criticism, blaming, threats, insults, humiliation, and excessive demands of performance for a child's age and ability.

Emotional neglect refers to the failure of the parent/caregiver to provide adequate psychological nurturing for a child's growth and development.

Emotional maltreatment can also happen to children who witness violence in their homes.

Exposure to domestic violence refers to when a child is living in a situation where there is domestic violence causing emotional harm to the child. It includes children seeing, hearing or being aware of violence perpetrated by one parent figure against another parent figure (adapted from training with Dr. Peter G Jaffe).

Indicators of child abuse and neglect

Children who are abused or neglected almost always show signs of what they have been going through. Some of the most common signs are listed below.

Physical warning signs of abuse and neglect may include:

- any injury — especially head or facial injuries — or bruising to a baby who is not yet crawling or walking;
- injuries where there is no explanation, the explanation does not seem to fit with the injuries, or the story keeps changing;
- injuries with a pattern or in the shape of an object such as a hand, stick, buckle, stove element, etc.;
- bruising in unusual places, such as the ears, neck, back, upper arms, thighs or buttocks;
- the child not getting proper medical attention;
- clothing being inadequate to protect the child from the weather;
- the child looking unwell or hungry, or who complains of hunger, or who is unusually thin or malnourished;
- Poor personal hygiene;
- unexplained anal or genital injuries;
- sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancy, especially in a young child;
- detailed and age-inappropriate sexual knowledge in language, behaviour, drawings, and play, or forcing another child into sexual play. Sexually aggressive behaviours with others;
- running away from home or being scared to go home;
- delinquent behaviour such as alcohol or drug use, stealing, setting fires, etc.;
- in a young child, not responding to affection or positive attention;
- poor self esteem, (that is, child appears anxious, sad, lacks confidence, is discouraged, refers to self as being bad, feels deserving to be punished, depressed, etc.);
- child appears extremely aggressive, or withdrawn;
- suicidal thoughts or self destructive behaviour (such as self-mutilation, suicide attempt, extreme risk-taking);
- withdrawal from family, friends and activities the child used to enjoy; and
- secretive about new friends, activities, phone calls or Internet use.

These are warning signs. **These signs do not always mean that abuse or neglect is happening**. If you do see one or more of these signs, you should be concerned and call Child Protection Services.

If a child tells you that he or she has been abused or neglected

Sometimes children who are being abused or neglected will tell someone they trust. If this happens to you:

Stay calm and listen. Do not become angry, shocked or upset, but remain calm and let the child tell his or her story. The child needs to know that it is okay to talk about what happened.

Go slowly. Let the child tell you what happened in his or her own way and at his or her own pace.

Be supportive. Let the child know that:

- he or she is not in trouble and has not done anything wrong;
- you believe him or her and they did the right thing by telling you;
- he or she is not to blame for what happened;
- you will do everything you can to help; and
- you know other people who can help them, too.

Get only the basic facts. Do not probe for details. It is sufficient to get only general information. The child will have to tell his or her story to a child protection social worker, and maybe the police, also. Remember that it is hard to have to talk about abuse or neglect again and again.

Explain to the child what will happen next. Let the child know you will need to report the abuse or neglect to the Department of Social Development, and that you will be talking to a child protection social worker who may need to come and talk to the child.

If the child asks questions, answer what you can. If you do not know the answer, it is okay to say, “I don’t know,” or “We can ask the child protection social worker about that.” Do not make promises you cannot keep. **DO NOT PROMISE TO KEEP THE ABUSE OR NEGLECT A SECRET.**

If you suspect that a child may be abused or neglected

If you suspect that a child may be abused or neglected, call Child Protection Services at the nearest office of the Department of Social Development. You do not need proof that abuse or neglect has occurred — just report what you know. Do not assume that someone else has made the referral to Child Protection Services. Reports may be made during regular office hours, or emergencies may be reported during the after hours, weekends and holidays.

All residents of New Brunswick have a **DUTY** to report suspicion that a child may be abused or neglected.

What to expect when you make a report.

The person to whom you make a report will be a social worker trained in responding to reports of child abuse and neglect. You will be asked for basic information, such as:

- name and address of the child victim and his/her parents or other persons responsible for his/her care;
- child's birth date or age;
- names and ages of other persons who live with the child, and their relationships to the child, if known;
- any immediate concerns for the child's safety (that is, nature and extent of the child's abuse or neglect). Any indications of previous abuse or neglect;
- why you think the child is presently at risk;
- what the child has said;
- any information about the alleged offender, including present whereabouts, and history of the alleged offender;
- whether any other children may be affected; and
- what other agencies or people are involved with the family.

Do not wait until you have all this information. Tell the child protection social worker what you know. The social worker will also ask for your name, telephone number, and how you know the child. If you do not want to give your name or phone number, that is okay. If you do, every effort will be made to keep your name confidential.

What happens following my report?

If the report is accepted for investigation, the Department of Social Development is obligated by the *Family Services Act* to investigate reports of suspected child abuse and neglect to determine if the child has been harmed or

is at risk of harm. The child protection social worker will gather as much information as possible by talking to the child, family members and, if necessary, others in the community.

If the abuse or neglect is substantiated, a plan must be put in place to ensure the safety of the child. If the child is at immediate risk of harm, the social worker will act right away to keep the child safe. If the child is not at immediate risk, work will begin with the parents to improve their ability to care for the child. Both of these processes may require the use of other family members, friends or community resources.

The social worker and the family will work together to ensure the safety and security of the child, and will attempt to resolve issues through Immediate Response Conference, Family Group Conference or Child Protection Mediation. If matters cannot be resolved through these collaborative approaches or if not appropriate for resolution in this manner, then the department would proceed to family court.

Children are removed from their homes only if nothing less disruptive will protect them. Such decisions could be made by the family at an immediate response conference, a family group conference, child protection mediation or if necessary a court process starts. In a court process, a family court judge hears evidence from all sides, then decides where the child will live until he/she can safely return home.

Who do you contact?

If you suspect that a child may be abused or neglected, please contact the nearest Office of Department of Social Development listed below:

Region 1
Moncton, Richibucto
1-866-426-5191

Region 2
Saint John, Sussex, St. Stephen, St. George
1-866-441-4340

Region 3
Fredericton, Woodstock, Perth-Andover
1-866-444-8838

Region 4
Edmundston, Grand Falls
1- 866-441-4249

Region 5
Campbellton, Kedgwick
1-866-441-4245

Region 6
Bathurst 1-866-441-4341

Region 7
Miramichi, Neguac
1-866-441-4246

Region 8
Acadian Peninsula-Caraquet, Tracadie-Sheila, Shippagan
1-866-441-4149

You may also make a report by calling 1-888-99ABUSE (1-888-992-2873).

After hours – After hours (Monday to Friday, 4:30 p.m. to 8:30 a.m., and all day Saturday, Sunday and statutory holidays), call After Hours Emergency Social Services (AHESS) at 1-800-442-9799.

If the child is in **immediate danger**, call 911 or your local police.

Early reporting of child abuse and neglect is vital.
You may prevent a child from suffering further harm.

Be vigilant.
www.gnb.ca/socialdevelopment

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