

What to do if you have concerns about possible child abuse

When a person becomes aware that a child may be or has been abused, there is a legal and ethical responsibility to take action. The legal responsibility comes from child welfare legislation within each province and territory and may also be a duty of a person's profession or workplace.

The responsibility to report means that a person who has knowledge or information that a child is being or is at risk of being abused must report it to someone:

If the information relates to potential abuse of a child by the child's parent or guardian, the person must report it to child welfare or police.

If the concern involves potential abuse by any other person, the individual should report it to the child's parent or guardian and may also be obligated to report it to child welfare and/or police.

Reporting information about potential child abuse allows:

An authority, like child welfare or police, to determine whether it is necessary to investigate.

The parent(s) or guardian(s) to proactively take steps to protect their child.

Mandatory reporting legislation removes any personal or professional dilemma from becoming a barrier to reporting. It is not uncommon for people to minimize or deny what a child tells them during a disclosure. People are often concerned about being wrong and causing problems. Remember, reporting may disrupt existing or future sexual abuse from occurring against other children, as well.

If a person learns about past child sexual abuse that is no longer occurring, it's still important to report the abuse. The offender may still have access to other children and those children may be at risk.



People are responsible for reporting concerns, not proving abuse.

How do you report misconduct or concerning behaviour ?

While obvious sexual acts are easier to identify and address, behaviour that doesn't meet the threshold of abuse still needs to be acted upon. Misconduct is considered adult behaviour towards a child that is inappropriate and that breaches reasonable boundaries:

If you observe or hear about concerning behaviour or an inappropriate situation between an adult and your child or another child within the organization, report your concerns to the organization.

If you have contact with the child outside the organization (e.g., you know the child's parents), you should still report to the organization and also report your concerns to the child's parents.

In some circumstances, particularly if your concerns are not addressed or you become aware of more information, you may wish to consider involving the appropriate authorities.

Flagging the concerning behaviour to the organization should trigger a review in an effort to correct and stop the possible misconduct. It will also allow an organization to address any behaviour that's not consistent with its policies and procedures.

Flagging concerning behaviour to a parent may help the parent address the issue with the organization and discuss it with their child if appropriate.

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