

END VIOLENCE TOGETHER

For The Dignity Of Every Woman

FACT SHEET

(Updated August 2012)

CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse is a crime and affects the child's psychological, emotional, physical and social well-being.

DEFINITION¹

Child abuse refers to the mistreatment, abuse or neglect that a child or adolescent may experience while in the care of someone they trust or depend on, such as a parent, sibling, other relative, caregiver or guardian. Abuse may take place anywhere and may occur, for example, within the child's home or that of someone known to the child. Child abuse includes:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse & exploitation
- Neglect
- Emotional abuse

Physical abuse may be one incident or it may happen repeatedly over a period of time. It involves the deliberate use of force against a child that either injures them or poses a risk of injury. Physical abuse includes:

- Hitting/beating
- Shaking
- Pushing
- Choking
- Biting
- Burning
- Kicking
- Assault with a weapon

It also includes holding a child under water, or any other dangerous or harmful use of force or restraint. Female genital mutilation is another form of physical abuse.

Place Your Agency Information Here

Sexual abuse and exploitation involves using a child for sexual purposes. Examples include fondling, inviting or forcing a child to touch or be touched sexually, intercourse, rape, sodomy, exhibitionism, incest or involving a child in prostitution or pornography.

Neglect in most cases is chronic, and most often than not, occurs repeatedly. It involves failing to provide for a child's physical, psychological or emotional needs, development and well-being. Examples of neglect include failing to provide a child with food, clothing, shelter, hygiene, medical care or safety from harm. Emotional neglect can be defined as failing to provide a child with love, protection or a sense of worth.

Emotional abuse involves harming a child's sense of self. It results in or places a child at risk for serious behavioral, cognitive, emotional or mental health problems. Examples of emotional abuse include verbal threats, social isolation, intimidation, exploitation, or routinely making unreasonable demands. It also includes frightening a child, or exposing them to family violence.

An abuser may use a number of different tactics to gain access to a child's trust, and exert control over them. They may prevent the child from telling anyone about the abuse or seeking support. Abuse is a misuse of power and a violation of trust. A child who is being abused is often dependent on the person who is abusing them, or is getting something from that person they cannot get elsewhere, such as love, freedom, attention, etc. The abuse may happen once or may occur repeatedly and in an escalating pattern over a period of months or years. The abuse may change form over time.

STATISTICS

- The Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2008 (CIS-2008) is the third nation-wide study to examine the incidents of reported child maltreatment in Canada based on data from child welfare authorities. An estimated 235,842 maltreatment investigations were conducted across Canada in 2008. Thirty six percent of the investigations were substantiated, with evidence indicating that maltreatment had occurred.
 - Neglect and exposure to intimate partner violence were the most common forms of substantiated maltreatment at 34% each.
 - The second most common form of substantiated maltreatment was physical abuse at 20%.
 - Emotional abuse was the primary form of maltreatment in 9% of cases while 3% of the substantiated investigations identified sexual abuse as the primary form of maltreatment.²
- According to the Family Violence Statistical Profile from Statistics Canada, 2011:
 - Police-reported data from 2009 indicate that children and youth under the age of 18 were most likely to be sexually victimized or physically assaulted by someone they knew (85% of incidents).

- Nearly 55,000 children and youth were victims of a sexual or physical offence in 2009, with 3 out of 10 of the offences being perpetrated by a family member.
 - Six out of ten children and youth victims of family violence were assaulted by their parents. Children under the age of three were most vulnerable to violence by a parent.
 - Of the 15,000 child and youth victims of family-related violence, around 67% (two-thirds) were physically assaulted and 33% (one-third) suffered sexual offences.
 - The rate of family-related sexual offences were more than four times higher for girls than for boys. The rate of physical assault was similar for boys and girls.³
- Over the past 10 years, there have been 326 homicides committed against a child or youth (under 17 years) by a family member. Parents committed the majority (84%) of family-related homicides against children and youth. Children under the age of 4, who were killed by a family member, were most often shaken or beaten to death whereas older children were most often killed with a weapon such as a firearm or knife.⁴
 - Many cases of child abuse are still not reported to either police or child welfare authorities.

IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Child abuse has devastating consequences. Depending on its form(s), duration and severity, abuse may affect every aspect of a child's life:

- Abuse may have consequences that are psychological, physical, behavioral, academic, sexual, interpersonal, self-perceptual or spiritual.⁵
- The effects of abuse may differ according to the nature of the response to the abuse, and whether the abuse was disclosed or reported. Effects can appear right away or surface later in adolescence or adulthood.
- Girls and boys are affected differently by abuse. Compared to boys, girls are more likely to internalize their response to violence, and experience, for example, suicidal ideation, eating disorders, low self-esteem and psychological disorders. Boys are more likely to externalize their response to violence, displaying, for example, increased aggression, delinquency and spousal abuse. Boys who have been exposed to violence in their homes are more likely to be violent in their adolescent and adult relationships than boys not exposed to violence.⁶
- Behavioral or emotional problems are common among maltreated children. The Canadian Incident Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2008, indicated that in 46% of substantiated child maltreatment investigations, children showed at least one child functioning issue. Twenty three percent of the children had academic difficulties, 19%

suffered from depression, anxiety and withdrawal and 15% had issues with aggression.⁷

RESPONDING TO CHILD ABUSE

A child who is being abused is usually in a position of dependence on the abuser, whether it is for love, food, shelter, attention, and safety. The power imbalance between the child and the abuser often increases the burden of disclosure. Children who are sexually abused, for example, may not tell anyone for a long time, or ever. Many children who experienced abuse while living in special needs institutions, child welfare facilities, youth detention facilities, and residential schools for Aboriginal children are only now, as adults, reporting the abuse.

Individuals who witness or suspect that a child is being abused may not report it because they:

- Want to avoid the demands of becoming “involved”.
- Have personal views which condone the use of physical punishment.
- Believe that the abuse is not “serious”, especially if the child does not have visible or severe injuries.
- Believe that reporting the abuse to the authorities is not in the child's best interest.
- Believe that reporting may not solve the problem because, for example, there may be a lack of appropriate services to help the child.
- Lack knowledge about the signs and symptoms of abuse.
- Do not understand their responsibility to report abuse.
- Do not know that they can report anonymously to the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

Duty to Report: Child, Family and Community Service Act:⁸

The Child, Family and Community Service Act is BC's child protection legislation and includes a duty to report where a person has reason to believe that a child needs protection. Under Section 14 of the Act, anyone with a reason to believe that a child needs protection must report the circumstances to a child protection worker at the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). Section 13 of the act lists specific situations where protection is needed. These include (please refer to the Act for a comprehensive list):

- Cases where the child has been, or is likely to be, sexually abused or exploited by the child's parent.
- Cases where the child has been, or is likely to be physically harmed, sexually abused, or sexually exploited by someone else and the child's parent does not protect the child.
- Cases where the child is emotionally harmed by the parent's conduct.

For reporting purposes, a child in BC, is anyone who is under 19 years of age.

RESOURCES

There are approximately 400 programs to assist with violence against women and children in BC. These include:

- Community-Based Victim Services Programs
- Stopping the Violence Counselling Programs
- Stopping the Violence Outreach/Multicultural Programs
- Transition Houses
- Children Who Witness Abuse Programs
- Second Stage Houses
- Safe Homes

VictimLink BC provides information and referral services for victims of family and sexual violence and all other crimes. It is a multilingual line.

- Call toll-free in BC at 1-800-563-0808, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- VictimLink BC is TTY accessible. Call TTY at (604) 875-0885. If calling from outside the Lower Mainland, please call the Telus Relay Service at 711. Text 604-836-6381. Email victimlinkbc@bc211.ca.

Helpline for Children

- Call 310-1234 (no area code required), 24 hours a day everyday.
- If calling from a pay phone, call the operator "0". **This is a free call.**
- To use the TDD (Telephone Device for the Deaf), call 1-866-660-0505.

CONTACT US

- If you want more information
- If you need help
- If you want to volunteer or make a donation

PLACE YOUR PROGRAM NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION HERE.

REFERENCES:

- ¹ *Child Abuse: A fact sheet from the Department of Justice Canada.* Department of Justice Canada. Available at: <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/fv-vf/facts-info/child-enf.html#ftn1>
- ² *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2008: Major Findings.* Ottawa: Public Health Agency 2010.
- ³ Statistics Canada, 2011. *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile*, Catalogue no. 85-224-X.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ *The Consequences of Child Maltreatment: A Reference Guide for Health Practitioners*, Health Canada, 1998.
- ⁶ *Violence Prevention and The Girl Child: Final Report 1999.* Alliance of Five Research Centres on Violence.
Mia Dauvergne and Holly Johnson. “Children Witnessing Family Violence”. *Juristat*, Statistics Canada, 2001.
- ⁷ *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2008: Major Findings.* Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada 2010.
- ⁸ *Sexual Assault: Victim Service Worker Handbook.* Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Victim Services and Crime Prevention Division, January 2007.

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