

What is Child Abuse and Neglect?

In B.C., a child is anyone under the age of 19. Child abuse can take different forms. It may be physical, sexual, emotional – or the result of neglect.

What is Child Protection?

In British Columbia, the law that protects children from abuse and neglect in their homes is the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*. This law says that anyone who has concerns about a child's safety and well-being must report that concern to a child welfare worker.

Children who suffer abuse and neglect are also often victims of an offence under the *Criminal Code of Canada*. Police respond first when a child is in immediate danger, or when someone has committed a crime.

YOUR DUTY TO REPORT!

Under B.C. law you have a duty to report your concerns if you have reason to believe a child has been, or is likely to be, abused or neglected. "Reason to believe" means that, based on what you have seen, or information you have, you believe a child could be at risk.

What if I think a child is at risk?

If the child is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1 or your local police. You do not need proof to report a child at risk of abuse or neglect. Just report what you know. Phone the Helpline for Children at 310-1234 at any time of the day or night. The Helpline call is free and confidential. The person you speak to will be a child welfare worker, trained in responding to reports of child abuse and neglect.

How can I contact a Child Welfare Worker?

Contact Enquiry BC, Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Call: 1-800-661-8773. Ask for your local Ministry of Children and Family Development office.

What can I expect when I make a report?

The child welfare worker will ask you for basic information, such as:

- The child's name, age and location
- Any immediate concerns for the child's safety
- Why you think the child is at risk
- What the child has said
- Any information about the child's parents and/or the alleged offender(s)

What happens after I make a report?

A child welfare worker will look into your report and decide on the best way to keep the child safe. If the child is at immediate risk of harm, the child welfare worker – and others, such as police, family and community members – will act right away to keep the child safe.

If the child is NOT at immediate risk but needs help, the child welfare worker may offer support for the family, or connect them with others who can help in their community.

Wherever possible, a child welfare worker will work out a plan with the family that will strengthen the family's ability to help keep the child safe. If necessary, a child welfare worker may also start an investigation. This involves seeing and talking to the child and people who know the child, such as parents, extended family, a teacher, doctor or child-care provider.

Children can only be removed from their homes if nothing else will protect them. If this happens, a court process starts. A family court judge hears evidence from all sides and then decides where the child will live until the child can safely return home.

If the child welfare worker removes your child from your home or you think this may happen, get a lawyer right away. A lawyer can help you work out an agreement for your child's care, explain papers you're asked to sign, and go to court for you. If you can't pay a lawyer, legal aid may pay for one for you.

Where can I get more help and information?

- Legal Services Society of BC (Legal Aid): www.legalaid.bc.ca. Phone: 1-866-577-2525
- Parent Support Services of BC: www.ParentSupportBC.ca. Phone: 1-800-665-6880
- BC Council for Families: www.BCCF.bc.ca. Phone: 1-800-663-5638
- BC's Family Resource Database: www.InYourGrasp.bc.ca
- Canadian Centre for Child Protection: www.ProtectChildren.ca

What if I don't speak or understand English?

VictimLINK provides help for anyone who has been a victim of crime or someone who witnesses a crime. The service is confidential, anonymous and multilingual. Call any time: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. VictimLINK: 1-800-563-0808 or visit www.VictimLinkBC.ca.

Some information in this document is taken directly from the Legal Services Society publication:
"If Your Child is Taken: Your Rights as a Parent".

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