

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.

What is child abuse and neglect?

Child abuse can include sexual abuse, physical abuse, physical neglect and emotional maltreatment.

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.

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 and its 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 neglect refers to acts of omission on the part of the parent/caregiver. This happens when a parent or caregiver ignores 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.

Emotional maltreatment refers to both emotional abuse and emotional neglect of the child. 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, and includes children seeing, hearing or being aware of violence perpetrated by one parent figure against another parent figure.

What are indicators of child abuse and neglect?

Some of the most common 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, or the explanation does not seem to fit with the injuries;
- 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;
- clothing is inadequate to protect the child from the weather;
- the child looks unwell or hungry, or complains of hunger, or is unusually thin or malnourished;
- unexplained anal or genital injuries;
- detailed and age-inappropriate sexual knowledge in language, behaviour, drawings, or 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.;
- poor self esteem (that is, the child appears anxious, sad, lacks confidence, discouraged, refers to self as being bad, feels deserving to be punished, depressed, etc.);
- 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 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. 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 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 sixteen (16), and of disabled persons under the age of nineteen (19).

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.

Planning and decision-making processes such as immediate response conference, family group conference, child protection mediation, or traditional ways of bringing families and communities together can be used to make plans to keep children safe with their families.

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, and 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:

1-833-SDDStel (1-833-733-7835)

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