

Administrative Procedure 325

CHILD ABUSE

Background

Children have a right to be safe and adequately cared for at home, at school and in the community. School staff have a responsibility to safeguard children from abuse and neglect and will seek to work in cooperation with Alberta Children's Services, the police and/or medical services in order to fulfill that responsibility.

Definitions

Child abuse, as defined by the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* and where child intervention services may become involved, is any act of maltreatment of a child by a parent/guardian that results in injury or harm. Child abuse by someone other than a parent/guardian must be reported to the police.

The four main types of abuse are:

1. neglect
2. emotional injury
3. physical abuse
4. sexual abuse

Each situation and family is different so, while some of the signs might point to abuse, they might also mean that the family is facing other problems which may contribute to child abuse.

1. Neglect: Neglect is failing to provide age appropriate basic care such as food, clothing, shelter, love and affection, medical and dental care, education, and protection from harm. If the parent/guardian cannot or will not provide these things to a child, it is neglect. While neglect is not always obvious, a pattern of ongoing neglect, or inadequate care, can often be seen.
2. Emotional Injury: Emotional abuse is an attack on the child's self-concept and self-worth. It is a pattern of ongoing behaviour by the parent/guardian that seriously interferes with the healthy development or the mental or emotional functioning of the child. Emotional abuse often happens along with other forms of abuse, such as neglect or physical abuse. Emotional injury is the least visible form of child abuse. In fact, a child may appear to be clean, well-groomed and well fed. But the child may be sad, depressed, timid, angry or withdrawn. Emotional abuse has serious, long term effects on children and can often outlast the impact of neglect or physical injury.
3. Physical Abuse: Physical abuse is any act by the parent/guardian which results in trauma or injury to any part of a child's body. It is the most visible form of child abuse, and can happen once or many times. These injuries are often the result of unreasonable, severe corporal punishment of a child. If physical abuse keeps up, the injuries to the child become more severe and it becomes more difficult to eliminate the abusive behaviour. Children often

explain injuries by saying they had an accident while playing or they got it while fighting with a sibling.

Accidental injuries look different and are usually in different places from non-accidental injuries. This is especially true in infants because they do not move around much on their own. Injuries such as broken ribs and femurs, spiral fractures, facial bruising, acceleration/de-acceleration brain injuries (shaken baby syndrome), failure to thrive (dehydration and malnutrition) are taken very seriously.

4. Sexual Abuse Sexual Abuse is the inappropriate exposure or subjection of a child to sexual contact, activity or behaviour by a parent/guardian.

Sexual abuse can include:

- 4.1. “non-touching” activities (e.g. obscene phone calls/conversations, indecent exposure or exhibitionism, masturbation in front of a child, deliberate exposure to others engaged in sexual activities, exposure to any forms of pornographic material)
- 4.2. “sexual touching” activities (e.g. fondling a child, making a child touch an adult’s genital area, or sexual intercourse)
- 4.3. “sexual exploitation” (e.g. engaging a child for prostitution, using a child in pornography or luring a child via the Internet for sexual purposes). In Alberta, children and youth under the age of 18 who are involved in prostitution are considered to be victims of sexual abuse, and have legislation to protect them. Children’s Services has more information about sexual exploitation.

A child who has been sexually abused may or may not show any behavioural or emotional reaction to sexual abuse. The most important sign of sexual abuse is a child telling someone about the abuse. Because children commonly delay telling anyone about chronic or acute abuse, all disclosures should be taken seriously.

Procedures

1. The Associate Superintendent, Learning Services has the responsibility to ensure that all staff is aware of the obligations to report under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act.
2. Division employees are required to report suspected cases of abuse and neglect to the appropriate authorities in accordance with the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act.
 - 2.1 The Child Abuse Hotline may be contacted any time at 1-800-387-KIDS (5437).
 - 2.2 The Supervisor (intake and assessment) for the Edmonton and Area Child and Family Services Authority-Leduc Office can be reached at 780-986-7869.
3. The safety and welfare of the students are of paramount concern in addressing cases of suspected child abuse. Reports of suspected abuse will remain confidential on the basis of those who need to know in order to protect the safety and welfare of the child.

4. The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act prescribes penalties for those who fail to report such situations, and provides protection against a person making a report unless the reporting “is done maliciously or without reasonable and probable grounds for the belief”.
5. Case workers and police may have access to students in certain circumstances when the students are alleged victims of abuse or neglect. In such special circumstances, assessors are expected to consider the convenience to the school and student when seeking times for access.
 - 5.1 Case workers advise that, in the interests of confidentiality and full and undistorted disclosure, it is appropriate for assessors and students to meet alone.
 - 5.2 If a student requests that a staff member be present, the Principal will comply with the request.
6. The Principal may ask case workers and police to present; identification, provide an explanation of the nature of the investigation being proposed, and to state reasons for conducting the investigation at school.
7. It will be the out-of-school assessor’s responsibility to notify parents about an investigation.
 - 7.1 The Principal will clarify with the assessor when contact will be made with the parent.
 - 7.2 The Principal will provide the name of the assessor to the parent in those cases where students are in the care of the investigator.
8. If threats are made against school personnel or the student, the Principal will contact the police.
9. The delivery of child personal safety programs is approved and supported by Division schools. Staff is to ensure that parents are aware of the programs and their contents.

Reference: Section 11, 33, 52, 53, 56, 196, 197, 222 Education Act
Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act
Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act
Ministry of Children’s Services
Practice Review of Teachers Regulation 4/99
Responding to Child Abuse – A Handbook (October 2005)
Student Record Regulation 225/2006
Student Record Regulation Information Bulletin 3.2.7