

When a child discloses abuse...

Stay calm and listen

An abused or neglected child needs to know that you are calm and available to help them. Reactions of shock, outrage, or fear may inhibit the child and make them feel more anxious or ashamed. A calm response not only allows the child to tell their story, it also provides the reassurance that what has happened is not so bad that it cannot be talked about and worked through calmly.

Go slowly

It is normal to feel inadequate or unsure about what to do or say when a child tells you about their abuse. As a result, there is a tendency to rush things. Frequently, too much is asked too quickly. Proceed slowly.

Reassure them that they have not done anything wrong

Any questions that are asked are usually associated in the child's mind with getting into trouble. Avoid using "why" questions. For example: "Why did he/she hit you?" suggests indirectly that the child may have done something wrong and increases the child's reluctance to discuss the matter.

Be supportive

Children need support and reassurance when discussing their abuse or neglect. It is helpful to let the child know that:

- they are not in trouble;
- they are safe with you;
- you are glad that they have chosen to tell you about this;
- they have done the right thing telling about this;
- you are sorry that they have been hurt or that this has happened to them;
- you know others who can be trusted to help

Gather essential facts only

If this is the first time the child has disclosed abuse or neglect, a full investigation will be necessary. To avoid the child having to endure multiple interviews, **limit your discussion to finding out generally what took place.** When you have sufficient information and reason to believe that abuse and/or neglect has occurred, gently stop gathering facts and be supportive.

Tell the child what will happen next

- Must be reported
- Never tell the child you won't tell anyone.
- Why it must be reported – to keep the child safe
- Let the child know they are safe

Children who disclose their abuse feel anxious and vulnerable about what people think of them and what will happen next. **It is important, however, to avoid making promises to the child about what may or may not happen next. For example, avoid promises that the alleged perpetrator won't get into trouble.** Provide only reassurance that is realistic and achievable. Discuss with the child what you think will happen next and who will be involved.

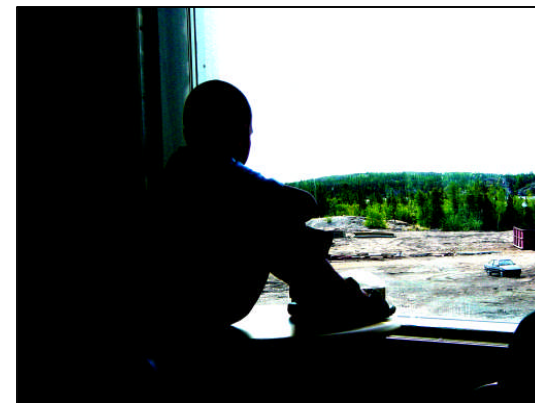
Report

Report disclosures of abuse or neglect immediately to a child protection Social Worker for follow-up and investigation. If a Social Worker is not available in your community, call the RCMP.

Make notes

Make notes of all comments made using the child's exact words where possible. Save all drawings and artwork. This information needs to be shared with the Social Worker, who may need to share this with the RCMP.

RECOGNIZING INDICATORS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT



If you have reason to believe a child is being abused...

**Call your local
Social Worker
Yellowknife Health and
Social Services Authority
873-7276**

**Evening and Weekends
On Call Social Worker
873-1929
or call the RCMP**



Behavioral Indicators Of Physical Abuse

- the story of what happened does not match the injury
- refuses or is afraid to talk about injuries
- is afraid of adults or of a particular person
- does not want to be touched
- may be very:
 - aggressive, unhappy, withdrawn, uncooperative, or wanting to please
- does not get along well with other children
- tries to hurt him/herself (e.g. cutting oneself, suicide)

Physical Indicators Of Physical Abuse

- suspicious bruising
 - unusual patterns, clustered or reflective of the instrument used
- bruises shaped like a handprint
- unexplained injuries
- repeated and multiple injuries
- skull, jaw or nose fractures.
- spiral fractures of the long arm or leg bones.
- fractures in various stages of healing
- cuts/scrapes that don't happen when playing
- human bite marks anywhere
- burns
 - cigar or cigarette burns
 - glove or sock-like burns
- signs of possible head injury: swelling, pain, nausea or vomiting

INDICATORS

- ❖ Indicators are the signs, symptoms or clues which may mean that a child has been abused or neglected or may be at risk for abuse or neglect.
- ❖ Indicators do not prove that a child has been abused or neglected. They are clues that should warn people that a child may need help.
- ❖ Indicators may be seen in the child's physical health or behavior.

Behavioral Indicators of Children Who Have Been Sexually Abused

- nightmares, trouble sleeping, fear of the dark
- extreme fear of "monsters"
- spacing out at odd times
- loss of appetite, or trouble eating or swallowing
- sudden mood swings, fear, anger or withdrawal
- fear of certain people or places
- stomach illness all the time with no identifiable reason
- an older child behaving like a younger child, such as bed-wetting or thumb sucking
- sexual activities with toys or other children, such as simulating sex with dolls or asking other children/siblings to behave sexually
- new words for private body parts
- refusing to talk about a "secret" he/she has with an adult or older child
- talking about a new older friend
- suddenly having money
- cutting or burning herself or himself as an adolescent

Physical warning signs a child may have been sexually abused

- unexplained bruises, redness, or bleeding of the child's genitals, anus or mouth
- pain at the genitals, anus or mouth
- genital sores or milky fluids in the genital area

Recognizing indicators of possible child abuse and neglect

While many indicators, particularly those of a behavioral nature, may be signs of other problems, a series or cluster of indicators observed over a period of time may be cause for concern regarding abuse or neglect. These signs or indicators often happen in combinations or as dramatic changes from normal behavior. They may be the child's reaction to abuse, and can be a way of communicating that he or she has been, or is being, abused or neglected or is witnessing abuse.

Behavioral Indicators in Children Who Have Been Neglected

- Does not show skills as expected
- Appears to have little energy
- Cries very little
- Does not play with toys or notice people
- Does not seem to care for anyone in particular
- May be very demanding of affection or attention from others
- Older children may steal food, drink alcohol or take drugs (break the law)
- Takes care of a lot of their needs on their own
- Has a lot of adult responsibility at home
- Discloses neglect (e.g., says there is no one at home)

Physical Indicators in Children Who Have Been Neglected

- An infant or young child may:
 - Not be growing as expected
 - Be losing weight
 - Have a "wrinkly old face"
 - Very thin arms and legs
 - Bloated belly
 - Pale, pasty skin color
 - Lack of muscle tone
- Not dressed properly for the weather
- Dirty or unwashed
- Bad diaper rash or other skin problems
- Always hungry
- Lack of medical and dental care

By themselves, these signs do not prove abuse or neglect. But they do tell us we need to know more. Indicators can be the result of disruptions to the child's normal routines, such as divorce, separation, death of a significant person or the arrival of a new sibling. That's why concerns of abuse and neglect must be assessed by professionals. The important thing to know is what the signs are, and how to report them if a child may need protection. The above is not an exhaustive lists of indicators.