

What is child abuse?

When people think about child abuse, they usually think of physical and sexual abuse. But more than 50 per cent of children and youth who come into provincial government care in Alberta do so because of neglect. There are four main types of abuse:

Emotional abuse is verbal attacks on a child's sense of self, repeated humiliation or rejection. Exposure to violence, drugs, alcohol abuse or severe conflict in the home, forced isolation, restraint or causing a child to be afraid much of the time may also cause emotional harm.

Neglect is when the child's day-to-day basic needs are not met includes failing to provide adequate nutrition, clothing, shelter, health care and protection from harm. Emotional neglect is the failure to meet the child's ongoing emotional needs for affection and a sense of belonging.

Physical abuse is the intentional use of force on any part of a child's body that results in injuries. It may be a single incident or a series or pattern of incidents.

Sexual abuse is the improper exposure of a child to sexual contact, activity or behaviour. It includes any sexual touching, intercourse, exploitation or exposure and can be perpetrated by anyone, including a parent or guardian, caregiver, extended family, friend, neighbour or stranger.

Children and Youth Services may also become involved in emergency situations, including when the parents, youth or child are intoxicated, high or suicidal, or if a child has been abandoned.

What contributes to child abuse?

Stress, inadequate parenting skills, lack of positive parent-child involvement, criminal or mental health issues, many children in care and poverty are all factors that can lead to child abuse by parents, guardians, extended family, friends, neighbours, caregivers and strangers. Family violence, lack of social supports, history of child abuse, and alcohol and drug abuse are the most frequent contributing factors in substantiated cases of child abuse.

(MacLaurin, et al., 2005)

What to do if a child discloses abuse:

- Listen to the child
- Allow the child to tell what happened in his or her own words
- Do not ask leading questions
- Remain calm and neutral
- Do not over-react, show horror or anger, or any other reaction that would lead the child to believe the abuse or neglect was his/her fault
- Support and acknowledge the child's feelings
- Reassure the child
- Tell the child you believe what you have heard
- Comfort the child by saying that it was a good thing for him/her to tell you
- Assure the child that you will do something to help
- Do not attempt to intervene on your own.
- **CALL THE CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE: 1-800-387-5437 (KIDS) or contact your local Child and Family Services Authority, Delegated First Nations Agency or police.**

What information will you need to provide?

- All reports are confidential and you can choose to remain anonymous, however you may choose to provide your name and telephone number
- How long you have known the child/family
- What your relationship is to the child/family
- Information about the family
- What your concern is about the child(ren)
- What you have seen/heard
- What the child or others have told you
- Where the child is now
- What you have done to support the child/family
- What supports (formal or informal) are involved with the family.

What happens once a report is made?

The information provided by the caller will be reviewed and referred for investigation as needed. Based on the outcome of the investigation, the child and his or her family may be referred to community supports, receive family enhancement services or actions to further protect the child may be taken, such as a voluntary agreement to receive services and supports or court order to take the child into the care of the province.