



What Schools can do about *Child Abuse/ Children Exposed to Family Violence* Information Sheet

Get Help

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, phone 911.

If you suspect that a child may be abused, neglected or exposed to family violence, phone your local Child and Family Services Authority, the Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-387-KIDS (5437) or the police.

For information about family violence resources available in your community, phone the 24-hour Family Violence Info Line at 310-1818, toll-free in Alberta, or visit www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca.

Alberta Children's Services is proud to lead Alberta's Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying Initiative.

For some students, school may be safer than home

Teachers and other school staff are in a position to help children and youth who are abused or exposed to family violence. These adults see children regularly and have the opportunity to observe changes in behaviour or other signs of trouble in a child's life.

Recognizing abuse

A student who is abused or exposed to family violence may show some of the following signs:

- hard-to-explain physical injuries
- sexual behaviour inappropriate for the age level, overt sexual behaviour, dressing provocatively
- dressing inappropriately for the weather
- crying or lagging behind when it is time to go home
- shrinking away when an adult approaches
- not receiving help for physical or medical problems brought to a parent or guardian's attention
- always being watchful (alert for possible danger)
- defiance, disobedience
- lacking adult supervision
- regularly coming to school without breakfast or lunch
- arriving at school early and staying late.

The key is to notice extreme behaviours or behaviours unlike the child's usual manner.

What a school can do

Host education sessions about how to recognize the signs and signals that a child or youth is abused or exposed to family violence, and how to respond. Child and Family Services Authority staff can provide this information. Visit www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca for contact information.

Clarify reporting procedures. In Alberta, the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* requires every person to report any suspicion that a child is being abused. Schools need procedures to ensure that appropriate people are notified, consultations are held and those who need to know are made aware of the student's situation. A handbook has been created to assist schools in developing procedures.¹



Build on safe and caring school programs. School-based programs help build students' self-esteem and have respectful, caring and equal relationships with peers and others, both male and female. For students in family violence situations, these programs may be their first exposure to learning about healthy relationships.

Weave preventive education into classrooms.

- Share information about child abuse and how to get help.
- Teach students how to have positive relationships, make decisions and resolve conflicts.
- Teach students about child development and childrearing so they become parents less likely to abuse their children.
- Use methods like art, theatre and writing to help students express their thoughts, feelings and what they have learned.

What school staff can do

- **Be responsive** in meeting student needs and responding to changes in behaviour.
- **Be an adult whom children and youth can trust.** Children and youth who overcome growing up in a high-risk family often find a trusted adult who provides consistent support. Frequently, that adult is a teacher.²
- **Demonstrate respectful behaviour.** School staff who model respect for all people positively influence students.
- **Use appropriate discipline.**
- **Help all students achieve success.** Schools provide positive opportunities for students to succeed.
- **Develop partnerships with community agencies** that provide support for children and families.

Let the community help

- Working with the community and your local Child and Family Services Authority is essential to increase awareness and address issues of family violence.
- Many communities are working together to create programs that help people impacted by family violence. School divisions can play an important role in these collaborative partnerships.

Did you know...

Neglect (30 per cent), exposure to family violence (28 per cent) and physical abuse (24 per cent) are the three primary types of substantiated child abuse.³

Resources for educators

Guidelines for reporting and investigating child abuse:
Responding to Child Abuse in Alberta: A Handbook (2005)
www.solgen.gov.ab.ca/publications

Bullying prevention websites:

- www.bullyfreealberta.ca for adults
- www.b-free.ca for youth
- www.teamheroes.ca for children three to 11 years old.

Bullying Helpline: **1-888-456-2323**

Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities: www.sacsc.ca

1. Alberta Children's Services. (2005). *Responding to Child Abuse in Alberta: A Handbook*. Edmonton, AB. Children's Services, Education, Health and Wellness, Justice and Attorney General, Public Security. <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/85-224-XIE/85-224-XIE2005000.pdf>

2. National Association for Children of Alcoholics. (2001). *Children of Alcoholics: A Kit for Educators*. Retrieved June 2007 from: <http://www.nacoa.net/teachers.htm>

3. Public Health Agency of Canada. (2003). *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2003: Major Findings, p. 2*. Ottawa, ON: Nico Trocmé, Barbara Fallon, Bruce McLaurin, et. al. http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cm-vee/csca-ecve/pdf/childabuse_final_e.pdf