

Child Abuse and Neglect



To Whom It May Concern,

When faced with a situation that may involve the abuse or neglect of children, it is common to feel a sense of powerlessness, as well as feeling as though it is not your place to get involved. If you are facing a situation such as this, it is okay to feel uncertain about which route to take and who to contact, and we hope that this information package will provide some answers to the questions you may have.

Violence includes not only physical abuse, but also emotional, financial or sexual abuse and spans all types of relationships. When children are involved, the violence they perceive can also affect them, and as such it is common that children face abuse through exposure to violence. Children are at risk of all these types of abuse and are impacted in a variety of ways. Children may also be experiencing many types of violence at once from many different sources, and are often silent victims with questions of abandonment, and what they did to deserve such maltreatment. **It is NOT their fault**, which they most often do not realize!

Because children often do not have the ability to reach out when they are being mistreated, as adults we are legally responsible to report any instances of abuse or neglect to Child and Family Services to ensure the safety of the child or children involved. CFS has a mandate of attempting to keep families together, as well as offering many programs to provide support and education for healthy family dynamics. Another option is to call the Child Abuse Hotline to report any concerns regarding child abuse or neglect.

If you are currently living in or are supporting someone who is involved in a violent situation involving children, we strongly encourage you to drop in to the Student Distress Centre or call the Distress Line at 482 4357 (24hrs), and to call Child and Family Services. While there is a lot of information available to you in this package, there is no substitute for talking it out and starting to develop a support system!

Common Referrals:

<i>Student Distress Centre</i>	492-HELP (4357)	M and W 9am-6m T, R, and F 9am-8pm
<i>Distress Line</i>	482-HELP (4357)	24/7
<i>Edmonton City Police - Emergency</i>	911	
<i>Non-Emerg.</i>	423-4567	
<i>Student Counselling Services</i>	492-5205	
<i>Stop Abuse in Families (SAIF)</i>	460-2195	
<i>Edmonton Family Violence Centre</i>	439-4635	
<i>Child Abuse Hotline</i>	1-800-387-5347	
<i>Child and Family Services</i>	Day: 422-2001 After Hours: 427-3390	

Sincerely,

Staff and Volunteers of the Student Distress Centre

Child Abuse

What Constitutes Abuse?

Child abuse is a general term that is used to describe behaviors that results in significant negative emotional or physical consequences for a child and is rarely a single event. It is usually a condition, a style of child rearing, or a pattern of interaction that is harmful to the child. Child abuse is far reaching, spanning age, race and socio-economic status, and takes several different forms:

Physical Abuse: Intentional application of force to any part of a child's body causing injury. Abuse may be isolated incidences, or recurrent.

Emotional Abuse: Primarily verbal attacks on child's sense of self, including humiliation, rejection and undermining of self-image, self-confidence and sense of worth. Abuse is generally chronic.

Sexual Abuse: Includes sexual touching, intercourse, or exploitation of a child by an adult who the child is in the care of.

Physical Neglect: Failure to provide for the physical needs of a child, including adequate nutrition, clothing, shelter, health care and protection from harm.

Emotional Neglect: Failure to provide for the emotional needs of a child, including a sense of belonging and self-esteem, ranging from passive indifference to outright rejection.

Exposure: Situations where there is some form of domestic abuse in the home, but for the most part it is not directed specifically at the children. The child does however; witness the verbal or physical abuse of one partner by another and/or the results of the abuse.



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030N SUB
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How Violence Impacts Children

The experience of family violence impacts children at every level of their development. Not only do children suffer negative consequences physically and emotionally, but their mental and social development can also be impaired. Potential effects of violence include:

Physical Problems:

- Delayed motor skills
- Speech difficulties
- Multiple health problems
- Regression to behaviors such as bed wetting or thumb sucking

Cognitive Functioning Problems:

- Drop in grades
- Lower verbal and quantitative skills
- The development of attitudes supporting violence

Psychological and Emotional Problems:

- Aggression towards others
- Hostility towards others

Myths and Facts

Myth: Many children lie about the abuse.

Fact: It is very rare for a child to lie, or imagine abuse. A child may seem confused in telling his/her story due to shock and mistrust toward older people.

Myth: Most children fantasize about sexual relationships with the parent of the opposite sex.

Fact: Seeking attention and love from adults is natural, but children are often too physically and emotionally immature to fantasize about sex. Freud's Oedipus and Electra Complexes have been discounted time and time again

Myth: Children should love, honour and obey their parents no matter what.

Fact: Children naturally admire, love and obey their parents. Parents need to learn to love, honour and respect their children.



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- Myth: Parents have the right to do whatever they want to their children, it is for the child's own good.*
- Fact:** Parents are responsible for their children; they do not own them. Far too often, parents are motivated by their own desires, not by what's best for the child.
- Myth: Outsiders have no right to interfere; the parent knows what is best for his/her own family.*
- Fact:** Parents do not always know what is best, or do not always act in accordance with what is best for their family. Anyone who suspects child mistreatment is **required by law** to report it to child welfare authorities.
- Myth: Adult family members do not commit incest because they want to, rather, they are seduced by the child or teenager.*
- Fact:** Adults are responsible for their own actions, especially when it comes to sex. Having been seduced is often a rationalization to avoid that responsibility.
- Myth: Incest occurs due to a cold and frigid, or absent spouse, depriving the offender. They are therefore not at fault.*
- Fact:** The status of the parents' sexual relationship does not give an adult permission to commit incest, nor does it shift responsibility. An adult is responsible for his/her own actions.
- Myth: Children are too young to experience serious emotional or physical damage. They quickly forget about it.*
- Fact:** Abuse is traumatic and damaging at any age, leading to intense emotions and physical sensations. While memories may be blocked out, the emotional impact remains.
- Myth: Incest is often an authentic act of love and affection. It satisfies the child's need for physical attention.*
- Fact:** Incest is never about love and affection, but rather the adult's indulgence of his/her own sexual desires. Incest is a profound violation of a parent-child relationship and one of the most damaging acts there is.

Without positive intervention in their lives, abused children will often carry its effects into their adult lives, possibly leading to repetition of abusive behaviour toward their own children, aggressiveness, depression, suicide, or violence toward others.



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