

STEPS IN REPORTING SUSPICIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

Anyone who suspects that a child has been abused or is at risk for abuse, has legal and moral responsibilities. Agencies and programs that provide services to children and their families also have roles and responsibilities with respect to child abuse and family violence. Below is a summary of steps to follow when reporting, as well as how a child protection agency may be involved.

THE PERSON WHO SUSPECTS CHILD ABUSE

- Anyone who suspects child abuse must immediately report the suspicions to a child protection agency. The person who suspects the abuse must call themselves – no one else can help you decide if a report should be made or make the report for you.
 - If you feel a child is in immediate danger, phone the police first, and then a child protection agency.
 - In Ontario, depending on the location, the report can be made to a: Catholic Children's Aid Society, Jewish Family & Child, Children's Aid Society, or Native Child and Family Services.
 - Information on how to reach the nearest child protection agency may be found: in the emergency numbers page of a telephone book; through the yellow pages website <http://www.yellowpages.ca>; through the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies website <http://www.oacas.org/childwelfare/locate.htm>; by calling 411; or by calling the local police department.
 - If you have doubts or concerns about making a report of suspected abuse, consult with a child protection agency. Do not discuss your suspicions with anyone else until you have consulted with a child protection worker.
 - You can call a child protection agency any time of the day or night, every day, 7 days a week. After regular business hours, you will probably have to leave a message with your phone number. An after-hours protection worker should call you back soon after.
 - Leaving a message with a child protection agency is not enough – you must talk to a child protection worker to make a report.
 - If this is your first time calling a child protection agency, tell the worker that you are unfamiliar with the process.
 - Make sure you write down the name of the person you spoke to at the child protection agency and anything they told you to do.

- Although anonymous calls can be made, it is more difficult for authorities to follow-up on the case, gather information and protect the child. It is in the best interest of the child that the reporter leaves identifying information.

- If you work with an agency or program, inform your immediate supervisor of your intention to call a child protection agency. Do not discuss your suspicions with anyone, including your supervisor, until you have consulted with a child protection worker. The supervisor should provide support. However, even if they do not want you to make the call, you must follow through on your legal responsibility and call a child protection agency.
- Document the indicators of abuse. If you have more information after the first call was made, you must phone the child protection agency again.
- Do not tell a parent or caregiver about your suspicions or the report until you have asked a child protection worker if it would be okay to tell. Telling could put the child in danger and/or impact the investigation.

AN AGENCY/PROGRAM

- If a supervisor of an agency/program is informed that someone suspects child abuse, the supervisor is expected to provide support, which includes allowing the person time to document the incident.
- An agency/program should have a child abuse policy in place. Parents, caregivers and staff should know ahead of time how people in the agency/program will proceed if there is a suspicion of child abuse.

If you are not sure if you should be reporting suspicions of child abuse, call a child protection agency to discuss your concerns with a worker and ask for guidance.

Respect the confidentiality of everyone involved in a suspicion of child abuse. A child protection agency must also respect confidentiality and details of the case cannot be shared.

A CHILD PROTECTION AGENCY

- An intake worker records the information you give in your report and passes it to a child protection worker.
- A child protection worker will see if there is any record of the child, the family or the alleged abuser in the child protection system.
- The child protection agency will decide whether or not the child is in immediate danger.
- The child protection agency will decide whether or not to begin an investigation.
- In some cases, a child protection worker will contact the police to share information and a decision will be made whether or not police should investigate.
- If necessary, a child protection worker will arrange for the child to get medical attention.