

HIGH-RISK CAREGIVER BEHAVIOURS

There are many caregiver behaviours that, while not intended to harm children, could lead to child abuse if they continue. When reading the list of high-risk caregiver behaviours, one must be honest and ask “Am I like this?” If the answer is “maybe” or “yes” then learning other ways to work with children is important.

Do I:

- resent the needs of the children in my care?
- always want to be in control of the children and how they behave?
- set rules, limits and routines that meet my needs and not the children’s needs?
- use or threaten to use physical force with children, including pushing, shoving, shaking and spanking?
- humiliate children (for example by criticizing, insulting, and embarrassing them, even in front of others)?
- fail to understand why children misbehave?
- use punishment instead of positive discipline?
- have trouble responding to difficult behaviours?
- expect too much from myself or the children?
- feel and show a dislike toward a certain child?
- have a hard time controlling my anger?
- feel stressed out, tired and have difficulty coping, thinking “I have to do it all myself” and not ask for help?
- fail to step in to protect a child who is being physically or emotionally hurt?
- have a special relationship with a certain child by: letting the child do or have more; wanting to be alone with that child; or trying to keep the relationship with the child a secret?
- ignore the laws that protect children and the child protection system?

(Adapted from Dawson, R. Preventing Abuse & Allegations of Abuse, 1995)

SUGGESTIONS FOR HIGH-RISK CAREGIVERS

- Talk about your feelings and the pressures of the job with someone who understands and has experience with children (e.g., a colleague, your supervisor).
- If you are getting upset, try to calm yourself by taking a “time out” for yourself, doing deep breathing, listening to music or whatever relaxation activities work for you.
- If you work with an agency, talk to your supervisor to develop better ways of responding to children’s behaviour, and ways for you to cope better.
- Get more information through workshops, reading, and media on what to expect from children, positive communication with others, positive guidance, and how to connect with supportive resources.
- Try to have contact with other staff/caregivers and children, so you do not feel you are on your own.
- Get professional help to work through your own problems and to learn how to control anger.
- Understand the laws that protect children.
- Recognize that this may not be the right time to be caring for children.*

*If a staff person/caregiver is exhibiting high-risk behaviour, it may be advisable for a supervisor to consider re-evaluating the person’s duties until the situation is evaluated and any recommended supports implemented.