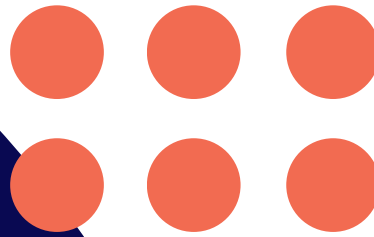




**LUNA**  
CHILD AND YOUTH  
ADVOCACY CENTRE



# **Recognizing, Reporting and Responding to Abuse in Schools:**

Facilitator's Guide



Children and youth often find it easier to talk to teachers and school staff than to other adults in their lives. This gives schools a big role in recognizing, reporting and responding to abuse. Knowing what to look for and having the confidence to act when you suspect abuse are key. Luna's new "Recognizing, Reporting, and Responding to Abuse in Schools" video will help school staff navigate suspicions of abuse and how to move forward.

## Note to Facilitators

Given the complex and difficult topic of child abuse, it is recommended to view and discuss the video as a group, rather than individually. The guidelines provided are intended to support a facilitated approach to:

- Reinforcing key messages
- Clarifying understanding
- Promoting discussion
- Generating further conversation or action.

As facilitators, you play a critical role in setting a positive, supportive tone to build the confidence and capacity of staff. Thank you for taking the time to ensure all staff feel empowered to do the right thing to keep children and youth safe.

## Facilitator Guidelines

Preview the video so you are familiar with the key messages.

Allow a minimum of one hour to view and discuss "Recognizing, Reporting and Responding to Abuse in Schools." The video is 15 minutes in length. The focus of the video and conversation will be on the skills and knowledge required to confidently recognize, respond to, and report suspected abuse. This content may trigger an emotional response. You should inform staff ahead of time that this will be the focus of the conversation. Be sure that everyone feels free to take a break if they feel uncomfortable at any point. Self-care is essential. After the discussion, conclude your session by acknowledging your appreciation for taking the time to learn more about the critical, yet difficult topic of child abuse.

## Resources

- Luna Child and Youth Advocacy Centre
- Alberta Sexual Assault Centres
- 211 Alberta
- Access Mental Health
- Distress Centre Calgary 24-hour Crisis Line



## Recognizing the signs of potential abuse

### Key message:

It's your legal obligation to report suspected child abuse to Children's Services.

There are 4 main types of child abuse:

- **Neglect** – occurs when a child is not provided the necessities of life, including essential medical treatment or adequate care.
- **Physical** – a substantial injury resulting from the non-accidental use of force.
- **Sexual** – inappropriately exposed to sexual contact, activity, or behavior, and/or sexual exploitation.
- **Emotional** – occurs when the caregiver's actions, or lack of action, result in impairment to the mental or emotional functioning or development of the child. Some examples include being deprived of affection or cognitive stimulation, rejection, exposure to domestic violence or chronic substance abuse.

Along with recognizing the signs of the four types of abuse be aware of other signs or symptoms that may indicate a serious problem in a student's life. These can include:

- Sudden or extreme changes in performance, behaviour, or emotion
- Sudden changes in behaviour or emotion such as being fearful, withdrawn, or overly aggressive
- Substance abuse or engaging in self-destructive activities
- Arriving early at school, staying late, and not wanting to go home

Abuse isn't always perpetrated by adults. Peer-on-peer abuse occurs when there is any kind of physical, sexual, emotional, or coercive control exercised between a child or youth either online and/or offline and can include, but is not limited to:

- Bullying, including cyberbullying
- Abuse in intimate relationships between peers
- Sexual violence, assault, and harassment
- Consensual or non-consensual sharing of nude or semi-nude pictures or video

If there is a disclosure of peer-on-peer abuse, you are obligated to take steps to ensure it is reported to the police.

### Possible discussion questions:

1. Is there any information about the signs or types of abuse that needs clarifying?
2. When concerned about a child's behaviour or performance (and aren't sure if it is abuse), whom should we consult at our school?
3. What is our current level of understanding about the impact of traumatic events on students' social, emotional or intellectual growth? Is this a topic of conversation we need to pursue further?



## What to Do If You Suspect Abuse

According to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act (the Act), there must be reasonable grounds for suspected abuse for Children's Services Child Intervention to become involved. If abuse is witnessed or there are clear signs that lead you to suspect child abuse, report it immediately, as the child or youth may be in imminent danger. It is your legal obligation to report suspected abuse to Children's Services Child Intervention.

### Reasonable grounds may include:

- You observe signs that raise suspicion
- A child or youth's explanation of how an injury was sustained
- Caregiver behaviour

### Key messages:

- If what you see or hear is ambiguous, use an open-ended question to gather further information
- Once you have reasonable grounds to suspect abuse or the child discloses, stop further questioning
- It's the legal responsibility of school staff and volunteers to report suspected abuse, not prove or disprove it
- Your call could be the one that triggers an intervention
- The report should come from the person who received the information
- You do not need permission to report, nor can anyone prevent you from reporting

### Possible discussion questions:

1. Is there any information that needs clarifying about what to do if you suspect child abuse?
2. What are some examples of open-ended questions?
3. Can you think of a situation where asking further questions might be helpful?
4. How are asking open-ended questions and probing for details different?
5. How does gathering information support the work of Children's Services to better assess the situation?

### Examples of open-ended questions include:

- Tell me more about... / Tell me how...
- What happened? / What was happening when...
- Describe what was going on when...

### Sample scenario:

You notice a bruise on a child and ask, "I see you have a bruise. What happened?" The child responds, "Dad hit me." You proceed to ask, "Tell me more about what was happening when he hit you." If the child tells you that they were play fighting with dad, and you haven't seen any other red flags, there is no reason to suspect abuse. However, if the child responds that dad hit them because he was mad, there is no need to probe for further details. Keep listening if the child continues to confide in you. Immediately after, report your concerns to Children's Services and document your conversation with the child.

This may be a good time to discuss discipline and cultural practices must align with Alberta's laws.



## What to Do If a Child Discloses Abuse

### Key messages:

- Stay calm. Your initial response is important for the child's path to healing.
- Listen, believe, and remain non-judgmental.
- Reassure the child that telling you was the right thing to do.
- Explain to the child that you will need to tell someone who can help.
- Don't make any promises that you can't keep.
- As soon as you can, document the child's words and/or your observations.
- Notify your principal. They can support you through the process of making a report and will need to be informed for potential follow-up.



## What Happens After a Report

### Key messages:

- You do not need permission to report, nor can anyone prevent you from reporting.
- A colleague can support you when you are making a report to Children's Services.
- It is important to keep your principal informed of your report for possible follow-up.
- Your role and legal obligations are to report suspected abuse.

### Possible outcomes of a report of suspected abuse are:

- The reported information is documented in the Children's Services Child Intervention system but there is insufficient information to meet the criteria for child intervention involvement under the Act. You may be asked to continue to track and document your observations.
- The reported information is documented, and it meets the threshold for involvement under the Act. If there are factors keeping the child or youth safe, child intervention will take no further action at this time.
- The reported information is documented, and a decision is made that further assessment is needed.
- There are imminent safety concerns requiring an immediate Child Intervention response.

### Possible discussion questions:

1. Are there any questions that need clarifying about reporting suspected abuse to Children's Services?
2. This is a good time to discuss protocols/procedures specific to your district. For example, the process for staff if parents question the school after a report has been made to Children's Services.



## Self-Care

### Key messages:

- It's very important to take care of yourself.
- Be aware of the signs of stress.
- Respecting confidentiality, discuss or debrief the situation with a friend, colleague, school counsellor, or administrator.
- If signs of compassion fatigue are still evident after two to three weeks, or you are dealing with an unresolved traumatic experience, seek counseling with a professional who is knowledgeable about trauma.
- Ask your principal or supervisor about services that may be available to you.

### Possible discussion questions:

1. Discuss signs of stress and healthy strategies for reducing stress and maintaining balance.
2. Ensure staff are aware of how to access resources through the school district and their Employee Benefits plan.



## How to Report Child Abuse

### To report suspected child abuse, please contact:

- Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-387-5437(KIDS)
- Children's Services at 403-297-2995
- Calgary Police Service at 403-266-1234
- Your local RCMP detachment



## Legislation

- Child, Youth, and Family Enhancement Act
- Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act
- Children's First Act