



**SPEAK  
UP**

**FOR  
KIDS**

**HOW WE CAN HELP**



**Safe Kids. Healthy Families. Strong Communities.**




# Our Vision

Safe Kids. Healthy  
Families. Strong  
Communities.

# Our Purpose

To build safety and well-being with children,  
youth, families and communities.





**If you have a concern about a child's wellbeing, contact us! We must all speak out for those who can't, collaborate together and share concerns for the safety of children.**

Any concerned person in our community can report suspicions of child neglect/harm. Reporting your concerns is not making an accusation; rather, it is a request for an assessment to determine if help is needed.

Use this brochure to help recognize the signs, determine when to call, and better understand what happens if you do. Please do your part to help keep kids safe.



# WONDERING WHEN YOU SHOULD CALL ?

Collaborative & supportive relationships is key to establish trust between our agency and stakeholders. We value others' perspectives, focus on effective solutions.

We are committed to providing cultural safety and inclusion for all children & families, and we believe in the importance of community and culture-oriented belonging.

## PARENTING ISN'T ALWAYS EASY

Raising children can be very challenging. Even in the best of circumstances it is a job that takes a lot of time, energy and patience. It is even harder when parents face serious issues such as ill health, relationship breakdown, addictions, unemployment, inadequate housing, or children with physical, emotional or developmental difficulties.

Our role is first and foremost to protect children and keep them safe from harm. Our goal is to work, engage and take into consideration the multicultural backgrounds of the families we serve to keep them together and help them overcome issues they are facing so that they can better care for their children.

## YOUR CALL IS IMPORTANT

Our role is to listen to children's voices and respect their rights. We advocate for them and make sure their voice is heard. Your role is as important as ours.

If you have concerns about a child or family, you may be nervous about calling or uncertain of your role. These are normal thoughts and feelings that most experience. Let us decide if anything needs to be done. No one else can call for you, even if you advised someone else, and your call could help make an important difference in the life of a child.



# WHY CALL?



## CHILDREN & YOUTH DEPEND ON ALL OF US TO KEEP THEM SAFE.

All children & youth have the right to grow up in an environment where they are loved, nurtured and cherished. As a community, we share a responsibility to ensure that our children are in supportive environments. If you have a concern about a child we encourage you to contact us so we can help them and their family.

Your concern should be based on “Reasonable grounds”, meaning you're using honest judgment, have a reasonable suspicion to decide to report a child may be in need of protection. You do not have to be sure about concerns or prove the information. Our role is to assess and decide whether to intervene.

## WHY CALL? WHY REPORT?

Children are precious and the most vulnerable citizens in society. They deserve a life free of fear and violence. Every person in our community can play a role in protecting children by being alert to the subtle and obvious signs of harm and knowing when and who to call to help a child at risk of harm. If you have concerns, you do not need to be certain of their validity, please just call.

## Help Protect Children & Youth in Your Community

Everyone is obligated to report when they suspect that a child may have been harmed or is at risk. The expectation is always that you will report based on reasonable and honest judgment. Be aware that your obligation to report your concerns is ongoing - even if

you have previously reported a concern or know someone else has called, you must make a further report. And, you must always call yourself - you cannot delegate the referral to someone else.

If you are a professional working in some capacity with children, you have an added duty to report as you see the child/ren on a regular or on-going basis.

### Child & Family Services Act - CYFSA

Its purpose is to promote children & youth's wellbeing. It states that it is your duty to report child abuse and neglect. For more information about your responsibilities, please see Section 125 of the CFYSA.





# IMPORTANCE OF PROTECTION

## Why do children & youth need protection?

Child or youth can be in need of protection when there's a concern of harm, when a parent or caregiver fails to protect a child in their care.

**Harmed children do not always show obvious signs of their harm or neglect, but oftentimes there are subtle indicators.** Learn about the different types of harm and neglect and how to know the signs. It is not your responsibility to determine if a child is being harmed, but your duty to report any suspected signs of harm.

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## Cultural Safety & Inclusion

### French Language Services

Children's Aid Societies in areas designated under the French Language Services Act 1990 (FLSA) are responsible for delivering child welfare services. The FLSA guarantees the rights of Francophones in 26 designated areas to receive services in French that are equitable and responsive to their needs as Francophones.

Simcoe Muskoka Family Connexions is a bilingual agency and offers services in both language.



### Services to Indigenous Families

We partner with our local sister agency **Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child & Family Services** who provide a stable foundation for Indigenous children, youth, and families through wraparound services that are culturally-based and family-focused.

When working with children, youth and families with Indigenous heritage, please call **1-844-523-2237** or visit **[www.binnoojiiyag.ca](http://www.binnoojiiyag.ca)**

Multiple Indigenous Child and Family Well-Being Agencies across Ontario provide culturally-intelligent service to First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and youth, their families, communities and Nations.



# TYPES OF HARM

Child harm has many faces, and while all harm hurts, different kinds of harm can hurt in different ways.

## Neglect



A child or youth can be in need of protection due to concerns regarding neglect. Neglect requires a pattern where a person having charge is not able or willing to meet the child's needs.

### INDICATORS

Signs of neglect may include (but are not limited to):

- Poor hygiene
- Continually tired, lacking energy, unkempt
- Frequent absence from school
- Missing many basic clothing items for season
- Regularly missing meals

**NOTE:** None of these indicators on their own necessarily constitutes neglect. Remember, poverty is not a cause of child maltreatment. These indicators may be also be opportunities for community support and assistance.

## Emotional Harm



Emotional harm is a pattern of negative behaviours or repeated destructive interpersonal interactions by a caregiver to the child or youth. Shaming, blaming, humiliation, and belittling are examples. Emotional harm has a different effect on a child or youth depending on their developmental stage. Emotional harm does not affect each child in a predictable manner. Its impact depends on a child's internal resources and on available supports.

### INDICATORS

Possible indicators of emotional harm include:

- Helplessness, avoidance
- Hyper-vigilance to perceived threats and anger
- Self blame, shame, rage
- Inhibition of emotional expression

# Physical Harm



The Children's Aid Society investigates allegations where a caregiver having charge of a child or youth has committed an act of physical aggression against the child and the child is at risk of harm or has been harmed by that action. It may be one incident or occur over time. A caregiver's inability to protect a child or youth from physical harm or risk of physical harm, can also be reason for a Children's Aid Society to investigate.

## INDICATORS

Possible indicators of physical harm:

- Injuries that don't fit the explanation
- Injuries to soft body parts like ears, neck or cheek
- Injuries inconsistent with the child's age and developmental stage
- Child cannot recall how injuries occurred
- Child may cringe or flinch if touched unexpectedly
- Highly aggressive or withdrawn

## Intimate Partner Violence and Adult Conflict



A child or youth can also be in need of protection due to exposure to intimate partner violence or adult conflict. Intimate partner violence is any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship.

## INDICATORS

There are different types of exposure to intimate partner violence that children may experience:

- Witnessing
- Hearing from another room
- Observing the aftermath
- Being aware of tension in the home, i.e. "walking on eggshells"

The leading study on child abuse and neglect shows that nearly 50% of all substantiated investigations of child abuse in Ontario involved exposure to intimate partner violence.



Adult conflict is violence within the home between household members whose relationship is something other than partners/parents.



# Sexual Abuse



Sexual abuse or sexual exploitation includes, but is not limited to, when a child or youth is used for the caregiver's sexual gratification.

Sexual abuse may also be happening online, such as luring and grooming for possible future sexual abuse, or engaging a child or youth in sexually-explicit conversations.

## INDICATORS

It includes:

- Sexual intercourse
- Exposing a child or youth's private areas
- Fondling for sexual purposes
- Watching a child or youth undress for sexual pleasure
- Showing a child or youth pornographic materials
- Asking a child or youth to engage in sexual behaviours
- Facilitating the sexual exploitation of a child or youth, such as making pornographic materials
- Human trafficking of children or youth

# Sex Trafficking



On October 1, 2021, the CYFSA was amended to include the risk of involvement/involvement in sex trafficking as grounds for protection.

Human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation is:

- The act of luring, coercing or manipulating a child under the age of 18 into sexual activity either by direct physical contact or the use of technology with or without the apparent consent of the youth in exchange for basic needs, drugs and/or alcohol or financial gain on the part of the perpetrator.
- The act of luring, coercing or manipulating an adult into sexual activity through abduction or in exchange for basic needs, drugs and/or alcohol or financial gain on the part of the perpetrator.

Please note: These new grounds do not require that the child's circumstances result from the actions or failure to act on the part of the "person having charge of the child".

A parent or caregiver may be acting protectively, but has been unable to prevent or extricate the child from the trafficking situation.

The amendments intend to recognize that children & youth who are being trafficked are in need of protection & their care providers may not be able to protect them alone. It is a community issue & requires a community approach to protect them.





# What Happens When You Call

## **Your call is received by a child protection professional**

who has been trained to listen to your concerns and ask questions before deciding how urgent the situation is and what type of intervention is needed.

If you have further concerns in the future, please call back and make a further report

**If a child is in imminent danger, you should call 911.**

Our professional staff use comprehensive guidelines to determine the risk in each situation and then determine the kind of support and service needed to keep children safe in situations involving child maltreatment.

We are required to place information regarding the investigation into our child protection provincial database (CPIN).

You can also complete the **online form on our website** to report your concern

# Many Factors are Considered



*When determining how to investigate your concerns, we include the age of the child, presence of physical injuries and other signals that may indicate harm.*

**Due to the private and confidential nature of investigations, we are not able to provide follow up information to individuals that provide a referral to us.**

Please know that every report received by us is reviewed by a child protection professional and, it is determined if a response is required and the appropriate action and response time to take in each individual circumstance.

Your collaboration is essential, but it's important for you to trust the professionals to do their work and not attempt to investigate yourself.

Standards are 12 hours or seven days to investigate, and 45-60 days to complete an investigation. When appropriate, contact the police.

**HELP PROTECT CHILDREN  
IN YOUR COMMUNITY**





Simcoe Muskoka

**Family Connexions**

**Connexions Familiales**  
de Simcoe Muskoka

**Know the Signs. Report Your Concerns. Make the Call.**

**24/7: (705) 726-6587**

**Toll-Free: 1-800-461-4236**

60 Bell Farm Rd, Unit 7 Barrie, Ontario L4M 5G6



**/smfconnexions**

**www.familyconnexions.ca**

