



2023 Dress Purple Day Key Messages

Dress Purple Day Campaign

- Every October Children's Aid Societies across the province raise awareness about the important role that individuals and communities play in supporting vulnerable children, youth, and families.
- On Dress Purple Day, we raise awareness that Children's Aid Societies are community organizations that are part of the circle of care that supports the well-being of children, youth, and families. We focus on bringing awareness to the early help and supportive services available to families facing challenges and to the prevention and early intervention work Children's Aid Societies do to support families and keep children and youth at home.
- On Dress Purple Day, Children's Aid Societies collaborate with key partners to speak up for every child and youth's right to safety and well-being in all spaces. Not just physical safety and well-being—children and youth have the right to have their intersectional identity, which includes culture, race, sexual orientation, and gender identity, protected and supported in all spaces.
- On Dress Purple Day, we celebrate the community that cares for families and share the message that help is available and no one is alone.
- Dress Purple Day offers an opportunity to remind Ontarians that Children's Aid Societies work together with many other social service providers and community partners to help children, youth, and families facing challenges.
- Dress Purple Day is an opportunity for Children's Aid Societies to build partnerships with local cross-sector providers and commit to strengthening families through enhanced community-based prevention and early intervention. This aligns with a key pillar of the Ontario Government's child welfare redesign initiative focused on strengthened partnerships and prevention and early intervention.
- Dress Purple Day offers an opportunity to remind adults about the important role they play in supporting vulnerable children, youth, and families. This includes every adult's legal duty to call their local Children's Aid Society if they have a concern about the safety or well-being of a child or youth. It also includes the responsibility to check their bias before making a report. Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, ability, poverty, and sexual orientation can lead to overreporting.
- Dress Purple Day offers an opportunity to raise awareness among children and youth, including elementary, middle, and high school students, about their right to safety and well-being in all spaces.



- Provincial classroom prevention resources are available to support teachers to engage in conversations with elementary, middle, and high school students about their safety and well-being in all aspects of their lives and their networks of support. The [Dress Purple Day Provincial Classroom Resources](#) were developed in response to inquest recommendations for age appropriate, child-rights focused child abuse and neglect prevention materials for students.

Equity

- OACAS acknowledges that the Dress Purple Campaign has had harmful impacts for Indigenous, African Canadian, and other communities that are marginalized. The campaign's historical focus on child abuse prevention encouraged reporting to Children's Aid Societies, which led to increased surveillance of these communities by the child welfare system and contributed to the overrepresentation of Indigenous and African Canadian families in the system.
- The overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth is due to the historical injustices perpetrated against First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities by the Canadian government and provincial child welfare systems. These injustices include residential schools and the Sixties Scoop. These colonial legacies have resulted in community impairment, intergenerational trauma, and the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in child welfare.
- OACAS acknowledges and apologizes for the harmful role child welfare has played historically, and continues to play, in the lives of Ontario Indigenous children, families, and communities.
- OACAS acknowledges that there is overrepresentation and an inequity in outcomes for African Canadian families engaged with child welfare agencies. In partnership with the African Canadian community in Ontario and through the development of the One Vision One Voice program, OACAS is taking steps to create a more equitable child welfare system by recognizing the role that systemic racism and colonialism plays in the overrepresentation of African Canadian families in the child welfare system.
- Racism, intolerance, prejudice, homophobia, and transphobia are forms of emotional abuse.
- Organizations and systems can also create harm. They can have patterns of behaviour, programs, and policies that don't respect the rights of certain groups of people. Children's Aid Societies have a history of creating harm. Dress Purple Day is an opportunity to demonstrate the ways the child welfare system is working alongside community partners and stakeholders to do better for the communities they serve. We must also work to prevent harm caused by systemic racism, colonialism, and other forms of oppression of equity deserving populations.



How Children's Aid Societies work to protect every child and youth's right to safety and well-being in all spaces

- Children's Aid Societies are independent, community-based organizations that protect every child and youth's right to safety and well-being in all spaces. The International Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the important role that child welfare plays in protecting these rights.
- The paramount purpose of Ontario's *Child, Youth, and Family Services Act, 2017* (CYFSA) is to promote the best interests, protection, and well-being of children. This provincial law gives Children's Aid Societies and Indigenous Child and Family Well-Being Agencies the exclusive responsibility to investigate concerns about the safety and well-being of children and youth under 18 and to provide child protection services.
- Children's Aid Societies investigate referrals from professionals and the public concerned about a caregiver's treatment of a child or youth. The word caregiver applies to a primary caregiver, such as a mother, father, and foster parent; an assigned caregiver, such as a child care worker and babysitter; and an assumed caregiver, such as a teacher, coach, religious leader, and school bus driver.
- Ontario's leading academic study on child abuse and neglect shows that children remained at home in 97 percent of CAS investigations (Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2018). This is not the case for Indigenous and Black children who are overrepresented in the child welfare system due to systemic racism.
- Children's Aid Societies primarily provide services to children and youth whose parents are unable to meet their physical and emotional needs. Their families are struggling with chronic challenges such as mental health, addictions, social isolation, trauma, and extreme financial stress.
- Child welfare research and data indicate that unemployment, lack of housing, and food insecurity play an important role in family crises that lead to Children's Aid Society involvement. These findings show that effective prevention starts with ensuring that adequate economic and social supports are in place so that families can look after their children.

Dress Purple Day Online Classroom Prevention Resources

- In response to recommendations from the Inquests into the deaths of Jeffrey Baldwin and Katelynn Sampson, the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) developed provincial prevention educational resources to teach students about their right to safety and well-being in all spaces. The [Dress Purple Day Online Classroom Prevention Resources](#) were developed with Boost Child & Youth Advocacy Centre and Windsor Children's Aid Society, organizations that have decades of experience educating in classrooms.



- The goal of the [Dress Purple Day Online Classroom Prevention Resources](#) is to help all children and youth, regardless of the situation they are in, to acquire skills and attributes that lessen their vulnerability to harm.
- The [Dress Purple Day Online Classroom Prevention Resources](#) support teachers and education professionals to engage with their students in conversations about safety and well-being in all aspects of their lives and their networks of support.
- Dress Purple Day offers teachers the opportunity to connect with their students and remind them of the ways they can get help if they or someone they know is struggling.
- Dress Purple Day is a tool teachers can leverage to support their conversations with children and youth about how they are feeling and what supports they might need to succeed.

Duty to Report

- The purpose of the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA)* is to promote the best interests, protection, and well-being of children and youth.
- Section 125 of the Act states that a person, including professionals who work with children or youth, must promptly report any suspicions that a child or youth may be "in need of protection" to a Children's Aid Society.
- Children and youth have a right to safety and well-being wherever they are. This includes not just in their homes, but also in their communities. Children's Aid Societies will investigate concerns about primary caregivers but also community caregivers such as child care workers, teachers, and coaches.
- The *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* recognizes that professionals and officials who work with children have an enhanced responsibility to report their suspicions.
- Under the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*, a professional's failure to uphold their duty to report for a child under 16 could lead to a "penalty" or a fine of \$5,000.
- As of 2018, 16 and 17-year-olds are eligible to receive protection services from Children's Aid Societies. While reporting for 16 and 17-year old youth is not mandatory, please contact your local Children's Aid Society if you have concerns about the safety or well-being of a youth.
- You do not have to be sure about concerns to make a referral to a Children's Aid Society: use your best judgement. The Children's Aid Society has the expertise to assess and decide whether to intervene.
- If you have a concern about the safety and well-being of a child or youth you must call a Children's Aid Society directly. You are not permitted to delegate your legal duty to report to any other person, including a supervisor.
- While confidentiality cannot be assured when making a referral, concerns about being identified should be shared with the Children's Aid Society. Privacy and confidentiality should not be seen as barriers to making a referral to a Children's Aid Society.



- The duty to report is ongoing. Even if you have made a previous referral, you must continue to make referrals if you believe a child or youth still requires protection.
- The Children's Aid Society may not be able to tell you details about how they are going to respond to your concerns but may be able to provide a general overview of what will occur.
- Overrepresentation of specific groups in the child welfare system begins at the referral stage based on stereotypes. We all need to be aware of personal and systemic biases that may impact a decision to call a Children's Aid Society.
- Perceptions and cultural misunderstandings can impact a decision to call a Children's Aid Society. Child-rearing practices vary across families and cultures. There are various parenting practices that are not concerning but may differ from your own.
- Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, ability, poverty, gender identity, and sexual orientation can lead to overreporting.
- Indigenous children and youth are overrepresented in Ontario's child welfare systems due to the historical and ongoing legacy of colonization and anti-Indigenous racism.
- African Canadian children are also overrepresented due to the historical legacy of slavery and the colonization of African descent people. This results in anti-Black sentiment and anti-Black racism.
- While poverty is a risk factor for children and youth, it is not a cause of child maltreatment.
- In 97% of CAS investigations, children, youth, and families are provided with supportive services while living in their homes. In only 3% of investigations do children and youth need to live with another family while their caregivers address their challenges.

Elementary Students

- A community is made up of different kinds of people including parents and caregivers, and children.
- Being part of a community means that there are lots of people you can go to for support when you need it.
- A helping adult is someone you can go to who will listen to you and try to do something to help you.
- If you have a problem or worry, and an adult can't help you, it is important to go to another adult and to keep on telling until you get the help you need.
- Because our bodies belong to us, we have the right to decide how a touch makes us feel and not anyone else. We also have to respect how others want to be touched.
- An "uh-oh" feeling is one that we get when we feel that something is wrong or when we feel uncomfortable about something.
- If someone touches you in a way that gives you an "uh-oh" feeling, it is important to tell a helping adult.



- There are no secrets about touch and all touch can be talked about.
- All children have basic needs including physical, emotional, social, and thinking and learning needs.
- It is the responsibility of adults in the community, including parents, caregivers and teachers, to meet children's basic needs.
- Food, shelter, clothing appropriate for the weather, education, medical care, safe surroundings, and being taken care of are some of our basic needs.
- We also need friends, love, security, culture and community, and respect for our gender, race, ability, culture, and community.
- If your basic needs are not being taken care of, it is important to tell a helping adult.
- Everybody in the community plays a role in supporting the rights of children and youth to safety and well-being, including Children's Aid Societies.
- Dress Purple Day is a time when we remind everybody that help is available and that the community needs to work together to support families and look after kids.
- It takes a community to support families and care for kids.

Middle and High School Students

- Youth have a right to safety and well-being in all the spaces they occupy, including home, school, and sport.
- Safety includes physical as well as psychological, emotional, social, cultural, and spiritual well-being.
- Many adults want to help youth.
- To get the help you need, you may need to tell more than one adult about your situation, because they may not understand or may not know what to do.
- Never give up. Keep on telling until you get the help you need.
- Although it is great to go to friends for help, our friends don't always have the answer or access to resources that may be needed to solve the problem.
- If you don't have an adult in your life that you trust, there are many organizations that can help youth, including Children's Aid Societies, Kids Help Phone, Naseeha Youth Helpline, Black Youth Helpline, and LGBT Youthline.
- Self-esteem can be defined as our sense of self-worth and how good we feel about ourselves. A youth's right to safety and well-being includes living in an environment that supports this strong sense of self-worth.
- A strong and positive sense of self-esteem can help you cope with stress, search for healthier relationships, maintain boundaries, and ask for help if you find yourself in an unhealthy relationship.
- The individuals in your life can impact your self-esteem.



- The ideas, practices, and systems in society can also impact your self-esteem.
- Your well-being and self-esteem can be damaged when your gender, race, ability, sexual orientation, language, religion, and culture are not respected, and when you encounter discrimination, intolerance, and prejudice.
- Positive self-talk is an important way you can boost your self-esteem.
- Healthy relationships are based on mutual respect. This refers to relationships with adults, as well as with our peers and friends.
- Unhealthy relationships are based on power and control. This includes relationships with adults, as well as those with our peers and our friends.
- In a healthy relationship race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, culture, language, and religion are respected.
- There are many kinds of abuse, including physical, sexual, and emotional harm.
- Racism, intolerance, and prejudice are forms of emotional abuse.
- Neglect of basic needs is another reason why you may need to reach out for help.
- Organizations and systems can also create harm. They can have patterns of behaviour, programs, and policies that don't respect the rights of certain groups of people.
- Many families struggle with chronic challenges such as mental health, addictions, and extreme financial stress, which can make it difficult for them to support the basic needs of their children. Children and youth in this situation also need help.