

A CHANCE FOR CHILDHOOD: A HANDBOOK  
ABOUT CHILD ABUSE FOR TEACHERS OF  
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**A CHANCE FOR CHILDHOOD:  
A HANDBOOK ABOUT CHILD ABUSE FOR  
TEACHERS OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR**

**By**

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**A project report submitted to the School of  
Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education**

**Faculty of Education  
Memorial University of Newfoundland  
November 1996**

**St. John's**

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0-612-36138-1

## **ABSTRACT**

Child abuse has become identified as a major concern of all communities in today's society. While resolving the problem is considered to require a multidisciplinary approach, teachers are often faced with abuse when they are alone within their classrooms. A community social concern suddenly becomes an individual's professional concern.

The purpose of this project is to develop a handbook about child abuse for teachers of Newfoundland and Labrador. While the laws and policies of this province state teachers' legal obligations to report known or suspected abuse to the appropriate authorities, many of the dilemmas teachers face when confronted with child abuse have generally been overlooked. The ultimate goal of this project is to develop a handbook which will increase teachers' knowledge, confidence and competence with respect to child abuse reporting, while aiming to reduce child abuse in Newfoundland and Labrador.

This project report contains four separate chapters: Chapter I includes a discussion of the problem; Chapter II contains a review of the background research, and a rationale for the project; Chapter III provides a description of the methodology used; and Chapter IV contains the results of the project, which is a self-contained handbook. The first three chapters provide the basis for the fourth chapter. Together, all four chapters were written to fulfil the requirements for the degree of Master of Education. It is anticipated that Chapter IV will be published separately, therefore different Tables of Contents and References have been included.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Sincere thanks are extended to a number of professionals for their valuable contributions which allowed me to complete this project. It is their genuine concern for the well- being of children which made "A Chance for Childhood" possible.

A special thank you to Dr. Rosonna Tite for supervising this project. Her continuous guidance and support was much appreciated.

I would also like to acknowledge the members of Dr. Tite's Thesis Group for their encouragement and feedback.

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## **CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION**

Child abuse has become a major social concern of all communities throughout North America during the past several decades. While resolving the problem is considered to require a full community effort, teachers are often confronted with abuse when they are alone within their classrooms (while in the presence of 20 to 30 other children). A community social problem suddenly becomes an individual's professional concern.

Since 50 to 60% of abused children are of school age, it is not surprising that teachers may be confronted with a number of abused children throughout their careers (Tite, 1995). More importantly, how teachers respond to such confrontations can have a major impact on a child's future. Teachers spend approximately five hours a day with children, and they often develop very special relationships with them. Hence, there is a significant chance that the abused child will disclose to his or her teacher (Halliday-Summer, 1990a). On the other hand, many children do not tell their teachers that abuse or neglect is a part of their life (Berliner, 1993), and teachers need to be able to recognize it and respond effectively. That is, teachers need to be well informed of the appropriate way to act before, during and after their encounter with a known or suspected case of child abuse. They need to know how to identify the symptoms, how to handle a disclosure (what to say, and what not to say), how to make an accurate report to Social Services, how to support the child, and how to help prevent future abuse.

Although the majority of teachers will probably be confronted with child abuse

among their students, they are provided with insufficient education and training about how to address this problem, a situation which often results in a reluctance to report (Abrahams, Casey, & Daro, 1992; McIntyre, 1987, 1990; Tite, 1994b, 1995). According to recent research, many teachers are unaware of their legal reporting obligations, the warning signs of abuse, the standards and procedures for making a report, and the consequences of failing to report (Abrahams et al., 1992; Beck, Ogloff, & Corbishley, 1994; McIntyre, 1987, 1990; Reiniger, Robison, & McHugh, 1995; Tite, 1994b, 1995). By and large, teachers seem to experience difficulties with identification and with the initial decision to proceed with a report (Tite, 1993, 1994b, 1995; Zellman, 1990). That is, teachers find it difficult to identify abused children under "normal" classroom circumstances, and there seems to be many personal, social, and professional issues which are interfering with their initial decision to proceed with a report. Thus, for example, the reluctance to report may be related to their concern for meeting curriculum objectives, their preoccupation with maintaining discipline, their need to sustain close working relationships with children and their families, their fear of retaliating parent, and their anticipation of negative responses from the school or outside agencies (Tite, 1993, 1994b, 1995, 1996).

Nevertheless, teachers have to take responsibility for reporting known or suspected cases of child abuse because: (1) the law requires it; (2) the development of the "whole child" demands it; (3) their empathy for abused students necessitates it; and (4) they are in a position to help eliminate it.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and various school board districts have developed policies about child abuse for teachers, but teachers do not seem to be well informed about them (Tite, 1995). The scarce supply of the appropriate number of copies of policy documents at the school level, as well as the lack of in-service training for teachers about them, appears to be interfering with the development of teacher knowledge. Furthermore, there are so many different school board district policies in this province that there is the possibility of inconsistency in teachers' overall approach. For example, although the Child Welfare Act (1992) and the Provincial Child Abuse Policy and Guidelines (1993) mandate direct agency reporting by teachers, a number of school board district policies encourage teachers to report their suspicions to their principal prior to filing a report with Social Services. According to the results of Tite's survey of 336 teachers from Newfoundland and Labrador, almost one-half of teachers' suspicions are investigated at the school level only, never making their way to an official Social Services report (Tite, 1995). Evidently, there is a need for a way of insuring that the expectations of the Child Welfare Act (1992) and the Provincial Child Abuse Policy and Guidelines (1993) are both communicated to and implemented by teachers.

I recall being first informed about the existence of my school board's policy and the new provincial policy during a very busy staff meeting in 1993. These policies were quickly introduced and then filed at the principal's office. It was my impression that they will probably remain there until a teacher goes searching for them (in a panic), when he

or she is suddenly confronted with a case of child abuse. Furthermore, I was first exposed to knowledge about child abuse during a two-hour seminar, while completing my last semester of course work in my Masters Program of Educational Psychology. At this point, I had already completed two undergraduate degrees, one in Elementary Education and one in Special Education, and taught for six years without receiving any pre-service or in-service training in child abuse. Although pleading ignorance of the law would not stand up in court, I can honestly say that my knowledge and training about child abuse as a teacher (in the past) were certainly inadequate.

The purpose of this project is to develop a handbook about child abuse for teachers of Newfoundland and Labrador in order to highlight the main policies and laws, while elaborating on issues considered of most relevance to teachers. The ultimate goal of this handbook would be to increase teachers' knowledge, confidence, and accountability with respect to child abuse reporting, while aiming to reduce child abuse in Newfoundland and Labrador. That is, I would like to make the difficult task of child abuse reporting a little easier for teachers, and to help them feel more ready, able, and willing to "get involved," since all adults have a role to play in helping to confront and eliminate the problem!

## CHAPTER II - LITERATURE REVIEW

### Definitions

There is no particular definition of child abuse which has been proven to be acceptable to all agencies and professionals involved with this problem (McGuire, & McCall, 1987). Definitions of what constitutes abuse tend to vary from one study to another. Most studies lack an explicit definition of abuse entirely, while others seem to accommodate their definitions to fit their population (Hicks, 1995). Furthermore, there are potential difficulties associated with any attempt to define the nature of abuse, because these definitions are left to the differing interpretations of various individuals. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this project, the definitions that have been accepted by the government of Newfoundland and Labrador will be utilized.

#### A General Definition of Child Abuse

In the Provincial Child Abuse Policy and Guidelines (1993) child abuse is defined in the following way:

**An abused or neglected child means a child whose physical or mental health or welfare is harmed or threatened with harm by the acts or omissions of his/her parent or other persons responsible for his/her welfare. (p. 6)**

This definition includes four specific categories: sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, as well as neglect, which includes physical and emotional neglect. It also highlights several important factors about abuse. First, it refers to “physical or mental health,” which suggests that abuse may not be visible if it has impacted on the child’s mental state. It includes the potential to cause harm by referring to “harmed or threatened” as possible interpretations of abuse. This definition also refers to “acts or omissions,” which means that abuse can occur from the failure to do something as well as from doing something. The “omission” of an act generally refers to the category of neglect. Finally, this definition makes specific reference to “parents or other persons responsible for his/her welfare.” This reflects the most recent literature which suggests that most abusers are persons in a position of trust with respect to the child. However, one must not ignore that some acts of abuse are committed by strangers (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1993).

#### Specific Definitions of Child Abuse

Child abuse is expressed in several different forms, and can be more specifically defined under the following four categories:

- |                     |                       |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| (i) sexual abuse    | (iii) emotional abuse |
| (ii) physical abuse | (iv) neglect          |

The following definitions are also cited in the Provincial Child Abuse Policy and Guidelines (1993).

(i) **Sexual abuse**

Sexual abuse refers to the sexual exploitation of children by more powerful, usually older, individuals who impose sexual contact (by force or otherwise). The contact may range from exhibitionism, exposing the child to pornography, fondling, genital touching, to oral, anal, or, vaginal penetration. (McGuire, & McCall, 1987) (p. 7)

This definition of sexual abuse includes incest, but it also includes the exploitation of a child for the purpose of pornography or prostitution.

(ii) **Physical abuse**

Physical abuse can be defined as the intentional, non-accidental use of physical force or action on the part of the parent or other person responsible for the child's welfare, aimed at hurting, injuring or destroying the child. The force used exceeds what is considered "reasonable discipline." (McGuire, & McCall, 1987) (p. 9)

The injuries may include bruises, scars, burns, head injuries, fractures, eye injuries, cuts, bites, internal injuries, pulled hair and so forth. However, it is important to recognize that not all physical abuse entails visible marks or scars.

(iii) **Emotional abuse**

Emotional abuse occurs when the parent(s) or caregiver(s) treats the child in such a negative way that the child's concept of "self" is seriously impaired. The negative treatment is such that the capacity of the child to reach his/her full potential is critically undermined. (p. 9)

This kind of behavior may consist of constant chastising, belittling, verbal tirades, ridicule, humiliation, or the outright rejection of the child's sense of self-worth and dignity. It can be seen as a chronic attitude on the part of the parent or other person responsible for the child's welfare that is detrimental to, or prevents the development of, a positive self-image in the child. (p. 9-10)

Children may not be physically abused or their sense of self may not be directly attacked, but they may be subjected to extreme violence between parents or caregivers. (p. 10)

(iv) **Neglect**

Neglect can be either physical or emotional. (p. 10)

- (a) **Physical neglect** can be defined as the failure of the person(s) responsible for the care of the child to provide for his/her physical or medical needs and resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's development or safety. (p. 10)

Physical neglect is the chronic or episodic withholding of necessary or essential physical care from the child with resulting injury or damage. Necessary physical care can include food, nutrition, shelter, clothing, medical care, safety, supervision or sensory stimulation. It can also include physical abandonment, failure to seek or comply with medical treatment, lack of adequate supervision of the child, or repeated accidents due to lack of supervision. (p. 10)



- (b) **Emotional neglect** can be defined as withholding affection and love from the child. It might also include the withholding of affirmations of the child's sense of self-worth, trust, and belongingness. It is the failure to provide the psychological nurturance for a child's growth and development. (p. 10)

Neglect describes acts of omissions which significantly impede a child's emotional, psychological, or physical development, hence the failure to provide adequately for the education or school attendance of a child is also neglect.

The above definitions, all found in the Provincial Child Abuse Policy and Guidelines (1993), provide a very elaborate description of the various forms of abuse. A handbook for teachers would need to contain these definitions of abuse, while putting greater emphasis on the indicators.

## **Prevalence**

The actual number of children who have been or are being abused is unknown. However, statistics throughout North America indicate that child abuse has become identified as a major problem in all communities. The true prevalence is difficult to assess because often only the extreme cases come to the attention of authorities. Also, the failure to recognize abuse and to acknowledge its reality, the variations in definitions, the lack of education and training, and the reluctance of individuals to become active participants in the helping process, may all contribute to under-reporting. Furthermore, the secrecy and shame often associated with child abuse, the legal sanctions which it may entail, as well as the young age and dependency of its victims all serve to reduce voluntary reporting (Health and Welfare Canada, 1990). Therefore, while the number of child abuse cases handled by various social agencies can be calculated, the actual incidence of child abuse can only be estimated.

A national survey on family violence conducted in the United States revealed that nearly 1.5 million children are very severely abused each year. This study distinguished very severe violence (kicking, burning, scalding, threatening or attacking with a knife or gun) from severe violence, which was defined as "hitting a child with an object." When both of these measures were added, it was estimated that 6.9 million children are physically abused each year. In Ontario, the Children's Aid Society Statistics for 1983 indicate that there were 3, 546 child physical abuse investigations, for 1984 there were

4, 340, and 5, 824 for 1986 (Health and Welfare Canada, 1990).

More pervasive, but less easily detected than physical abuse is child neglect. A Nova Scotian Task Force on Family and Children's Services found that 70% of the children on child welfare caseloads had suffered or were currently suffering from neglect. Another report by Saskatchewan Social Services noted that underfeeding, or caloric deprivation, caused more than 50% of the cases of "failure to thrive" in infants (Health and Welfare Canada, 1990).

The most extensive study of child sexual abuse in Canada was conducted by the Committee on Sexual Offences Against Children and Youth (1984), often referred to as the Badgley Report. This random National Population Survey showed that child sexual abuse is a major problem in every part of Canada. That is, child sexual abuse is prevalent in all regions, in all socioeconomic classes, in all races, and among all religions. The results of this survey revealed that more than one-half of the females and approximately one-third of the males had been victims of one or more unwanted sexual acts during their lifetime, and that about four in five of those incidents happened to the victims when they were children or youths. The term "unwanted sexual acts" as used by Badgley included sexual exposure, threatened sexual assault, unwanted sexual activity such as kissing and fondling, and attempted or actual anal or vaginal penetration. The Badgley Report also reports that 99% of the assailants were males. Of these, about one in four was a family member or a person in a position of trust, while about one-half were friends or acquaintances, and about one in six was a stranger (Health and Welfare Canada, 1990;

Hicks, 1995).

It is impossible to identify common statistical data on child abuse and neglect across provinces in Canada because there are variations in the definitions used for identification, the types of data collected, and the manner in which cases are reported. For example, some jurisdictions report allegations while others report only investigated cases. Also, some count the number of families that come to the attention of authorities, while others count the number of children. However, Statistics Canada (1994) has recently released findings from two elaborate studies conducted in this country.

First, an analysis of data from the Revised Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey (1992) provides insight into the nature and extent of child abuse cases reported to the police. In 1992, the UCR collected criminal incidents reported to 51 police agencies across Canada. These incidents represented 30% of all reported crimes in Canada.

During 1992, 14% of physical assaults reported were against children less than 18 years of age, of which 22% occurred at the hands of a family member, most often the parent. More frightening, 65% of all sexual assaults reported to the police in 1992 were against children, of which more than one-third occurred within the family. Almost one-half of the family related cases involved a parent (45%). Child victims of physical assault were more often females than males (60% versus 40%), and almost four in five accused offenders (78%) were male. The majority of victims of sexual assault were also female (86%), and the vast majority of perpetrators were male (97%). This perpetrator rate

concur with Badgley's male perpetrator rate of 99%, which suggests that not much has changed over the past eight years with respect to males' desire to exert power over females. A small proportion of perpetrators of physical assault (5%) against children were themselves less than 18 years of age. The majority of child victims of physical assault (68%) were teenagers between 12 and 17 years of age, while one-third were children less than 12 years of age. An opposite pattern was shown in sexual assault cases, in which over one-half of the victims were less than 12 (57%). The relationship between the child victim of sexual assault and the accused person differed somewhat for male and female children. Female victims were twice as likely to be sexually assaulted by a parent than any other family member, while males were equally at risk of sexual assault by a parent or another immediate or extended family member. Furthermore, the majority of offences of physical (70%) and sexual (80%) assaults against children resulted in a charge being laid against the suspect, yet a significant number of victims (or guardians of victims) chose not to lay charges against the assailant in both physical (16%) and sexual assault cases (11%) (Statistics Canada, 1994).

Between 1991 and 1992, the Canadian Hospital Injury Reporting and Prevention Program (CHIRPP) at the Labrador Centre for Disease Control conducted a survey focusing on intentional injuries of children presenting to three pediatric hospitals from different provinces across Canada, each serving a major urban area. The records reviewed were those cases in which the child abuse team had been involved and do not represent the total number of abuse cases seen by each hospital. A total of 951 cases

were reviewed for this study involving 934 different children; 17 children appeared twice in the study. An average of 17 cases per month were processed across all three Children Hospitals. This study defined “children” as young people less than 20 years of age, and “abuse” as including physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect.

This CHIRPP survey revealed that twice as many sexual abuse (61%) as physical abuse (29%) cases were recorded, neglect comprised only 3% of the total sample, and 7% were multiple forms of child abuse. The greatest number of victims fell between 3 and 10 years of age (62%). Sexual abuse victims were older on the average than victims of physical abuse or neglect: 75% were between 3 and 10 years of age compared to 42% of physical abuse victims, and 25% of children who were neglected. Victims of neglect were the youngest. There was a small percentage of 15 to 19 year old victims of all types of abuse, but this may reflect a greater tendency of older teenagers to seek medical attention from a general hospital. The distribution of the victims and perpetrators of child abuse according to gender tended to vary by the type of abuse. Boys and girls suffered equally from physical abuse and neglect, while girls were far more likely to be sexually abused; the perpetrator was a family member in all but one case. Children of either sex were equally as likely to be abused by a female perpetrator (53% boys and 47% girls), but girls were abused by males in 70% of the cases. More than 90% of the sexual abuse cases and more than one-half (54%) of physical abuse cases were committed by male perpetrators, while almost 60% of the neglect cases were committed by females.

With respect to the perpetrator’s relationship with the victim, in one-half of the

cases in this sample, the child knew the perpetrator all of his or her life, in 8% of the cases, the child had known the perpetrator for less than one year, and in only 3% of the cases, the perpetrator was a stranger. This study also revealed that 67% of the child abuse cases the perpetrator was a family member; in 22% of the cases, the perpetrator was someone else known to the child. Almost one-half of the perpetrators were parents, or the current partner of a parent, and the majority of parents (62%) were fathers of the victim.

This study also analysed the family structure of the victims in an attempt to determine which factors increase the risk of a child being abused. Risk factors included, for example, single parent families, young parents, alcohol or drug abuse within the home, numerous siblings, poverty, and having a disabled child, or one of poor health or prematurity. In this study, 33% of the abused children were living in single parent families, which is a significantly higher proportion than is found in the general population (13%). With regard to young mothers, few abusive mothers identified in this sample (4%) were less than 19 years of age. The largest proportions were between 20 and 30 years of age (45%), and 30 and 40 years of age (40%). Furthermore, in 15% of the cases, the injured child had a disability or other medical condition compared to only 7% of children up to 14 years of age in the general population have a disability. Children with disabilities were twice as likely as other children in the sample to experience neglect, and less likely to experience sexual or physical abuse. These results are very disturbing to someone like myself who spent six years teaching disabled children.

However, they are quite believable considering the children's greater dependency on others and their limited communication skills (Statistics Canada, 1994). In summary, the UCR and CHIRPP surveys report that: (1) the percentage of sexual assaults against children was significantly higher than the percentage of physical assaults; (2) girls were most frequently the victims of sexual assault; (3) a large number of physical and sexual assaults reported involved a family member, most often a parent; (4) boys ran an equal risk of being sexually assaulted by either a parent or another family member, while girls were more likely to be sexually assaulted by a parent; (5) boys were at a higher risk than girls of being physically assaulted by a parent; (6) the police reports indicated that 12 to 17 year olds were more likely to be victims of physical assault, while the hospitals reported that children 1 to 9 years of age were most at risk; and (7) the majority of victims of child sexual assault dealt with by the police were less than 12 years of age, and the greatest proportion of child sexual abuse incidents reported to the hospital involved children between 3 and 10 years of age (Statistics Canada, 1994).

Statistics Canada (1994) also reports some very startling information about child homicides. Between 1981 and 1992, 1019 victims of homicide (13% of all homicide victims in Canada) were less than 18 years of age. More specifically, an average of 85 children were murdered each year; more than one-half (52%) of all child homicides over this period were committed by a family member; and eight in ten family related child homicides were committed by a parent. Children actually have died in the hands of parents. Furthermore, the primary methods employed were beating and strangulation,



which suggests that many child homicides may be the result of a period of physical abuse.

During this 12-year period, almost 90% of all the homicide incidents committed against children were solved by the police through the identification of the accused. In 28% of these cases, the accused, usually a parent, committed suicide immediately following the incident. Boys were slightly more likely to be killed by a family member than were girls (53% versus 47%) and the largest percentage of child homicide victims (48%) were less than 3 years of age which was consistent for both sexes (Statistics Canada, 1994).

Unfortunately, child abuse is no less of a problem in Newfoundland and Labrador than in any of the other provinces throughout Canada. Awareness seems to have grown, but many circumstances remain the same. That is, most of the offenders are male, most of the victims are female, and the perpetrator is usually a family member or a person in a position of trust such as a teacher, coach, priest, or physician (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1993).

As mentioned, the statistics recording child abuse reports to official agencies such as the police or Social Services may undercount the true level of child abuse in this province. However, statistical data about child abuse does provide valuable information about the nature of such incidents.

**Table 1**

**Province of Newfoundland and Labrador  
Children's Protection Referrals**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>General Protection (including neglect)</b>	<b>Sexual Abuse</b>	<b>Physical Abuse</b>	<b>Emotional Abuse</b>	<b>Total # of Referrals</b>
1983-1984	485	38	19	2	544
1984-1985	498	73	24	3	598
1985-1986	615	107	44	5	771
1986-1987	557	326	95	17	995
1987-1988	816	438	217	55	1526
1988-1989	819	555	307	23	1704
1989-1990	1172	694	442	126	2434
1990-1991	1498	1219	779	271	3767
1991-1992	1747	1407	953	431	4538
1992-1993	1919	1451	983	328	4681
1993-1994	2706	1071	838	409	5024
1994-1995	2825	1005	673	411	4914

\* A copy of information received from the Department of Social Services, Division of Statistics, St. John's, NF.

The data presented in Table 1 represents the number of Children's Protection referrals that have been received by Social Services in Newfoundland and Labrador during the past 12 years. As indicated, these figures represent referrals, and are not substantiated cases. Evidently, the total number of referrals received by Social Services

was approximately 10 times greater in 1994-1995, than it was in 1983-1984. All forms of abuse referrals have increased over the past 12 years. However, the number of sexual abuse referrals has always been greater than the number of physical or emotional abuse referrals each year, which is consistent with other Canadian statistics. These dramatic increases in the number of referrals received by Social Services may indicate an increase in the incidence of abuse in this province, however it may also represent an increased awareness of abuse, and/or a greater willingness to report.

The inquiry into abuse by members of the clergy in the Catholic Church (Winter Commission, 1990) and the allegations of abuse at Mount Cashel Orphanage (Hughes Inquiry, 1991) are probably the two most prominent events in Newfoundland and Labrador which have contributed to heightening public awareness and focusing people's attention on the problem of child abuse in this province. A quick glance at the referral rates during those years makes this clear. From April 1, 1991 to March 31, 1992, 1407 referrals of child sexual abuse were received by Social Services, which represents a substantial increase from 1219 referrals in 1990-1991, and an even greater increase from 694 referrals in 1989-1990. The number of referrals for other types of abuse/neglect also increased during this time. In 1991-1992 there were 953 referrals of physical abuse, which shows an increase from 779 referrals in 1990-1991, and from 442 referrals in 1989-1990. Finally, the emotional abuse referrals increased to 431 in 1991-1992, from 271 in 1990-1991, and from 126 in 1989-1990, while the number of general protection referrals increased to 1747 in 1991-1992, from 1498 in 1990-1991, and from 1172 in

1989-1990.

To conclude, the number of sexual and physical abuse referrals have decreased a little over the last couple of years, while the number of emotional abuse and general protection referrals have continued to increase. Hopefully, this suggests a decrease in the incidence of child sexual and physical abuse in this province, an increase in awareness of emotional abuse or neglect incidents, and a greater willingness of victims and others to report cases of abuse or neglect to Social Services.

The data presented in Table 2 represents the number of complaints received and investigated by the Major Crimes Section of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary (RNC) for the years 1983, 1986, 1990, 1992, and 1994. As indicated, these figures represent the number of complaints received and investigated, and are not actual convictions.

**Table 2**  
**Number of Complaints Received and Investigated**  
**by the Major Crimes Section of the RNC.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Sexual Abuse</b>	<b>Physical Abuse</b>
1983	19	3
1986	138	15
1990	224	60
1992	285	121
1994	194	118

\* Adapted from information received by telephone from the Crime Protection Unit of the RNC, St. John's, NF.

It is difficult to compare these statistics with those of Social Services because the police calculate the number of complaints they receive during a calendar year, while Social Services count the number of referrals they receive during a fiscal year. However, it is clear that the number of complaints received by the police has also steadily increased over the past decade. Similarly, there was a dramatic increase around 1990 and 1992, and a slight decrease in 1994.

It is also worth repeating that the number of complaints received by the police were significantly lower than the number of referrals received by Social Services. Many referrals made to Social Services never reach the police for various reasons. First, Social Services conduct their own investigation of cases and they may or may not involve the police, and second, many victims (or guardians of victims) may decide not to follow through on charging the offender. Whatever the case, far too many offenders appear to be getting away with committing some very serious crimes.

In conclusion, while the true prevalence of child abuse in this country or province may be essentially unknown, there is enough evidence to indicate a very serious widespread problem. Hence, everyone (including teachers) must recognize the need to provide better protection for children.

## **The Legal Context**

It is important to distinguish between criminal (federal) and child welfare (provincial/territorial) laws, but services for abused children in Canada are generally provided by provincial and territorial governments. Each province and territory has legislation defining a “child in need of protection” that provides the legal basis for government intervention. Although definitions vary across the country, each one identifies physical and sexual abuse, as well as neglect as reasons for a child being in need of protection. This legislation recognizes that children have certain basic rights, including the right to be protected from abuse and neglect, and that governments have a responsibility to protect children from harm (Statistics Canada, 1994).

### A Child in Need of Protection

In Newfoundland and Labrador, a “child in need of protection” is defined in **Section 2. (b)** of the Child Welfare Act, RSN 1990, C-12:

**S2. (b)** “child in need of protection” means:

- (i) a child who is without adequate care or supervision,
- (ii) a child who is without necessary food, clothing or shelter, as may be available with the level of financial assistance given in relation to that child under the laws of the province,

- (iii) a child who is living in circumstances that are unfit or improper for the child,
- (iv) a child in the care or custody of a person who is unfit, unable or unwilling to provide adequate care for the child,
- (v) a child who is living in a situation where there is severe domestic violence,
- (vi) a child who is physically or sexually abused, physically or emotionally neglected, sexually exploited or in danger of that treatment,
- (vii) a child who is in the care and custody of a person who fails to provide adequately for the child's education or attendance at school,
- (viii) a child who has no living parent and who has no person willing to assume responsibility or with a legal responsibility for the child's maintenance,
- (ix) a child who is in the care or custody of a person who refuses or fails
  - (A) to provide or obtain proper medical or other recognized remedial care or treatment necessary for the health or well-being of the child, or
  - (B) to permit the care and treatment to be supplied to the child when it is considered essential by a qualified medical practitioner,
- (x) a child who is brought before the court with the consent of the parent, guardian, or person with actual control for the purpose of transferring the guardianship of the child to the director,
- (xi) a child who is beyond the control of a person caring for the child,

- (xii) a child who by his or her behavior, condition, environment or association, is likely to injure himself or herself or others,
- (xiii) a child taken into a home or otherwise in the care and custody of a person contrary to subsection 3(3) or (5) of the Adoption of Children Act, and
- (xiv) a child actually or apparently under the age of 12 who performs an action that contravenes a provision of an Act or a regulation made under that Act or a municipal regulation or by-law or an Act of the Parliament of Canada; (p. 2-3)

#### Legal Responsibility to Report.

Child protection legislation in all jurisdictions, except the Yukon, requires that all persons must report cases of alleged or suspected child abuse or neglect to a child services authority. Failure of an individual to report alleged or suspected abuse or neglect is an offense in eight jurisdictions: Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories. In New Brunswick and Ontario, only the failure of a professional to report is an offence, and in Quebec, the failure of a professional to report child abuse or neglect is an offence, while the failure of any person to report suspected physical and sexual abuse of a child is also an offence. Convictions for failing to report may result in a fine and/or imprisonment (Statistics Canada, 1994).



The Child Welfare Act (Revised, 1992) of Newfoundland and Labrador states:

- S38. (1) Where a **person** has information that a child has been, is or may be in danger of abandonment, desertion, neglect, physical, sexual or emotional ill-treatment or has been, is or may be otherwise in need of protection, the person shall **immediately** report the matter to the **director**, a **social worker** or a **peace officer**.
- (2) Where a person makes a report under subsection (1), the person shall report **all** the information in his or her possession.
- (3) Where a report is made to a peace officer under subsection (1), the peace officer shall, as soon as possible after receiving the report, inform the director or a social worker.
- (4) This section applies, notwithstanding the provisions of another Act, to a person referred to in subsection (5) who, in the course of his or her professional duties has **reasonable grounds to suspect** that a child has been, is or may be in danger of abandonment, desertion, neglect, physical, sexual, or emotional ill-treatment, or has been, is or may be otherwise in need of protection.
- (5) Subsection (4) applies to every person who performs professional or official duties with respect to a child, including,
- (a) a health care professional;
  - (b) a **teacher, school principal**, social worker, family counsellor, member of the clergy, rabbi, operator or employee of a day care centre and a youth and recreation worker;
  - (c) a peace officer; and
  - (d) a solicitor.
- (6) This section applies notwithstanding that the information is **confidential** or privileged, and an action does not lie against the informant unless the making of the report is done **maliciously** or **without reasonable cause**.
- (7) A person shall **not interfere with** or **harass** a person who gives information under this section.

- (8) A person who contravenes this section is **guilty of an offence** and is liable on summary conviction, to a **fine** not exceeding \$10,000 or to **imprisonment** for a term not exceeding 6 months or to both a fine and imprisonment.
- (9) Notwithstanding section 8 of the *Summary Proceedings Act*, an information or complaint under this section may be laid or made within **3 years** from the day when the contravention occurred. (p. 30-31)

It is the primary responsibility of Child Protection Services, Child Welfare Division of the Department of Social Services in Newfoundland and Labrador to investigate alleged or suspected child abuse or neglect, and to provide services to ensure the well-being and safety of the child. Cases of abuse or neglect which may hold grounds for criminal investigation are generally referred to the police. It is the role of the criminal court to prosecute the offender, while the judge presiding over the child protection hearing determines if a child is in need of protection, and whether to remove the child from the home if necessary. The judge may also specify that certain services be provided to the child and/or family to address the situation. The maximum age to which authorities must investigate a report and provide services varies among jurisdictions from 16 to 19. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the Child Welfare Act (1992) defines a "child" under **Section 2.(a)** as: "an unmarried boy or girl actually or apparently under the age of 16." (p. 2)

### When is a Young Person's Consent Legal?

Another issue requiring consideration is whether or not young persons can legally consent to sexual activity. Sexual activity without consent is always a crime. However, it is important to note that sexual abuse can be considered to have occurred even when consent has apparently been given. It depends on the age of the victim, the difference between the age of the alleged perpetrator and the victim, and the difference in power between these two individuals. The federal law says that in some cases the consent is not legal. That is, even if a young person has agreed to sexual activity, the other person involved may be still committing a crime. Therefore, the person charged with sexual abuse or exploitation cannot use as a defence the fact that the younger person consented to the sexual activity. The accused must be able to prove that he or she took all reasonable steps to determine the young person's age (Department of Justice Canada, 1989).

To clarify whether or not sexual abuse has occurred, the Department of Justice Canada (1989) provides the following legal interpretations:

#### **Children under 12:**

Children under 12 can never give consent to sexual activity. (p. 12)

**Children 12 or more but under 14:**

In general, children 12 or more but under 14 are not considered old enough to consent to sexual activity. However, there is an exception. No crime is committed if two young people consent to sexual activity and the older teenager is still under the age of 16. As well, there must be less than two years' age difference between the two. (p. 12)

Even if a young person in this age group consents to sexual activity with someone less than two years older, the consent is not legal if one of them is in a position of trust or authority over the other -- for example, a babysitter -- or if a relationship of dependency exists, such as a young person looking after a disabled teenager. (p. 12)

**Young people 14 or more but under 18:**

Young people 14 or more but under 18 can legally consent to sexual activity. However, the consent is not legal and the crime of sexual exploitation occurs if one of those involved is in a position of trust or authority over the other, or is a person upon whom the other is dependent. (p. 12)

## **The Policy Context**

Although Newfoundland and Labrador statistics indicate that child abuse has been a growing concern in this province for several years, the development of policies (especially policies for teachers) pertaining to this issue has been fairly recent.

In 1991, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador recognized the need for a coordinated, long-term plan to address the problem of violence in this province, and established The Committee To Develop A Provincial Strategy Against Violence. This executive level committee was formed to develop a provincial strategy on violence against women, children, elderly and dependent adults. While interdepartmental committees existed in the past, the government identified a need to coordinate efforts in focusing more attention on the prevention of abuse, and the delivery of services to abuse victims.

A number of common themes emerged from this project. The importance of regional coordination and increased opportunities for networking was highlighted; the need for education to address attitudes that condone violence was recognized; the school system was identified as a potential catalyst for change through the creation of peaceful school cultures, modelling and teaching mutual respect, cooperation, equality, fairness, and conflict resolution; emphasis on community ownership and collaboration between communities and government was recommended; and the prevention of violence was expressed as the ultimate goal. Prevention was seen as occurring only with major societal

changes that address recent problems of sexism, racism, ageism, poverty, and homophobia (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1994).

### The Provincial Policy

In 1993, the Department of Education, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador realized that child abuse has serious implications for educators and produced the Provincial Child Abuse Policy and Guidelines. The intent of this document is to offer guidelines for school board districts in order to avoid inconsistent or inappropriate actions by school personnel, while attempting to ensure that all aspects of child abuse are thoroughly understood. It recognizes the need to train teachers in appropriate verbal and non-verbal responses to better prepare them for receiving a disclosure from a child, and the need for teacher training in identification. It suggests that awareness and prevention programs need to be offered to children, and that school boards need to have a clear succinct policy about child abuse in their schools.

This policy provides some very valuable information for teachers such as: their legal obligation to report child abuse to the appropriate authorities; the legal consequences of failing to do so; the appropriate reporting procedure to follow when filing reports; an extensive list of child abuse indicators; and a list of prevention techniques that should be implemented in the classroom. However, it is very prescriptive in its approach, and lacks an approach to dealing with the factors affecting teachers'

reluctance to report, as described earlier (Tite, 1994b, 1996; Zellman, 1990).

The scarce supply of copies of the provincial policy at the school level, and the lack of teacher training about it also limits its effectiveness. Although this policy contains some very valuable information for teachers of Newfoundland and Labrador, it is not being adequately communicated to them (Tite, 1995).

Potential problems could arise when various school board districts begin to develop their own policies as recommended by the Provincial policy. This approach tends to lead to inconsistency because it assumes that school board members will accurately do what is expected of them, while there are no guarantees.

#### District School Board Policies

A review of 19 existing child abuse policy statements obtained from various District School Boards throughout Newfoundland and Labrador revealed many surprising results.<sup>1</sup> First, the development of so many different school board policies has resulted in widespread variations in content. Teachers across the province are not receiving the same information about child abuse. Presently, school board policies range in length from two pages of very limited content to 63 pages of comprehensive directions. In many cases, much vital information is being omitted from policies, while in other cases, there

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<sup>1</sup> These documents were obtained from Tite's Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada project (File # 410-93-0970).

is too much information which may seem to be irrelevant to teachers.

Many policies also contain ambiguous statements such as, "The obligation to report arises if the objective test is met that there are reasonable grounds to suspect abuse." Statements such as this may cause confusion for teachers.

More importantly, the majority (74%) of the existing school board policies are extremely outdated. That is, 14 of the 19 policies analysed refer to the Child Welfare Act before it was revised in 1992. Even though some of these policies were developed or revised since this time, the policy makers seemed to be unaware of the revised Act. Furthermore, the Provincial Child Abuse Policy and Guidelines produced in 1993 recommended that school boards use this document as a guide to develop clear and succinct policies of their own. Only six school boards policies have been developed since 1993. One of these recent policies still references the Child Welfare Act before it was revised in 1992, and states, "Under normal circumstances, prior to reporting the suspected case of abuse to Social Services, the principal will be informed." Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that many school board policies contain information which contradicts the existing provincial law and policy.

With so much discrepancy existing between various school board policies, it may be impossible to have a consistent approach to the problem of child abuse in this province. Some school boards recommend direct agency reporting of teachers, while many others inform the teachers about their (outdated) legal responsibility to report, but suggest, recommend, advise, or require teachers to report to their principals prior to filing



a report. This sheds some light on Tite's research in Newfoundland and Labrador which indicates that approximately one-half of teachers' suspicions never make it past the principal's office (Tite, 1995). One policy does not refer to the Child Welfare Act at all, and advises teachers not to make the report themselves. It states, "Suspected cases of child abuse/neglect are to be reported to the school principal who is responsible for filing the report with the Department of Social Services." Two issues seem clear: (1) many school board policies are not being adequately delivered to teachers (Abrahams, et al., 1992; Tite, 1995); and (2) the ones that are being communicated often contain inaccurate information.

## **Reporting Behavior**

Although teachers are thought to be well-placed for the detection of child abuse, and are legally responsible for reporting such cases to the appropriate authorities, recent research suggests that child maltreatment is under-reported by teachers (Abrahams et al., 1992; McIntyre, 1987). McIntyre (1987) reports that 10% of child abuse referrals come from school personnel, while Abrahams, Casey, and Daro (1992) report a slightly higher percentage of 16.3, and suggest that less than 25% of teachers' suspicions of abuse are formally reported to Social Services. These reporting rates are surprisingly low considering the amount of time teachers spend with children, especially in light of their general concern for the development of the "whole child" (Tite, 1994a, 1994b, 1995). Why are teachers' reporting rates so low? The literature suggests a number of factors: teacher knowledge, teacher training, the school context, the professional context, the decision-making context, and the personal context.

### **Teacher Knowledge**

Lack of teacher knowledge about child abuse reporting is a common theme recurring throughout the literature (Abrahams et al., 1992; Beck et al., 1994; McIntyre, 1987, 1990; Reiniger et al., 1995; Tite, 1994b, 1995; Zellman, 1990). Abrahams, Casey, & Daro (1992) found that almost two-thirds of the teachers in their survey felt that lack

of sufficient knowledge about how to detect and report cases of suspected child abuse was a significant obstacle to reporting. Owing to inadequate teacher education and training, many teachers are unaware of the symptoms of child abuse, their legal responsibility to report any suspicions of child abuse to Social Services, the consequences of failing to file a report, the limits of their liability, and the proper procedure to be followed when making such reports.

McIntyre (1990) cites similar findings. He found that only 21% of teachers reported being “very aware” of the signs of physical abuse, 64% reported that they would recognize the signs if they were “very obvious,” and 12% said that they were “not aware” of the indicators. The teachers in his study were even less aware of the signs of sexual abuse; only 4% said they were “very aware” of the signs, 17% reported that they would be able to recognize the signs if they were “very obvious,” and a frightening 75% indicated that they would not recognize the signs at all.

McIntyre (1990) also reports that only one-third of the teachers in his study were well informed of their legal requirements. He concludes that teachers seem to be very empathetic to the needs of abused children and want to help, yet their lack of knowledge may be interfering with accurate identification and increased reporting.

The results of a study in British Columbia revealed that almost all teachers were aware of the existing mandatory reporting law, but their knowledge of the specific components of the legislation was very limited. That is, they did not know that all school personnel are required to report suspected child abuse, that there are legal consequences

for failing to report, and that there are proper procedures to follow when filing a report. This suggests that teachers are not fully aware of their reporting responsibilities, and do not consistently comply with the mandatory child abuse reporting laws (Beck et al., 1994).

Reiniger, Robison and McHugh (1995) conducted a survey of 1,368 professionals from various disciplines, and their results indicated that substantial numbers of professionals were not aware of the indicators of abuse, but that all professionals were more knowledgeable about child abuse than they were about their legal obligations. Moreover, teachers were no more knowledgeable about the indicators of abuse than were other professionals, although most abused children are of school age. In another study, Volpe (cited in McIntyre, 1990) compared the knowledge of teachers, nurses and social workers, and found that teachers were the least informed and least prepared to deal with the problem of child abuse. These results are somewhat disturbing considering the fact that teachers spend more time with children than any other professionals.

Research conducted by Tite (1994b, 1995) suggests that most teachers are aware of their legal reporting obligations, but are less aware of the signs and symptoms of child abuse. In her most recent survey of 336 teachers from Newfoundland and Labrador, she found that less than 2% said that it is easy to detect symptoms of sexual abuse, less than 10% indicated that it is easy to detect symptoms of physical or emotional abuse, and about one-half said it is easy to identify indicators of neglect. However, Tite explains that the difficulties teachers experience with detecting abuse are not solely a matter of the

type of abuse. The findings from this Newfoundland and Labrador survey (1995) concur with the results of her Ontario survey (1994b), which stresses the extreme difficulty of identifying victims of abuse under normal classroom conditions. Teachers tend to focus on the intellectual development of children, and often cases of child abuse go unreported unless the symptoms are blatantly obvious. The majority of teachers in Tite's Newfoundland and Labrador study indicated that they probably would not notice signs of sexual, physical or emotional abuse "*if the child is not having trouble at school*" (p. 11). As stated by Tite (1995), "This is particularly interesting given the prevailing assumption that teachers are particularly well-placed for identifying child abuse victims and considering the policy attention given to the development of the 'whole child' within most educational jurisdictions across the country" (p. 11).

Tite (1995) also suggests that other classroom conditions further complicate teachers' abilities to detect signs and symptoms of abuse. Teachers deal with large numbers of children who present themselves with minor injuries from time to time, abused children often provide convincing excuses to cover up the abuse, and it is common for teachers to be faced with children who seem to be emotionally distressed. Evidently, it is not surprising that only the extreme cases of child abuse stand out and get reported by teachers. Teachers are confronted daily with a wide range of personalities, needs, abilities, and interests, which further complicates their ability to identify symptoms of child abuse. Tite (1995) concludes, "Interpreting children's symptoms in such circumstances requires a very sophisticated knowledge base" (p. 12).

Overall, it seems clear that teachers need to become more knowledgeable about various issues pertaining to child abuse. Teachers need to be aware of the indicators of abuse and of the appropriate procedure to be followed when making a report. It is important for teachers to realize that a reasonable suspicion of child maltreatment is all that is needed in order to file a report, and that other people are responsible for collecting the facts. Teachers also need to be reminded that there are legal penalties for not reporting their suspicions, and that they are fully protected legally if their reports are made in good faith (Beck et al., 1994).

### Teacher Training

Most research indicates that teacher training about child abuse has been inadequate (Abrahams et al., 1992; McIntyre, 1987, 1990; Tite, 1994b, 1995). A survey conducted by the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse (NCPCA) in the United States found that approximately two-thirds of the teachers indicated that their schools were not sufficiently educating them on identifying, reporting, and preventing child abuse (Abrahams et al., 1992). McIntyre (1987) found that 81% of the teachers in his study received no child abuse training during their college career, and 66% received no in-service training about child abuse during their teaching career.

More recently, the results of Tite's (1994b) Ontario study indicate that the majority of the teachers surveyed had received information about the reporting law from

their school boards, but almost 40% of the teachers did not know whether their school board had a child abuse policy, and less than one-half had been required to attend an in-service program in the last five years. In Tite's (1995) Newfoundland and Labrador study, the majority (77.1%) of teachers surveyed had received information from their school boards, however slightly more than one-half (60%) indicated an awareness of their school board policy, and less than one-half (48%) had attended a mandatory child abuse in-service session in the last five years. Clearly, policies pertaining to child abuse are not being adequately communicated to teachers.

With regard to gender differences, male teachers are slightly less likely to report their suspicions of child abuse than females (Beck, et al., 1994; Tite, 1995). Beck, Casey and Corbishley (1994) found that female teachers scored higher than male teachers on the knowledge items of his survey, and Tite (1995) found that there was a strong positive correlation between suspicion and in-service training, and between suspicion and awareness of policy for female teachers, but that male teachers' suspicions seemed unaffected by training and policy. Tite (1995) explains this gender difference by suggesting that men and women experience violence differently, and that gender relations in the school are likely to reflect those on the outside.

Just over one-half of Tite's sample of Newfoundland and Labrador teachers indicated that they had ever suspected that a child in their class was a victim of child abuse, and a good majority of the teachers claimed that they were not sufficiently trained for detecting the symptoms of abuse (Tite, 1995). These results are quite interesting

considering the incident of Mount Cashel in 1989, and the fact that statistics suggest that it is highly probable for teachers to have at least one abused child in their classroom each year.

To conclude, all of the above studies suggest that teachers' knowledge and training about child abuse are insufficient, and strongly support the need for more effective delivery of information about child abuse to teachers (Abrahams et al., 1992; Beck et al, 1994; McIntyre, 1987, 1990; Reiniger et al., 1995; Tite, 1994b, 1995).

### The School Context

Although there is much research available on the effects of teacher knowledge and training on child abuse reporting (Abrahams et al., 1992; Beck et al., 1994; McIntyre, 1987, 1990; Tite, 1994b, 1995), many features of the school that pose problems for the effective implementation of reporting procedures have been overlooked (Tite, 1994a).

First, the school principal has a major influence on teachers' reporting behavior (Beck et al., 1994; McIntyre, 1990; Tite, 1994a, 1995, 1996; Zellman, 1990). Many teachers report their suspicions, but most often to their principals. The findings of Tite's Ontario study show that teachers do not intentionally avoid their reporting responsibility, but that "almost half of the teachers' suspicions never make it past the principal's desk" (Tite, 1994a, p. 87). In Newfoundland and Labrador, very few child abuse reports are made without the principal's knowledge. Reporting procedures among school districts



vary, but principals are almost always involved, and often conduct their own investigations before Social Services are called (if they are called at all). Only 15% of teachers' reports went directly to Social Services without involving the principal, although the Child Welfare Act mandates direct agency reporting (Tite, 1995).

There appears to be a perception among teachers that principals can handle child abuse reporting better than teachers, yet they usually have no more education or training about child abuse than teachers. Teachers also seem to think that principals can adequately handle reports, while protecting their working relationships with children and their families (Tite, 1994a). The problem arises when principals do not go forth with teachers' suspicions. Teachers in effect are giving their legal responsibility to someone else, while the Child Welfare Act requires the person having information about a child being abused to immediately report the matter to the director, a social worker or a peace officer (Child Welfare Act, 1992).

Unfortunately, failure of teachers to report child abuse to the proper authorities may place a child at risk of continued abuse. Since lack of support from the school seems to be a significant reason for teachers failing to report child abuse, it is important that all school personnel develop a greater understanding of the issues surrounding child abuse. Teachers need encouragement and support from colleagues when they are confronted with abusive situations.

It is also important to recognize that child abuse reporting may cause a disruption to the "regular" daily operation of schools. Schools are busy and crowded places, where

teachers are trying to meet the needs of all children. The idea that teachers are well-placed for the detection of child abuse is based on the assumption that teachers are concerned with the development of the "whole child," and that their close relationships with children and their families put them in a better position to observe signs that are suggestive of abuse. However, these factors may in fact complicate the reporting role (Tite, 1994a). Reporting to Social Services often impacts greatly on teachers' relationships with children and their families. Abraham, Casey, and Daro (1992) conclude, for example, that 52% of the teachers in their study were concerned about the potential damage of reporting child abuse to the parent-teacher and teacher-child relations. This concern is quite natural considering the educational importance of maintaining a positive relationship with parents and their children.

Teachers are primarily concerned about academic learning and they are preoccupied with maintaining discipline, which further complicates reporting (Tite, 1994a). Many teachers spend most of their time trying to meet the diverse academic needs of many children, while trying to control the disruptive behaviors of a few. The fact that abuse may be what is inhibiting academic learning or causing behavior difficulties for some children is frequently overlooked, although child abuse has been shown to affect the intellectual, social, or psychological development of children (Halliday-Sumner, 1990a).

Furthermore, teachers may also find it difficult to distinguish between the indicators of abuse and discipline (Tite, 1994a). The results of Tite's Ontario study

revealed that 41.7% of the teachers surveyed said it would be difficult to determine if a child's injury is a sign of physical abuse, the majority (68.8%) said they were in favour of spanking as a discipline measure, and one-quarter were undecided about the abusiveness of spanking and bruising. Clearly, teachers' perceptions of the need to discipline children appear to create confusion about which children are in need of protection.

Thus, since teachers' views about child abuse arise out of the school climate and institutional context in which they work, any future attempts to encourage teachers to become more involved in this problem must emphasize an understanding of the many difficulties associated with the school context which tend to interfere with reporting.

### The Professional Context

Reporting is further influenced by teachers' perceptions of the kind of responses they anticipate from outside agencies. These perceptions have developed from either actual past experiences with agencies such as Social Services or from the "horror stories" that have been relayed to them by others (Tite, 1994a, 1996).

Unfortunately, some teachers believe that reporting their suspicions to Social Services will not do any good, while potentially adding new trauma to already abused children (Abrahams et al., 1992; Beck et al., 1994; Tite, 1994a, 1996). A significant minority (13.9%) of the teachers in Tite's Ontario study said they do not report their

suspensions, although they know that they are legally responsible for doing so. Many of these teachers are so cynical of Social Services' interventions that they do not even consider reporting. They believe that reporting does not make a difference because too often little is done to help the child (Tite, 1994a).

Other teachers are not as cynical of Social Services' responses, but do express dissatisfaction with the final outcomes of their reports and the amount of feedback they receive from Social Services. Tite's research in Ontario, as well as in Newfoundland and Labrador, indicates that teachers are rarely pleased with or fully informed of the outcomes of their reports. In her Ontario survey, less than one-half of the teachers who had made reports were able to state that their report resulted in some sort of treatment: one-fifth of these teachers stated that the child was immediately provided with a safer place, while approximately the same number were aware of some other form of intervention such as warnings to parents, counselling, or family support. Some teachers were unable to comment on the actual results of their report because the child was removed from the school after the report, yet they expressed discontent over the disruption that had been caused to the child's life. The results of Tite's Newfoundland and Labrador survey are even more telling. Less than one-third of the sample teachers in this study stated that their reports resulted in some sort of positive treatment, approximately one-quarter indicated that their reports did not go beyond the initial investigation, and almost one-half were unable to comment on the full outcome of their reports (Tite, 1994a, 1995).

Although it is difficult to determine how Social Services actually does respond to teachers' reports, the data from both of Tite's surveys strongly suggests that abused children are not being adequately provided with the supports they need, and teachers are simply not being adequately informed about the outcomes of their reports.

Probably due to budget restraints, schools have inadequate resources (i.e., Counsellors), outside agencies have long waiting lists of referrals, and child welfare workers have huge caseloads. These situations may make it virtually impossible for agencies to keep up with incoming referrals. Zellman (1990) suggests that school staff reports are often met with annoyance and rejection because of teachers' over-willingness to report. According to her, teachers' reports are not enthusiastically received by Social Services because they often do not constitute the most serious cases. Are child welfare workers reluctant to intervene in "nonurgent" cases because they lack the actual peoplepower to do so, or do their philosophies and definitions of abuse differ from those of teachers? Whatever the case, there is a need for better communication between these two agencies in order to provide more effective services to abused children (Tite, 1996; Zellman, 1990).

With respect to teacher feedback from Social Services, teachers are often simply not being told about the outcomes of their reports, which does very little to encourage them to continue reporting (Tite, 1994a, 1996; Zellman, 1990). Although it has been suggested that teachers often do not take the initiative to follow up their reports (Zellman, 1990), even when they do, the results are not always forthcoming (Tite, 1994a, 1996).

Is this a matter of concern about confidentiality, or is it confusion over “the appropriate division of responsibilities between the school, the police, and agents from child welfare?” (Tite, 1996, p. 4 )

While there are certainly ethical and legal concerns regarding confidentiality, a multidisciplinary approach to the child abuse requires open communication among all team members. Coordinated action is the term presently being used to describe how professionals are approaching the problem of child abuse. Teachers are expected to play their part by detecting abused children in the classroom and then reporting their suspicions to the appropriate authorities. Child welfare workers, police, health workers, and legal professionals then play their part by processing the cases and channelling help to the children. Fortunately, this type of action allows for a community effort against child abuse by drawing on each group’s professional strengths and institutional opportunities, while sending a community message that child abuse is unacceptable. However, there is a need for better communication between professionals, and the various professional groups involved in child abuse cases need to have a better understanding of each other’s role (Tite, 1996).

More specifically, the teachers’ role needs to be viewed as a response role rather than a surveillance role, and their reporting behavior needs to be seen as a systematic process rather than a procedural one. Current policies and procedures require teachers to play a limited surveillance role, and then to turn the abused child over to outside agencies (Tite, 1996). Teachers are warned against asking leading questions rather than being

encouraged to use open-ended questions, and they are cautioned against following up their cases with parents, police, or child welfare. Outside agencies tend to forget that, "Teachers are among the few professionals who can be expected to be in contact with the child and the family from the time of initial suspicion through the reporting process, treatment, and follow-up" (Tite, 1994b, p. 13).

Although teachers have a different kind of relationship with children and their families than any other agency worker assigned to handling child abuse cases, present procedures are distancing teachers from children, parents, principals, counsellors, and outside agencies. To allow for a more effective approach and fuller educational commitment to the problem of child abuse, teachers need to be better informed of how to deal with children in the midst of a disclosure, during the course of the investigation, and after the case has been taken up by outside authorities (Tite, 1996).

Furthermore, outside agencies need to draw on teachers' knowledge about communication, curriculum, pedagogy, and learner characteristics, while encouraging them to be active members of the helping process. Teachers are in a position to heighten awareness about abuse, they are aware of academic and behavioral strategies that may help abused children, and they have the ability to develop and implement prevention curricula (Tite, 1996). Drawing on teachers' expertise may, in return, help to alleviate negative concerns, and increase their level of confidence in child abuse reporting. Hence, it is crucial for outside agencies to listen to the voices of teachers and provide them with the feedback they desperately need.

### The Decision-Making Context

Is it really abuse? What are some other symptoms I should be looking for? What do the policies say about child abuse? How do I make a report? What will happen if I am wrong? How will my principal react? What will my colleagues say? How will the parents react? How will the child react? Who can I consult with about this matter? What if no one agrees with me? What will happen to the child if I make a report? What will happen if I do not? These are the types of questions teachers ask themselves when they are confronted with a suspicion of child abuse. Teachers do not report their suspicions to Social Services haphazardly, they usually engage in a very intense decision-making process before they file an official report.

Filing an official report to Social Services is the final stage of a decision-making process for teachers. According to Tite (1994b), "Once teachers' initial suspicions are aroused, many investigate abuse informally before making their reports" (p. 7). Several stages of decision-making occur before teachers actually go forth with an official report. Teachers' initial suspicions are aroused when they are confronted with a particular incident or with a range of disturbing observations, and then there is a period in which teachers attempt to accumulate sufficient evidence before making a report. During this period, teachers enter into a process that is shaped by statements of children and parents, guided by their knowledge of child welfare legislation, and reinforced by the reactions of their principal, the police, and child welfare workers (Tite, 1994a, 1994b, 1995, 1996).



There is very little research available on how teachers actually define child abuse for themselves, or how they determine which cases to report. According to Tite (1993, 1995), teachers use the word “abuse” quite loosely when thinking and talking about harm to children, but their definitions of abuse tend to narrow when they are confronted with the decision of whether or not such harm represents a reportable case.

Too often, teachers do not report their suspicions of child abuse because they feel they lack sufficient evidence, and they are worried about making false allegations (Abrahams, et al., 1992; Beck, et al., 1994; Berliner, 1993; Halliday-Summer, 1990b; Tite, 1993, 1994b, 1995). Beck, Ogloff, and Corbishley (1994) found that the most important reason for reporting abuse was to protect the child, yet the most important reason for not reporting was lack of evidence. This process of trying to obtain sufficient evidence is not surprising, considering the difficulties associated with detecting child abuse in the classroom, and the legal requirement that teachers report only on “reasonable grounds.”

The Child Welfare Act (1992), section 38(4) requires teachers to have “reasonable grounds to suspect” that a child is in need of protection. This statement is somewhat subjective, and problems arise when teachers try to determine what constitutes “reasonable grounds.” A “suspicion” may be best explained as an initial gut feeling, but what constitutes “reasonable grounds” is left to the judgement of individuals. However, establishing “reasonable grounds” does not mean that one must obtain facts to prove that abuse has occurred. It is the responsibility of investigating agencies to obtain the facts.

Teachers need to be reminded of subsections 6, 7, and 8 of the Child Welfare Act (1992), which indicates that they are protected by the law if their reports are not made “maliciously or without reasonable cause,” that they shall not be “harassed,” and that they can be “convicted” for failing to report their suspicions.

### The Personal Context

Unfortunately, this decision-making process is not always a pleasant one. Teachers face a number of disturbing issues when they are contemplating reporting, and they are often reluctant to get involved because of the many mixed emotions that usually result from doing so. When deciding whether or not to report their suspicions to Social Services, teachers experience feelings such as doubt, uncertainty, guilt, fear, anger, worry, frustration, disappointment, and helplessness, all of which any person might rather avoid.

To begin, it is likely that many teachers have suffered some trauma in their own childhood and confronting a case of abuse in their classrooms may bring some old emotions to the surface (Halliday-Summer, 1990a, 1990b; Tite, 1996). In such instances, teachers must make sure that their own needs do not interfere with them meeting the needs of the child. Halliday-Summer (1990a) states,

If the teachers involved, have unresolved issues of their own, this could hamper rather than help the child. It

is important for the teacher that is experiencing such problems to seek out some assistance for the child that can be more objective (p. 1).

Meanwhile, teachers who have a history of abuse can become empowered adults if they have accepted and come to terms with their own childhood experiences. Such teachers may be better able to detect victims of abuse because of their greater sensitivity and understanding of the issue.

From another perspective, teachers are often reluctant to report child abuse for *fear* of invading family privacy (Abrahams et al., 1992; Tite, 1994b), and they *worry* about the consequences that may result from doing so (Abrahams et al., 1992; Beck et al., 1994; Berliner, 1993; Halliday-Summer, 1990a, 1990b; McIntyre, 1990; Tite, 1994b, 1996). They think about the negative consequences that may result for the child, and they wonder if making a report to Social Services will actually make a difference. They *fear* they may be putting the child in greater danger because retaliating parents may inflict more harm on the child, and they are *disappointed* in the amount of services that can actually be provided to the abused child.

Approximately 90% of the sample teachers in Tite's Ontario study *feared* that making a report could result in angry parents taking their anger out on the child. More than 50% were *concerned* about disturbing parent-teacher rapport, and the majority expressed *concern* about damaging the teacher-child relationship (Tite, 1994b). Considering the fact that teachers have to maintain close working relationships with

children and their families after a report has been made, it is not surprising that teachers would like to avoid any type of conflict. However, whether teachers' concerns are sincere or are a matter of avoiding conflict, their greatest concern appears to be the best interests of the child. The majority of teachers in Tite's (1994b) Ontario study expressed concern about disrupting the child's trust in the teacher. Teachers need to know that it is common for abused children to get angry with the reporting teacher, to blame him or her for "messing things up", and to retract statements because they fear what their future may hold (Halliday-Summer, 1990a). It is important to stress to teachers that failing to report can put the child in greater danger of abuse, and prevent the family members from receiving the help they need (Beck, et al., 1994).

Halliday-Summer (1990a) and Tite (1996) suggest that more teachers are talking about their feelings of *helplessness* and *frustration* in coping with the aftermath of disclosures in the classroom. Teachers need to know how to appropriately handle a disclosure, but they also need to know how to effectively deal with the child during the investigation and afterwards. While teachers feel that they may be the only support persons the child has, they are unclear as to what role they should undertake. This is particularly true for teachers from rural school districts, who often feel obliged to personally assist an abused child due to a general lack of resources.

To conclude, it is impossible to evaluate the reporting behavior of teachers without giving recognition to the various issues that interfere with the decision-making process. The present increases of demand on teachers to be more responsive to child

abuse puts a tremendous amount of pressure on teachers. Teachers want to help and protect the children they teach, but they lack the confidence to do so (Tite, 1996). The reporting behavior of teachers is a very complex issue, however heightening teachers' awareness is one possible way of influencing this decision-making process. Teachers need to feel that by filing a report to Social Services, they are taking the first step toward helping the child. Since they may be holding the missing piece to the puzzle which completes the total picture of abuse.

## **Conclusion**

A review of the most recent literature strongly suggests that the teachers of Newfoundland and Labrador are in need of a handbook about child abuse. Despite the dramatic increase in the incidence of child abuse over the past decade, and the increased amount of attention researchers, government, and policy makers have given to persuading teachers to address this problem, very little has changed with respect to the actual reporting rate of teachers in this province (Tite, 1995). Why?

First, there has been plenty of recent policy development for teachers in this province pertaining to child abuse reporting, but these policies are not being adequately communicated to teachers (Tite, 1995). That is, one provincial policy or school board policy per school is not reaching the hands of teachers. Teachers need to be in possession of their own personal document (handbook), which can be kept in their desk for quick reference if needed.

Second, the existence of so many policies (the Provincial Child Abuse Policy and Guidelines, as well as 27 school board district policies) results in excessive variations. Teachers' responses to child abuse are thus inconsistent. Teachers need a single document (handbook) which sends the same message to all teachers across the province, in order to allow for a more consistent approach to the "educational" problem of child abuse.

Third, most of the policy documents in Newfoundland and Labrador tend to

define teachers' legal role in terms of reporting. Teachers need a handbook, written from one colleague to another, which views the reporting behavior of teachers as a difficult decision-making process, and emphasizes an understanding of teachers' dilemmas, while attempting to alleviate teachers' concerns.

Finally, policy documents usually attempt to identify child abuse as a growing concern for teachers, while emphasizing the need for "coordinated action" with outside agencies. Such documents underestimate the role of teachers in dealing with such problems. "Coordinated action" requires teachers to play a limited surveillance role by identifying abused students in their classroom, and then remaining silent once they have handed their cases over to outside agencies (Tite, 1996). This approach to the problem of child abuse ignores the fact that teachers are often required to provide support to abused students before, during, and after reporting. Hence, a handbook for teachers needs to include suggestions and resources for teachers to use during prevention/intervention. A handbook should include information such as the telephone numbers for Children's Protection Services (Social Services) across Newfoundland and Labrador, literature references for teachers, bibliotherapy books for abused children, and practical prevention/intervention ideas that teachers can use in the classroom.

Zellman (1990) suggests that knowledge about child abuse reporting, formal child abuse training, and perceptions about personal consequences of making reports are most consistently related to patterns of reporting behavior. She said,

Those who are most knowledgeable about child abuse reporting and who are least likely to perceive that reporting will result in negative personal consequences are most likely to comply with the dictates of reporting laws by reporting all cases of suspected abuse that come to their attention (Zellman, 1990, p. 51).

If this is the case, then teachers of Newfoundland and Labrador lack knowledge about child abuse and/or, their perceptions of the negative personal consequences are interfering with their reporting behavior.

Tite (1995) revealed some very interesting and valuable information about the perceptions of teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador. According to the responses of 336 teachers (approximately 60% female, 40% male) in her survey, teachers' reporting behavior is influenced by: their "broad" theoretical definitions of child abuse, their past experiences with cases, their gender, and the responses they receive from their school and outside agencies.

Therefore, a handbook for teachers of this province would need to provide teachers with knowledge about child abuse reporting, while attempting to reduce teachers' perceptions of the negative consequences that may result from reporting. Reducing such perceptions will certainly be the most difficult of the two.

Several shortcomings have also been highlighted in the training and support available for teachers with respect to child abuse identification, reporting and prevention/intervention. First, teachers are not being provided with a sufficient amount pre-service and in-service training regarding child abuse. That is, the quantity of current



education about child abuse available for teachers is inadequate. Second, the pre-service and in-service training programmes being delivered to teachers may not be the most effective. That is, the quality of current education about child abuse available for teachers is inadequate.

It seems reasonable to assume that child abuse might be more easily identified by teachers if they were provided with more pre-service and in-service training about its indicators and about reporting procedures. However, Tite (1994b, 1995) suggests that attending child abuse in-service programmes only had a marginal effect on the sample of teachers in her studies, which causes one to question the effectiveness of current programmes.

Ideally, university students should be required to complete course work about child abuse in order to obtain a degree in Education, and practising teachers should be provided with in-service training annually (in the fall) which would reflect current issues and procedures for child abuse detection and intervention. The team chosen to conduct such training programmes should include knowledgeable persons from various disciplines (Education, Social Services, Health, and Justice). The content of these training sessions should emphasize: legal obligations, working definitions of child abuse, signs and symptoms of child abuse, reporting procedures, teachers' attitudes and personal biases about reporting, and variations in the roles of the various professionals involved with child abuse. Case scenarios from sources such as the Child Abuse Casebook for Educators (1996) should be presented at these training programmes to help teachers

develop effective strategies for dealing with abusive situations. Finally, a handbook developed specifically for teachers should be used as a guide during such training sessions to allow for a more consistent approach to teacher training throughout the province. Teachers should be provided with their own personal copy of this handbook for future reference.

Realistically, delivering such a comprehensive training programme to all teachers of Newfoundland and Labrador may not be feasible considering the cutbacks and budget restraints of our present economy. However, a handbook developed to increase teacher knowledge and confidence in child abuse reporting, can be delivered. While a handbook about child abuse could not possibly replace the need to train teachers, it could reach the hands of all teachers and it could be revised to be kept up to date with current issues.

Furthermore, such a handbook, developed specifically for teachers, could serve as a resource during professional development in a variety of ways: it could be reviewed and discussed (section by section) at a series of staff meetings, it could be used during the in-servicing of practising teachers and the pre-servicing of new teachers, and it could be presented and discussed at various home and school meetings.

Teachers from other provinces (i.e., Manitoba, Northwest Territories, & Ontario) have handbooks. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers Association, and the various School Board Committees should thus also make every effort to provide all teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador with such a document. A handbook for teachers about child abuse would be one more step

toward helping to “reduce abuse!”

## **CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this project is to develop a handbook about child abuse for teachers of Newfoundland and Labrador, which highlights current laws and policies, while elaborating on issues which are considered to be of most relevance to teachers. The ultimate goal of this handbook would be to increase teachers' knowledge, confidence, and competence with respect to child abuse reporting, while aiming to reduce child abuse in Newfoundland and Labrador. This chapter provides a description of the process followed in order to determine the need for such a handbook, and to obtain the information required for its development. A qualitative methodology was chosen for this project because of the nature of the data required. For this project, information was collected in three phases, as outlined below.

### **Phase I - Literature Review**

The first phase involved a thorough review of the relevant child abuse literature, particularly the literature pertaining to child abuse and teachers. This included an analysis of available literature to determine the nature and extent of the problem, to develop a greater understanding of the barriers most frequently identified as interfering with

teachers' reporting behavior, and to gather practical suggestions for helping teachers deal with various issues related to child abuse. A number of sample handbooks from other provinces (Manitoba, Ontario, Northwest Territories) were also collected, and were used as guides in the development of a handbook for this province.

### **Phase II - Review of Existing Laws and Policies**

In the second phase, an analysis was conducted of existing laws and policies in this province. This involved studying sections of the Child Welfare Act (1992) and the federal law related to child abuse in order to develop a greater understanding of the legal context, as well as analysing the Provincial Child Abuse Policy and Guidelines (1993) and the content of 19 District School Board Policies of this province to evaluate the policy context. This phase confirmed that teachers of Newfoundland and Labrador are in need of a handbook about child abuse, and determined the legal content which would need to be included in such a handbook.

### **Phase III - Consultations**

The third phase involved conducting consultations with an availability sample of eight knowledgeable persons in the area of child abuse. The participants chosen for this phase were considered to be "experts" in the field. "Expertise" was determined by

ensuring that at least one of the three following criteria applied: (1) individuals in a supervisory position who could articulate the policy position of the institution in which they worked; (2) individuals who work in the “front lines” and are involved in delivering child abuse knowledge to others; and/or (3) individuals who have special knowledge or experience in dealing with child abuse issues. The purpose of these consultations was to explore the opinions of various professionals with respect to the concerns expressed in phases I and II, and to determine which topics are pertinent to the development of a child abuse handbook for teachers.

The respondents for this phase were volunteers contacted by telephone, who were selected from different institutional affiliations in St. John's. The participants included: an available researcher from Memorial University; a course instructor from the Faculty of Education, Memorial University; the Chair of Child Protection from the School of Social Work, Memorial University; an in-service instructor on the Janeway Child Protection Team; the Assistant Director of Child Welfare at the Department of Social Services; a duty officer from the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary; a Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers Association representative from the Teacher Welfare Division; and a school board policy maker with the Avalon Consolidated School Board.

Despite their busy schedules, all individuals contacted for consultation were more than willing to meet to talk about a handbook about child abuse for teachers, and to offer suggestions about what should be included in such a handbook. The consultants (6 women, 2 men) ranged in age from their mid-thirties to early-sixties, and four of the eight

had worked in the school system in the past.

### Procedure

Each consultation began with a verbal explanation and description of the project. The same open-ended question was posed to all eight participants. This question was; “What do you feel should be included in a handbook for teachers about child abuse?” Other specific questions were posed depending on the participant’s institutional affiliation and based on the information gleaned from phases I and II. Generally questions were exploratory and focused on what was needed in a handbook for teachers about child abuse. All consultations were conducted in person and ranged in length from one-hour to three and one-half hours. Detailed notes were taken.

### Results

A number of common themes were highlighted during phase III. All eight consultants agreed that child abuse reporting can be very difficult, but felt that teachers have to pursue their responsibility. As one informant said, “They are professional people who have to make a professional decision.”

With respect to what should be contained in a handbook about child abuse for teachers, the suggestions most frequently offered by the consultants included: definitions

of abuse, statements regarding teachers' legal obligations and liabilities, a thorough list of abuse indicators, the appropriate steps to follow in handling a disclosure, a step by step procedure for reporting, and a reminder that teachers do not need proof that a child is being or has been abused because other people are responsible for investigating the case.

Since the police and social workers are involved in the investigation of reported abuse, it is not surprising that the respondents from these institutional affiliations felt that teachers should be warned about saying or doing anything which might ruin the investigation. They suggested that teachers need to be aware of the appropriate way to handle a disclosure, and need to be told not to contact the child's parents before the designated authorities have an opportunity to investigate the case.

One of the "front line" consultants strongly emphasized how an overreaction to a disclosure can be very harmful, and suggested that the school's response can "shut the child down". She told about a Grade One student who wrote the word "fuck" in her journal, and was brought to the principal's office (by the teacher) to be chastised for writing foul language. During the investigation stage of this case, the child said (between tears), "I am not allowed to talk about 'it,' because 'it' involves bad language."

Another consultant spoke about a case in which the child's parents were contacted by the teacher before the appropriate authorities had a chance to intervene. This resulted in very negative consequences for the child. The child's father was charged for physically assaulting the abuser, while no charges were laid against the abuser.

It is interesting that four of the eight consultants (those who had worked in the



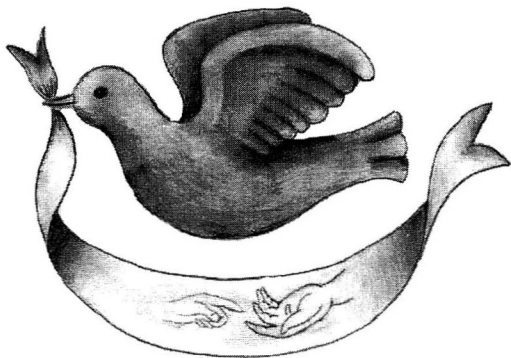
school system in the past) suggested that teachers need support themselves when dealing with child abuse issues. When specific questions were posed regarding support for teachers, all consultants agreed that a list of telephone numbers for Children's Protection Services (Social Services) across the province, a list of resources for teachers, and practical examples of cases should be included in this handbook.

All of the consultants except one felt that teachers should call Social Services to consult about a case if they are not sure of whether or not their suspicions constitute "reasonable grounds" and that they should seek feedback about the cases they report. However, one consultant (who agreed with teachers consulting with Social Services) said, "If you have reason to consult, you have reason to report."

### **Conclusion**

The handbook developed will give due consideration to the concerns and suggestions expressed in the most recent literature, the laws and policies of this province, and the recommendations of various experts in the field. Once developed, it will be recommended that the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers Association make every effort to pilot this handbook with a sample of teachers.

**CHAPTER IV - A CHANCE FOR CHILDHOOD:**  
**A HANDBOOK ABOUT CHILD ABUSE**  
**FOR TEACHERS OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR**



A Handbook about Child  
Abuse for Teachers of  
Newfoundland and Labrador

**A CHANCE FOR CHILDHOOD:**  
**A Handbook about Child Abuse**  
**for Teachers of Newfoundland and Labrador**

## **Acknowledgements**

Sincere thanks are extended to a number of professionals for their valuable input during the development phase of this handbook about child abuse for teachers. It is their sincere concern for the well-being of children which made "*A Chance for Childhood*" possible. A special thank you is extended to Craig for his patience and understanding while "San" wrote her book for teachers."

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## Foreword

Dear Colleagues;

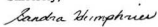
The intent of this handbook is to make the difficult task of child abuse reporting a little easier for teachers. Child abuse is a very complex problem which requires a multidisciplinary approach, yet as teachers we are often faced with this issue when we are alone within our classrooms.

While Laws and policies of this province state our legal obligation to report known or suspected abuse to the appropriate authorities, many of the dilemmas teachers face when confronted with child abuse have often been overlooked.

The ultimate goal of this handbook is to increase teachers' knowledge, confidence, and competence with respect to child abuse reporting, while elaborating on issues considered to be of most relevance to teachers. It highlights the main laws and policies of this province, and includes practical suggestions for teachers dealing with child abuse in their classrooms.

As teachers, we are responsible for the development of the "whole child," and in a position to help protect the children we teach. If abuse is a part of a child's life, it is hoped that this handbook will assist teachers in recognizing it and in initiating the necessary helping process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sandra Humphries".

Sandra Humphries



## **Introduction**

The physical, sexual, and emotional damage of abuse can remain with a child for life. That is, the effects of abuse can appear weeks, months, or even years later in difficulties getting along with others, problems taking care of oneself or others, drug and alcohol dependency, suicide, and the continuance of abuse. Without appropriate intervention, boys who have been abused are more likely to become abusers, and girls who have been abused are more likely to become involved in abusive relationships. Whatever the case, the next generation of children are at risk of being abused.

As teachers, we spend approximately five hours a day with children, and we often develop special relationships with them. Hence, there is a significant chance that abused children will disclose to us. On the other hand, many children do not tell their teachers that abuse is a part of their life. We have to be able to recognize it, and to respond effectively. We need to know how to act before, during, and after we encounter a known or suspected case of child abuse.

When we're concerned about a child, but unsure as to why, we need to pay closer attention to that child and his or her circumstances. We must listen to our intuitions, and trust our instincts. We must never assume that the child is "OK," or that we are meddling. Abused children are often not in a position to protect themselves, but we are in a position to seek help for children who may be caught in desperate situations.

### **What is the Purpose of this Handbook?**

The purpose of this handbook is to:

- increase teachers' knowledge about child abuse and to assist them in identifying signs of possible abuse.
- ensure that teachers are aware of their legal obligation to report child abuse, and of the penalties that may be employed for failing to report.
- inform teachers of how to listen and respond to a child speaking about possible abuse; to ensure that teachers know what to say and do, as well as what not to say and do.
- ensure that teachers are aware of how to make an accurate report of known or suspected abuse to the appropriate authorities.
- assist teachers in providing support for abused children in their classrooms.
- provide support for teachers dealing with child abuse in their classrooms.
- empower teachers with knowledge about child abuse which will enable them to work toward increasing the general level of public awareness.

***Please remember, when you report known or suspected abuse, you are taking the first and most important step in generating help for the child.***

## **Chapter 1**

### **Understanding Child Abuse**

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#### **Contents**

- \* What is Child Abuse?**
- \* Who are the Abusers?**
- \* Who are the Victims?**
- \* How Many Children are Abused?**
- \* The Roles of Different Professionals  
Involved in Child Abuse Cases**
- \* Questions and Answers**

## Chapter 1 - Understanding Child Abuse

### What is Child Abuse?

In the Provincial Child Abuse Policy and Guidelines (1993) child abuse is defined as:

An abused or neglected child means a child whose physical or mental health or welfare is harmed or threatened with harm by the acts or omissions of his/her parents or other persons responsible for his/her welfare. (p. 2)

This general definition of child abuse includes four categories of abuse: (1) **Sexual Abuse**; (2) **Physical Abuse**; (3) **Emotional Abuse**; and (4) **Neglect**. Neglect includes both **Physical and Emotional Neglect**. (Specific definitions<sup>1</sup> for these four different forms of abuse are presented in Chapter 2, along with some possible physical and behavioral signs which may assist you in identifying abused children in your classroom.)

### Who are the Abusers?

It is difficult to distinguish abusers from non-abusers. You can't tell if a person is an abuser by appearance, race, gender, occupation, level of wealth or education. However, current research indicates that . . . .

- Adults who were abused as children or who come from abusive homes are at a higher risk of becoming abusers.
- Most offenders are not strangers. Studies reveal that in approximately 85-90% of child abuse cases the perpetrator is either related or known to the child.
- Child-abusing parents frequently have unrealistic expectations for their children. They often demand a level of physical, social, and emotional maturity which is inappropriate given the age of their children.
- Many abusers view themselves as victims. They feel they have lost control of their children and their own lives. When confronted with what they perceive to

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (1993). *Provincial Child Abuse Policy and Guidelines*. St. John's: Department of Education.

be disrespectful behavior from their children they lash out in an effort to establish control.

- Much research has shown that more than 90% of reported sexual abusers are male.
- Sexual abusers use a number of strategies to gain access to children and to keep their victims silent such as threats, force, bribery, acts of cruelty, and other forms of physical and psychological coercion.

### **Who are the Victims?**

Like abusers, victims of child abuse come from all walks of life. Child abuse is not confined to any one group or class; victims of child abuse can be found in all cultures, religions, or socio-economic groups. There are no typical victims of abuse. However, some children may be more easily victimized than others. That is, children who are seen as being “different” and “isolated” from others and who appear to lack confidence are at a greater risk of being abused.

Special needs children may be at even a greater risk of being abused, depending on their level of dependency and/or vulnerability. Therefore, teachers who are responsible for meeting the educational needs of these children should be aware of this increased vulnerability.

### **How Many Children are Abused?**

The actual number of children who have been or are being abused is unknown. However, statistics throughout North America indicate that child abuse has become a major problem in all communities. The true prevalence is difficult to assess in part because only the extreme cases come to the attention of authorities. The failure to recognize abuse and to acknowledge its reality, the variations in definitions, the lack of education and training, and the reluctance of individuals to become involved in the helping process, may all contribute to under-reporting. The secrecy and shame associated with child abuse, the legal sanctions which it may entail, as well as the young age and dependency of its victims all serve to reduce voluntary reporting (Health and Welfare Canada, 1990). Therefore, while the number of child abuse cases handled by various social agencies can be ascertained, the actual incidence of child abuse can only be estimated.

## Some Startling Statistics

### In Canada,

- between 1981 and 1992, an average of 85 children were murdered each year. More than one-half of these child homicides were committed by a family member, usually the parent (Statistics Canada, 1994).
- more than 8000 cases of physical abuse are reported each year (Health & Welfare Canada, 1989).
- approximately one in three girls and one in four boys suffer from sexual assault by the age of 18 years (Badgley Report, 1984).
- the incidence of neglect and emotional abuse is higher than all other forms of abuse (Health & Welfare Canada, 1989).
- approximately 50 to 60% of child abuse victims are of school age (Health & Welfare Canada, 1989).

### In Newfoundland and Labrador,

- the total number of referrals received by the Department of Social Services increased from 544 in 1983-1984 to 4914 in 1994-1995 (Department of Social Services, Division of Statistics).

*While the true prevalence of child abuse in this province is essentially unknown, there is enough evidence to indicate a very serious and widespread problem.*

## The Roles of Different Professionals Involved in Child Abuse Cases

**1. Teachers:** Teachers are responsible for reporting any known or suspected cases of child abuse to a social worker or police officer, and for providing support to abused children in their classrooms.

**2. Child Protection Workers/Social Workers (Department of Social Services):** Social workers are responsible for investigating (gathering evidence on) suspected child abuse cases in order to determine if a child is in need of protection, and for providing services to ensure the well-being and safety of the child. While they aim to keep families intact, providing protection might include placing a child in foster care.

**3. Police Officers:** Police officers investigate child abuse allegations under the Criminal Code of Canada. They are responsible for collecting evidence (the facts) and laying charges against offenders.

*Many child abuse investigations involve both social workers and police officers.*

**4. Health Care Workers:** Health care workers may be responsible for providing evidence of child abuse through medical examinations of the child.

**5. Department of Justice (Provincial):** When a child abuse case goes to court, the judge presiding over the child protection hearing determines if the child is in need of protection, and whether or not to remove the child from the home. The judge may also specify that certain services be provided to the child and/or family to address the situation.

**6. Department of Justice Canada (Federal):** When child abuse laws have been broken, the Criminal Court is responsible for prosecuting the offender.

*All professionals are responsible for stopping abuse and helping the child!*

### Questions and Answers

**1. Do children lie about abuse?**

Research has shown that very few children have made false allegations of abuse. If a child discloses abuse to you, consider it to be true.

**2. Are children more likely to be abused by strangers?**

NO. Children are more likely to be abused by someone they know and trust.

**3. If I suspect abuse, do I need to obtain proof before making a report?**

NO. Once you have reasonable suspicions of abuse, you are legally responsible to report. It is the responsibility of social workers and police officers to gather the facts.

**4. Are some children at greater risk of being abused?**

While all children are at risk of being abused, there may be a greater possibility of some children being abused than others. These are children who are less able to defend themselves. That is, for example, children who "stand out" in a crowd or who lack confidence and/or credibility may be a target of abuse. Special needs children may be exceptionally vulnerable to abuse.

## Chapter 2

### Understanding the Indicators

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#### Contents

#### \* Recognizing Abuse: What are the Indicators?

Sexual Abuse  
Physical Abuse  
Emotional Abuse  
Physical Neglect  
Emotional Neglect

#### \* Questions and Answers

## Chapter 2 - Understanding the Indicators

### Recognizing Abuse: What are the Indicators?

Since most children do not tell their teachers that abuse is a part of their life, teachers need to be able to recognize the indicators of abuse. This chapter provides specific definitions of abuse as well as possible physical and behaviors signs which may assist you in identifying abused children in your classroom. These indicators usually occur in combinations, and may be a drastic change from the child's normal behavior. It may be a child's way of communicating to you that he or she has been or is being abused.

No one sign is absolute proof of abuse, and even when many of these signs are present it does not necessarily mean that abuse is definitely taking place. However, if a child exhibits some of these signs you would know that he or she is in need of some kind of help, and that you should pay closer attention to that child and his or her circumstances. You do not need proof of abuse before making a report. Once you suspect abuse you are responsible for reporting it. It is the responsibility of social workers (the Dept of Social Services) and police officers (the RNC or RCMP) to investigate.

**NOTE:** Any teacher who is uncertain as to whether his or her suspicions are based on reasonable grounds, may consult with the social worker in his or her district.  
A list of phone numbers for Children's Protection Services can be found in Chapter 8.





**The following specific definitions of abuse and possible physical and behavioral signs may lead you to suspect child abuse.** (A general Child Abuse Checklist for Teachers can be found in Chapter 8.)

## **Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse refers to the sexual exploitation of children by more powerful, usually older, individuals who impose sexual contact (by force or otherwise). The contact may range from exhibitionism, exposing the child to pornography, fondling, genital touching, to oral, anal, or, vaginal penetration.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Signs of Possible Sexual Abuse***

#### **Physical Signs:**

- ☐ sudden weight changes
- ☐ eating problems (i.e., refusing to eat or eating constantly)
- ☐ sleep disturbances; nightmares
- ☐ fatigue (from staying awake all night to try and prevent the abuse)
- ☐ recurring physical complaints with no apparent somatic base
- ☐ difficulty in walking or sitting
- ☐ pain, swelling or itching in the genital area
- ☐ bruises, bleeding or laceration of the external genitalia or anal areas
- ☐ pain during urination
- ☐ vaginal/penile discharge
- ☐ recurring vaginal infections
- ☐ constant sore throat of unknown origin
- ☐ pregnancy in early teens
- ☐ sexually transmitted diseases, especially in pre-adolescents

**Note:** Sexual abuse may still be occurring even when none of these physical signs are present.

#### **Behavioral Signs:**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> difficulties in school; poor comprehension, lack of concentration, daydreaming and being labelled a slow learner | <input type="checkbox"/> arriving early or late to school, or is late leaving in the afternoons |
| <input type="checkbox"/> being the perfect child or over-achiever   | <input type="checkbox"/> not wanting to participate in school activities                        |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> falling asleep in class  |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> refusing to undress under normal                                       |

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<sup>2</sup> McGuire & McCall (1987) cited in Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (1993). *Provincial Child Abuse Policy and Guidelines*. St. John's: Department of Education, p. 7.

- ☐ circumstances (i.e., Physical education classes)
- ☐ sudden fears or phobias
- ☐ sudden change in feeling about a particular person or place (i.e., "I hate Uncle John")
- ☐ sudden obsession with cleanliness
- ☐ noticeable personality changes; anxiety, insecurity, anger, hostility
- ☐ need for predictability
- ☐ behavioral extremes; aggressive or withdrawn
- ☐ depression, poor self-esteem
- ☐ poor self-image; poor overall physical care or wears suggestive or provocative clothing
- ☐ excessive nail biting or other nervous habits
- ☐ attention seeking behavior or overly compliant
- ☐ compulsive lying or exaggeration, and/or confusion regarding personal reality (i.e., dissociation, multiple personalities)
- ☐ difficulty accepting blame even for minor problems
- ☐ self-blame
- ☐ bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual behavior, knowledge or language for the child's age group
- ☐ persistent and inappropriate sexual play for the child's age and development level (including sexual play with toys)
- ☐ simulated sexual acts with siblings or friends, or sexual attention to pets or animals
- ☐ excessive genital self-stimulation
- ☐ compulsive sexual behavior (i.e., grabbing breasts or genital, or compulsively removing clothes)
- ☐ impulsive behavior; seems unable to control, acts without thinking, "accident prone"
- ☐ regressive behavior; baby talk,

- ☐ thumb sucking, urinating or defecating in clothes
- ☐ artwork of a sexual nature
- ☐ writing about abuse
- ☐ confusion about appropriate physical boundaries; rejects any physical contact or acts too "familiar" with others
- ☐ unable to show affection in usual ways
- ☐ poor peer relations; inability to make or retain friends
- ☐ seductive behavior
- ☐ prostitution
- ☐ destructive behavior; destroying property, setting fires or cruelty to smaller children or animals
- ☐ self-mutilation, destroying own work or possessions
- ☐ lack of appropriate affect in emotional circumstances
- ☐ running away from home; delinquency
- ☐ abuse of drugs or alcohol
- ☐ suicidal thoughts or attempts



***You can make a difference!***

## Physical Abuse

Physical abuse can be defined as the intentional, non-accidental use of physical force or action on the part of the parent or other person responsible for the child's welfare, aimed at hurting, injuring or destroying the child. The force used exceeds what is considered "reasonable punishment."<sup>3</sup>

NOTE: It is important to recognize that not all physical abuse entails visible marks or scars.

### *Signs of Possible Physical Abuse*

#### Physical Signs:

- ☐ unexplained bruises, welts or cuts on any part of the child's body, most often on the face, torso, back, buttocks, back of legs or genitals
- ☐ these injuries sometimes form a shape or pattern such as teethmarks or handprints, or may look the shape of the object used to make the injury (i.e., cord, belt buckle, iron or stove element)
- ☐ unexplained burns such as small circular burns (as from a cigarette) or pattern burns (as from a stove); these burns are often found on the soles of the feet, palms or back
- ☐ unexplained fractures and dislocations, especially of the shoulders and hips; this may include multiple fractures in various stages of healing.
- ☐ retinal haemorrhages or bald patches on the scalp where hair has been pulled out.

#### Behavioral Signs:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> confusion over social boundaries; very wary or distrustful of adults, or overly friendly to adults            | <input type="checkbox"/> in hot weather  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> low frustration level; becomes upset very easily, or is far too tolerant or patient                           | <input type="checkbox"/> refuses to participate in gym for no apparent reason                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> poor social skills; does not initiate contact with others, or is very attention seeking                       | <input type="checkbox"/> vacant stare or unusually watchful  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> confusion over appropriate physical contact; may refuse physical contact, or engage in inappropriate touching | <input type="checkbox"/> behavioral extremes; aggressive or withdrawn                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> inappropriately dressed; wears jacket in school, or long sleeves  | <input type="checkbox"/> depression  |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> withstands examination or painful procedures with little movement or crying |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> extreme anger and rage, or unusually passive and compliant                  |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> believes he or she is bad and deserves the punishment                       |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> does not turn to parents for  |

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<sup>3</sup> McGuire & McCall (1987) cited in Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (1993). *Provincial Child Abuse Policy and Guidelines*. St. John's: Department of Education, p. 9.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> support   | <input type="checkbox"/> extreme fear or passivity in the presence of a particular person |
| <input type="checkbox"/> afraid to go home; stays late or arrives at school early  | <input type="checkbox"/> runaway behavior, especially in adolescents                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> prolonged repeated absences from school/social activities, especially after weekends or vacations | <input type="checkbox"/> flinching, easily startled                                       |

## Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse occurs when the parent(s) or caregiver(s) treats the child in such a way that the child's concept of "self" is seriously impaired. The negative treatment is such that the capacity of the child to reach his/her full potential is critically undermined.<sup>4</sup>

This could include being exposed to constant chastising, belittling, verbal attacks, ridicule, humiliation, rejection, or violence in the home.

### *Signs of Possible Emotional Abuse*

#### Physical Signs:

- ☐ speech disorders
- ☐ sleep disorders
- ☐ eating disorders; sudden weight changes
- ☐ psychosomatic complaints, such as headaches, nausea, abdominal pain
- ☐ involuntary twitching of muscles
- ☐ failure to thrive with no organic cause

#### Behavior Signs:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> apparent mental, emotional lag                        | <input type="checkbox"/> poor peer relationships; insults or "puts down" peers           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> depressed and withdrawn                               | <input type="checkbox"/> inhibition of play  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> inability to trust others                             | <input type="checkbox"/> uses violence as a subject for artwork or writing               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> excessive crying, sighing, clinging or weeping        | <input type="checkbox"/> shows no emotional attachment to toys, pets or peers            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fears, anxieties, and phobias                         | <input type="checkbox"/> unusual fear of consequences, which may lead to excessive lying |
| <input type="checkbox"/> absence of affect and ability to communicate feelings | <input type="checkbox"/> repetitive stereotypic motions such as rocking                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> overly compliant, too well-mannered                   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> poor social skills                                    |  |

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<sup>4</sup> Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (1993). *Provincial Child Abuse Policy and Guidelines*. St. John's: Department of Education, p. 9.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> excessive nail biting or other nervous mannerisms | <input type="checkbox"/> self-mutilation              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> poor self-image/low self-esteem                   | <input type="checkbox"/> substance abuse              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> statements about being worthless or "nobody"      | <input type="checkbox"/> suicidal thought or attempts |

### **Physical Neglect**

Physical neglect can be defined as the failure of the person(s) responsible for the care of the child to provide for his/her physical or medical needs and resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's development or safety.<sup>5</sup>

This means that basic needs such as food, nutrition, clothing, shelter, medical care, safety, supervision, or sensory stimulation are not being provided.

### **Emotional Neglect**

Emotional neglect can be defined as withholding affection and love from the child. It might also include the withholding of affirmations of the child's sense of self-worth, trust, and belongingness. It is the failure to provide the psychological nurturance for a child's growth and development.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Signs of Possible Neglect***

#### **Physical Signs:**

- ☐ underweight, poor growth pattern, constant hunger
- ☐ poor physical hygiene; skin rashes, dirty hair and face, persistent body odour
- ☐ unattended physical or medical needs; glasses, dental work, untreated injuries
- ☐ consistent lack of supervision, abandonment
- ☐ fatigue, listlessness, lethargy

#### **Behavioral Signs:**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> dull and inactive                 | <input type="checkbox"/> aggressive, passive or withdrawn |
| <input type="checkbox"/> pale, listless, thin, unkempt     | <input type="checkbox"/> depression                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> behavioral extremes; hyperactive, | <input type="checkbox"/> poor impulse control;            |

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<sup>5</sup> Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (1993). *Provincial Child Abuse Policy and Guidelines*. St. John's: Department of Education, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (1993). *Provincial Child Abuse Policy and Guidelines*. St. John's: Department of Education, p.10.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> acts without thinking  | <input type="checkbox"/> often arrives early or late for school, or is often early or late leaving school in the afternoons |
| <input type="checkbox"/> begs or steals food  | <input type="checkbox"/> poor educational achievement   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> complains about hunger   | <input type="checkbox"/> poor concentration   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> complains of aching teeth  | <input type="checkbox"/> role reversal; child acting as a parent  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> squints eyes when looking at the board                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> delinquent acts or substance abuse   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> dirty clothes or appearance  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> states that there is no one to look after him or her, or that "no one cares" |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> falling asleep in class  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> frequently absent from school without explanations or notes from home        |   |

*Reaching out, just a little,  
can make a big difference!*

*Remember - No single indicator or set of indicators guarantees that abuse is/has taken place. However, if a continuing pattern is observed, child abuse should be considered as a possibility.*

### Questions & Answers

**1. How many physical or behavioral signs must I notice before I make a report of child abuse?**

There is no particular number of signs or symptoms which automatically confirms a suspicion of child abuse. However, if a child exhibits even one or two of the aforementioned indicators you would know that he or she is in need of some kind of help (i.e., counselling), and you should pay particular attention to that child and his or her circumstances. When you suspect abuse report it.

**2. Do I need to know which specific form of abuse has occurred before I file a report?**

NO. You only need to suspect that a child is in need of protection. You are not responsible for determining which form of abuse may be occurring. Social workers and/or police officers are responsible for obtaining the details of the abuse.

**3. What should I do if I feel that I have noticed enough signs or symptoms to suspect abuse, but my principal or colleagues do not agree with me?**

The Child Welfare Act requires the person who suspects abuse to report it, and you must not allow anyone to "talk you out of" your legal responsibility.

## Chapter 3

### Understanding the Law

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#### Contents

\*The Child Welfare Act:  
A Child in Need of Protection

\*The Child Welfare Act:  
Your Legal Responsibility to Report

\* When Can Young People  
Legally Consent to Sexual Activity?

\* Questions and Answers

## Chapter 3 - Understanding the Law

Services to abused children in Canada are provided by provincial and territorial governments. That is, each province and territory has legislation defining a “*child in need of protection*” that provides the legal basis for government intervention. This legislation recognizes that children have certain basic rights, including the right to be protected from abuse and neglect, and that governments have a responsibility to protect children from harm.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Child Welfare Act, RSN 1990, c. C-12, defines a “*child*” under Section 2.(a) as: “an unmarried boy or girl actually or apparently under the age of 16.” (p.2)

### **The Child Welfare Act: A Child in Need of Protection**

A “child in need of protection” is defined under Section 2.(b) of the Child Welfare Act, RSN 1990, c. C-12 as:

**S2.(b) “child in need of protection” means:**

- (i) a child who is without adequate care or supervision,
- (ii) a child who is without necessary food, clothing, or shelter, as may be available with the level of financial assistance given in relation to that child under the laws of the province,
- (iii) a child who is living in circumstances that are unfit or improper for the child,
- (iv) a child in the care or custody of a person who is unfit, unable or unwilling to provide adequate care for the child,
- (v) a child who is living in a situation where there is severe domestic violence,
- (vi) a child who is physically or sexually abused, physically or emotionally neglected, sexually exploited or in danger of that treatment,



- (vii) a child who is in the care and custody of a person who fails to provide adequately for the child's education or attendance at school,
- (viii) a child who has no living parent and who has no person willing to assume responsibility or with a legal responsibility for the child's maintenance,
- (ix) a child who is in the care or custody of a person who refuses or fails
  - (A) to provide or obtain proper medical or other recognized remedial care or treatment necessary for the health or well-being of the child, or
  - (B) to permit the care and treatment to be supplied to the child when it is considered essential by a qualified medical practitioner,
- (x) a child who is brought before the court with the consent of the parent, guardian, or person with actual control for the purpose of transferring the guardianship of the child to the director,
- (xi) a child who is beyond the control of a person caring for the child,
- (xii) a child who by his or her behavior, condition, environment or association, is likely to injure himself or herself or others,
- (xiii) a child taken into a home or otherwise in the care and custody of a person contrary to subsection 3(3) or (5) of the Adoption of Children Act, and
- (xiv) a child actually or apparently under the age of 12 who performs an action that contravenes a provision of an Act or a regulation made under that Act or a municipal regulation or by-law or an Act of the Parliament of Canada; (p. 2-3)

## The Child Welfare Act: Your Legal Responsibility to Report

The Newfoundland and Labrador Child Welfare Act (Revised, 1992) requires you to report any known or suspected child abuse (sexual, physical, emotional abuse and neglect) to an appropriate delegate of the Department of Social Services or the police. This includes any detachment office of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary, the office of the Director of Child Welfare (729-2668), or a social worker in your district. (NOTE: Chapter 8 contains a list of telephone numbers for Children's Protection Services (Social Services) throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, which are current as of September, 1996.)

*Your failure to report known or suspected abuse is an offence  
and may result in a fine and/or imprisonment.  
You are protected by the law if your report is made in good faith.*

### What does the Act Say?

### What does this Mean?

S38. (1) Where a **person** has information that a child has been, is or may be in danger of abandonment, desertion, neglect, physical, sexual or emotional ill-treatment or has been, is or may be otherwise in need of protection, the person shall **immediately** report the matter to the **director, a social worker or a peace officer.**

You must report child abuse as soon as you know of it, or suspect it.

You must report to the Director of Child Welfare, a social worker or a police officer.

S38. (2) Where a person makes a report under subsection (1), the person shall report **all** the information in his or her possession.

You must cooperate with investigating agencies, and release all information in your possession related to the case.

S38. (3) Where a report is made to a peace officer under subsection (1), the peace officer shall, as soon as possible after receiving the report, inform the director or a social worker.

If you report abuse to a police officer, he or she is responsible for filing a report with a delegate of the Department of Social Services as soon as possible.

---

**S38. (4)** This section applies notwithstanding the provisions of another Act, to a person referred to in subsection (5) who, in the course of his or her professional duties has **reasonable grounds to suspect** that a child has been, is or may be in danger of abandonment, desertion, neglect, physical, sexual or emotional ill-treatment, or has been, is or may be otherwise in need of protection.

The Child Welfare Act takes priority over any other Acts.

You don't need proof of abuse before filing a report. If you have reason to suspect abuse, you must report it.

---

**S38. (5)** Subsection (4) applies to every person who performs professional or official duties with respect to a child, including,  
(a) a health care professional  
(b) a **teacher, school principal**, social worker, family counsellor, member of the clergy, rabbi, operator or employee of a day care centre and a youth and recreation worker;  
(c) a peace officer; and  
(d) a solicitor.

It is your professional duty to file a report if you have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child has been, is or may be abused.

---

**S38. (6)** This section applies notwithstanding that the information is **confidential or privileged**, and an action does not lie against the informant unless the making of the report is done **maliciously or without reasonable cause**.

You must report information about child abuse even when it has been told to you in confidence, and even if the child has asked you not to tell.

All information pertaining to suspected child abuse shall be kept confidential.

When you make a report in good faith and without malice, you are protected by law from any possible legal action being brought against you.

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**S38. (7)** A person shall **not interfere with** or **harass** a person who gives information under this section.

The reporting agency should make every effort to protect your identity. You are protected by the law from being harassed.

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**S38. (8)** A person who contravenes this section is **guilty of an offence** and is liable on summary conviction, to a **fine** not exceeding \$10,000 or to **imprisonment** for a term not exceeding 6 months or to both a fine and imprisonment.

Failing to report known or suspected child abuse is a criminal offence, and may result in you receiving a fine up to \$10,000 and /or imprisonment for as long as 6 months.

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**S38. (9)** Notwithstanding section 8 of the *Summary Proceedings Act*, an information or complaint under this section may be laid or made within **3 years** from the day when the contravention occurred. (p. 30-31)

You can be charged with failing to report known or suspected child abuse up to 3 years from the day you violated this Act.

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### **When Can Young People Legally Consent to Sexual Activity?**

Sexual activity without consent is always a crime. However, it is important to remember that sexual abuse can be considered to have occurred even when consent has apparently been given. It depends on the age of the victim, the difference between the age of the alleged perpetrator and the victim, and the difference in power between these two individuals. The federal law says that in some cases the consent is not legal. That is, even if a young person has agreed to sexual activity, the other person involved may be still committing a crime. Therefore, the person charged with sexual abuse cannot use as a defence the fact that the younger person consented to the sexual activity. The accused must be able to prove that he or she took all reasonable steps to determine the young person's age.

To clarify whether or not sexual abuse has occurred, the Department of Justice Canada (1989) provides the following legal interpretations:

#### **Children under 12:**

Children under 12 can never give consent to sexual activity. (p. 12)

### **Children 12 or more but under 14:**

In general, children 12 or more but under 14 are not considered old enough to consent to sexual activity. However, there is an exception. No crime is committed if two young people consent to sexual activity and the older teenager is still under the age of 16. As well, there must be less than two years' age difference between the two. (p. 12)

Even if a young person in this age group consents to sexual activity with someone less than two years older, the consent is not legal if one of them is in a position of trust or authority over the other – for example, a babysitter – or if a relationship of dependency exists, such as a young person looking after a disabled teenager. (p. 12)

### **Young people 14 or more but under 18:**

Young people 14 or more but under 18 can legally consent to sexual activity. However, the consent is not legal and the crime of sexual exploitation occurs if one of those involved is in a position of trust or authority over the other, or is a person upon whom the other is dependent. (p. 12)

### **Questions and Answers**

- 1. The Child Welfare Act 38(4) requires that I report child abuse when I have “reasonable grounds to suspect” that a child is in need of protection. What is meant by “reasonable grounds to suspect?”**

A “suspicion” may be best explained as your initial gut feeling, and what actually constitutes “reasonable grounds” is left to your individual judgement of the indicators you have observed.

- 2. A 13 year old girl in my class has just told me that she agreed to have sex with her boyfriend, and she is now pregnant. Could this be child abuse?**

According to Justice Canada, you would need to know the age of the boyfriend before you can determine if a crime has been committed. If he is two or more years older than the girl in your class, child abuse can be considered to have occurred even if consent has been given.

## Chapter 4

### Understanding Disclosures

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#### Contents

- \* What is a Disclosure?
- \* How to Respond if a Child Discloses to You  
(Listening to a Child's Story of Abuse)
  - As the Child Discloses
  - After a Disclosure
  - If the Child Discloses in a Group Setting
- \* Appropriate Questioning:  
Non-Leading, Open Questions and Comments
- \* Inappropriate Questioning:  
Leading, Closed Questions and Comments
- \* Types of Disclosures
- \* Sample Responses to Disclosures
- \* Questions and Answers

## Chapter 4 - Understanding Disclosures

### What is a Disclosure?

A “disclosure” occurs when a child tells you that he or she has been or is being abused, or lets you know about the abuse in some other way. Sometimes a child will tell you directly (verbally) of abuse, but more often than not, he or she will drop hints or use indirect ways of letting you know about it. For example, drawing pictures which suggest abuse, writing about abuse in a journal, or talking about abuse indirectly, as if it were happening to a friend.

A child may disclose abuse which is presently occurring, which has happened weeks, months or years ago, which took place in another community or province. In any case, you need to report all disclosures of suspected abuse, no matter where or when it happened.

### How to Respond if a Child Discloses to You (Listening to a Child’s Story of Abuse)

The initial response a child receives from you can have a major impact on how the child behaves during the investigation process and afterwards. You need to communicate the following important messages to the child:

- I believe you.
- It’s not your fault.
- You did the right thing in talking to me about it.
- You have the right to be safe and happy. I care, and I want to help.
- I’m here for you when you need to talk.
- You are not alone. Abuse happens to other children.

### As the Child Discloses:

1. In private, **listen** to what the child is trying to tell you. (Victims of child abuse often disclose a number of times before someone really hears them.) Let the child tell his or her story in his or her own way. Respect silence, do not rush the child, and avoid asking leading questions. (See page 25 for Appropriate Questioning techniques.)

2. Remain **calm** and don't **overreact**. Don't impose your own values, moral or opinions on the child, and don't express to the child what you think he or she might be feeling. That is, you should avoid making comments or statements such as, "I know your parents and they seem like such nice people," "Your father is a horrible person for doing this," or "You must hate him for doing what he did to you." These type of statements or comments may immediately cause a child to shut down, or make him or her feel more guilty about disclosing the abuse.

3. **Reassure** and provide as much **support** as possible to the child. Assume the child is telling the truth when reporting abuse, and make sure the child knows that what has happened was not his or her fault. Use comments such as, "I believe you" or "It is not your fault." Let the child know that telling someone was the right thing to do, for example, "I'm glad you told me, you did the right thing." The child may also receive comfort from hearing that he or she is not alone and that other children have experienced abuse. This message of reassurance may be communicated to the child by saying, "You are not alone, this happens to other children."

4. Be careful not to make **promises** that you may not be able to keep. That is, for example, telling the child that "Your Mom will not be upset," "Your family will not break up," "Your offender will not get into trouble," or "Everything will be alright, this will never happen again" are promises that cannot be guaranteed.

5. Once a disclosure has been made, or enough information has been given so that you suspect abuse, do not continue to question the child. It is the role of the social worker and/or police officer to question the child for the details of the abuse. **Inform** the child of what will happen next. The following response might be appropriate, "Thank you for telling me, you did the right thing. I am going to tell someone (a social worker or police officer) who may be able to help you, and he or she will want to talk to you." You can acknowledge how the child feels about this, but you cannot give him or her a choice. Tell the child, "There are certain secrets which can't be kept if you are being hurt." (It might be a good idea to refrain from telling the child when anyone is coming until they are there.)

6. Take **time** to respond to the child's questions and concerns.

#### **After a Disclosure:**

7. Follow the reporting procedure on pages 30-32. (Chapter 8 contains a list of telephone numbers for Children's Protection Services (Social Services) throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.)



8. Immediately after a disclosure, you should write down (**document**) any comments or statements made by the child during the disclosure. Try to use the child's exact words. Keep notes about the child's behavior or emotional state during the disclosure which may also be helpful. That is, for example, "The child sat in her seat with her face hidden behind her hands, and cried for 15 minutes." (See Chapter 8 for a reproducible form, "Written Report of Disclosed or Suspected Child Abuse.") Make a copy of the completed written report, as well as any of the child's drawings or writings which may form part of this report. The person who interviews the child may request the originals, but keep a copy for yourself. Your copy should be placed in the child's confidential file, and should **not** be kept in his or her cumulative record file.

9. Maintain **confidentiality**. Respect the child's right to privacy by not identifying him or her to other staff members or children.

10. Talk to a colleague or someone you trust about your feelings. Disclosures are never easy to handle. You also need support! (See Chapter 7 for information about "Taking Care of Yourself.")

11. Feel **free to call** the social worker or police officer responsible for the case to find out the status of your report (the action being taken), or to provide additional information. (If the social worker or police officer are unavailable, call their supervisor.)

12. Keep **communication open** with the child who will require ongoing support. Say, for example, "If you want to talk, I'm here." Recognize and respect the child's feelings which may follow after a disclosure. These may include:

- feelings of guilt for having told
- fear and anxiety about what will happen next
- feelings of anger, directed towards you or others
- feelings of uncertainty
- feelings of being blamed
- feelings of low self-esteem
- feelings of shame

(See Chapter 6 for information about "Working with Abused Children.")

*The child should not be left alone after a disclosure, someone should stay with him or her while you make the report and until the interviewer arrives.*

### **If the Child Discloses in a Group Setting:**

1, **Acknowledge** the statement by saying, "That sounds really important. Can you and I talk about that later?" and move on with your discussion.

2. **Arrange** to talk with the child in private as soon as possible. This may be during recess or lunch, or it may mean having another teacher or principal take responsibility for the rest of the class, while you speak with the child. Be careful not to respond, under such circumstances, in a way that will stop the child from continuing to disclose at a later time.

3. Follow the guidelines of "**How to Respond if a Child Discloses to You**" outlined on pages 22-24.

### **Appropriate Questioning: Non-Leading, Open Questions and Comments**

When responding to a child who may be talking about abuse, use non-leading, open questions and comments. This type of questioning does not make assumptions about what may have happened, but allows the child to describe what has taken place in his or her own words. These type of questions do not direct the child or hint at how he or she should respond. Non-leading, open questions or comments do not put words in the child's mouth because they do not contain an answer, or a choice of answers. They usually cannot be answered by a "Yes" or "No" response.

### **Some Examples of Non-Leading, Open Questions and Comments:**

"You look as though things are not going well. Do you want to talk about it?"

"Do you want to tell me what you had to eat this week?"

"Do you want to tell me about your home?" (In response to a child who says he does not want to go home after school because he is very unhappy there.)

"Explain what you mean," "Do you want to tell me more about that?" or "What happened then." (In response to a child saying that she can not sleep at night because her older bother keeps bugging her.)

### **Inappropriate Questioning: Leading, Closed Questions and Comments**

Avoid using leading, closed questions and comments which direct the child or hint at how the child should respond. This type of questioning usually labels the child's feelings, threatens the child's sense of dignity, or puts words in the child's mouth. They make assumptions about what may have happened, and do not allow the child to describe what has happened in his or her own words. Leading, closed questions and comments can often be answered by a "Yes" or "No" response. They contain the expected answer or a choice of answers. This type of questioning can be very harmful, since the court may consider the child's evidence to be tainted or spoiled, and the case could end up being thrown out of court.

#### **Some Examples of Leading, Closed Questions and Comments:**

"This is terrible. Did your Dad do that?" (In response to a child who shows you a cigarette burn on his hand.) This type of response names the suspected offender before the child has identified the person.

"Did he touch your private parts?" (In response to a child who says she cannot sleep at night because her older brother keeps bugging her.)

#### **Types of Disclosures<sup>7</sup>**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>1. Direct Disclosures:</b> Verbal or written statement by the child.  | to him only if certain conditions are met.  |
| <b>2. Indirect Disclosures:</b> Verbal, written or graphic hints, e.g. journal writing, drawings, artwork that appear to be about abuse. | <b>4. Disguised Disclosure:</b> The child isn't ready to tell you that she is being abused, and so pretends that it is happening to someone else. |
| <b>3. Disclosures with Conditions:</b> The child tells you that he will tell you about something that is happening                       | <b>5. Third Party Disclosures:</b> The child tells you about abuse which is happening to another child.   |

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted from Government of Northwest Territories (1995). *Dealing with Child Abuse: A Handbook for School Personnel*. Yellowknife: Department of Education, Culture and Employment, p. 12.

## Sample Responses to Disclosures

### 1. Direct Disclosure:

"I don't want to take off my gloves because someone burned my hands with a cigarette last night."

**Leading Response:** "That is terrible. Did your dad do that?" (*WRONG*)

**Non-Leading Response:** "May I look at your hands to see if they need to be taken care of? Then we can call someone who can try to help you." (*RIGHT*)

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### 2. Indirect Disclosure:

"I don't like it when uncle does those things to me."

**Leading Response:** "Is uncle abusing you?" (*WRONG*)

**Non-Leading Response:** "What kinds of things don't you like?" (*RIGHT*)

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### 3. Disclosure with Conditions:

"I want to tell you something, but you have to promise not tell anyone else or I'll get into big trouble."

**Leading Response:** "Is someone abusing you? If so, I'll have to tell a social worker." (*WRONG*)

**Non-Leading Response:** "There are some secrets that should not be kept. If you tell me that someone is hurting you or someone else, I will have to tell someone who will try to help you." (*RIGHT*)

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### 4. Disguised Disclosure:

"I have a friend who says her mother hurts her all the time. She gets mad and hits her a lot. My friend does not know what to do."

**Leading Response:** "Are you trying to tell me that this is really happening to you? Is your mother beating you?" (*WRONG*)

**Non-Leading Response:** "It is important for your friend to talk to someone who will try to help her. Tell her that I am available if she wants to talk to me. It must be difficult for her to deal with these things by herself." (*RIGHT*)

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### 5. Third Party Disclosure:

"My friend was sleeping over at my house last night, and he told me that his uncle has been abusing him since he was five. But it has stopped now."

**Leading Response:** "Is this your friend Cory who lives with uncle Frank?" (*WRONG*)

**Non-Leading Response:** "Your friend trusts you and so he has told you about this. I'm glad you told me too. Do you want to tell me your friend's name or anything else about this?" (*RIGHT*)

*Practice using Non-leading, Open Questions and Comments, so you will be better prepared when you are confronted with a child's disclosure.*

### Questions and Answers

- 1. I have recently received a family picture drawn by a child, in which one person's penis was drawn outside of his clothing. What should I do?**  
If you suspect child abuse report your suspicion to a social worker in your district following the procedure presented on pages 30-32. If you need a little more information, ask the child to tell you about the picture.
- 2. A student has just disclosed to me that a neighbor had abused him. Since the abuser was not his parents, should I call and tell them about it?**  
Your first responsibility is to report the matter to a social worker following the procedure on pages 30-32. It is the role of the social worker and/or police officer to contact the parents. In the past, teachers have called parents before the investigation was conducted and many negative consequences have resulted for the child. If the abuser really was a parent, then you could be putting the child at an even greater risk. If the abuser was a neighbor, the parents might become angry and confront the abuser, which could result in destroyed evidence or charges being laid against the child's parents.
- 3. A child in my class made a disclosure of abuse to me. Can I remain with her for support during the initial investigation interview?**  
You may stay with the child during the initial investigation interview, if the child so desires, but you are not permitted to take notes or participate in the interview. (Anything written during the interview could be subpoenaed and provided to the lawyer defending the alleged abuser.) Meanwhile, the interviewer can veto the child's choice of having a support person present, if he or she feels that it is not in the best interest of the child. Also, a support person may be subpoenaed as a witness if the case goes to court.
- 4. If I suspect a child is being physically abused, should I ask that the child remove clothing?**  
NO. If you suspect abuse report it following the procedure on pages 30-32. It is important not to subject victims of abuse to any uncomfortable prying or probing. If the child refuses to provide information about abuse despite a gentle, reflective approach which focuses on his or her feelings, then you must not persist.
- 5. Can I assume that an abused child hates or is angry with the offender?**  
NO. Never assume that the child hates or is angry with the offender. An abused child usually wants the abuse to stop, but may not want anything to happen to the abuser. Some children will even go to great lengths to protect them.

## Chapter 5 - Understanding Reporting

The law is quite clear with respect to child abuse reporting. It states: that every person who knows about or suspects child abuse must report it immediately to the Director of Child Welfare, a social worker or a police officer; that the person reporting is protected from any kind of legal action if the report is made in good faith; and that failure to report known or suspected child abuse is a criminal offence, which may result in a fine up to 10,000 and/or imprisonment for a period up to 6 months.

### Who Should Report?

It is the responsibility of the person who receives a disclosure, or who knows about or suspects abuse to report. The principal or any other staff member **can not** make the report on your behalf.

### Who Should I Call?

You should call the Child Protection Worker (social worker) at the nearest District Office of Social Services. (Telephone numbers for Children's Protection Services throughout Newfoundland and Labrador can be found in Chapter 8.) If the Child Protection Worker is unavailable, do not wait to call later. Ask to speak with another social worker or the District Manager. When the child is in need of immediate protection and you are unable to reach a local social worker, call the police or 911. Otherwise, when a local social worker is unavailable contact one of the following persons in the order presented:

1. the Regional Child Protection Program Supervisor
2. the Regional Manager of Social Services
3. the Director of Child Welfare
4. a Police Officer

Note: The telephone numbers for these individuals can be found in the government listings section of your telephone directory.

***Please remember, you do not need proof of abuse before making a report. Once you suspect abuse, report it. Social workers (the Dept. of Social Services) and police officers (the RCMP/RNC) are responsible for gathering the facts.***

### **Six Main Steps in Reporting Child Abuse**

1. ***Call and make a verbal report to Social Services.***  
(See Chapter 8 for a list of telephone numbers for Social Services in Newfoundland and Labrador.)
2. ***Inform the school administration (principal or vice-principal) that you have made a report and of the follow-up action you expect to be taken by the social worker and/or police.***
3. ***Complete a written report and place it in the student's confidential file.***  
(A reproducible form, "Written Report of Disclosed or Suspected Child Abuse" can be found in Chapter 8.)
4. ***Maintain contact with the social worker responsible for the case until you are satisfied that appropriate action has been taken.***
5. ***Document all aspects of your involvement in the case.***
6. ***Refrain from contacting parents or informing the accused until the social services/police team and the school administration have determined how and when this should occur.***

### **Details of the Reporting Procedure**

1. Make the verbal report to Social Services as soon as you suspect abuse.
2. Do not attempt to investigate, and avoid physical inspections.
3. Inform your principal of the report after the call has been made to Social Services.
4. Leave the child with the secretary or other staff member when you inform the principal. The child requires support during this period and should not be left alone.
5. Make sure that Social Services/police know what the timelines are (i.e., when the child is expected at home) so their response can be prioritized accordingly.
6. Share with Social Services/police any information regarding the child or his or her family which may be helpful in the planning process.

7. Confer with Social Services/police about their future plans. Do they plan to come to the school or home? When?
8. Consult with Social Services/police before allowing the child to go home at lunch or after school if the interview has not yet taken place.
9. Discuss with Social Services/police what information you can share with the child.
10. Stay with the child until Social Services/police arrive at the school.
11. Ask the child if he or she would like you to remain with him or her for support.
12. Refer any questions from parents or guardians to the social worker and/or police officer responsible for the case.
13. Complete the written report as soon as possible.
14. Be as detailed as possible when completing the written report; include the facts, without personal opinions or judgements.
15. Make a copy of the completed report and supporting documents, since the person conducting the interview or the court may require the original copies.
16. Keep your copy of the written report and supporting documents in the child's confidential file, do not place it in the child's cumulative record file.
17. Keep a detailed log of any conversations or event related to the case. File this with your copy of the written report.
18. Update the verbal or written report if you learn anything new about the case.
19. If the alleged offender is another student, follow the same procedure. Ensure that both children are separated and do not wait together for Social Services /police to arrive.
20. If the alleged offender is a colleague, follow the same procedure. However if the principal is the suspected abuser, **don't** tell him or her about the report. Call the Director of your school board after you have called Social Services.
21. Maintain Confidentiality.



## **The Principal's Responsibilities**

When you make a report of child abuse the school principal's role is to:

- understand that it is the legal responsibility of the person suspecting abuse to report.
- record any information or concerns you share with him or her about the report.
- assist you as needed. However, it is important to remember, that the principal **can not** make the report on your behalf.
- find out who will be conducting the interview with the child, as well as when and where the interview will take place.
- record the names of the investigating social worker and/or police officer.
- provide a place at the school where the social worker and/or police officer can interview the child privately.
- let the Superintendent or Director of his or her school board know that a report has been made.
- refer any inquiries from parents or guardians to the social worker or police officer responsible for the case.
- make sure that you are aware of the importance of maintaining confidentiality and of avoiding any discussions with the media.

***Please remember, the legal responsibility to report rests with the person who has reasonable grounds to suspect abuse, and this responsibility can not be discharged by reporting to any person other than an appropriate delegate of the Department of Social Services or the police.***

### **Questions and Answers**

- 1. The Child Protection Worker in my community is at court for the day and I have to report a case of child abuse. What should I do?**

Don't wait for the Child Protection Worker to return. Ask to speak with another social worker or the District Manager. If you are unable to reach any of these persons, call the next person listed on page 30.

- 2. If a social worker wants to conduct an investigation interview with a child in my class, do I need permission from the parents or my principal?**

NO. A social worker or a police officer may conduct an interview at the school or any other location without permission of the parents or school authorities.

- 3. If I suspect child abuse, can I report it to my principal and ask her to make the call to Social Services?**

NO. The Child Welfare Act specifies that you have to report your suspicion directly to the Director of Child Welfare, a social worker, or a police officer. You cannot give this legal responsibility to someone else.

- 4. When do I write the written report?**

As soon as possible after the disclosure of abuse and after the verbal report has been made.

- 5. What happens if I don't report?**

If you don't report, you could be contributing to keeping a child in an abusive situation. Also, if this abuse is reported by someone else at a later date, and it is determined that you knew about or suspected the abuse, legal action can be brought against you.

- 6. What if a parent comes to my classroom to ask me if I made a report of abuse to Social Services about his or her child?**

Tell the parent that you are not permitted to discuss this matter and that he or she should call the social worker for any information. If the parent demands a meeting with you, avoid confrontation, listen to the parent even though he or she may vent, and make sure your principal attends the meeting.

- 7. What information can I expect to receive from the social worker?**

You should expect general, limited follow-up information about the child, for example, where the child will be staying, when the child will be absent from school for investigation or court purposes, or whom the child is not to have contact with. Details about a case will be kept confidential.

## Chapter 6

### **Understanding Abused Children**

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#### **Contents**

- \* How does Abuse make Children Feel?
- \* Working with Abused Children in the Classroom
- \* Reaching and Teaching Abused Children
- \* Questions and Answers

## Chapter 6 - Understanding Abused Children

Children who have been abused often feel the effects of abuse long after the initial disclosure or investigation is over. They will need your respect, understanding, guidance and support. Maintaining a positive relationship with them will demand patience, empathy, and sensitivity.

### How does Abuse make Children Feel?

During the hours, days, months or even years following an abusive situation, children may experience a wide range of feelings. Each child will react differently, but often he or she will experience feelings of anger, guilt, shame, loneliness and isolation. The following is a list of feelings which abused children may experience:

- *anxiety* about what will happen next
- *anger* towards the abuser or the person who made the report
- *guilt* for having told or for breaking up the family
- *responsible* for getting the abuser into trouble
- *relief* for having told someone
- *worry* about the reactions of peers, teachers or others
- *shame* for having allowed the abuse to have happened
- *shame* for having possibly enjoyed some aspects of the abusive relationship (i.e., the special attention or special treats)
- *low self-esteem* as a result of the abuse

You must realize that these reactions are normal, and you should not take them personally or allow them to interfere with you providing support to the child. You should also make every effort to keep communication open with the child who will require ongoing support, for example, "If you want to talk, I'm here."

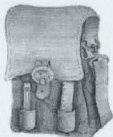
### Working with Abused Children in the Classroom

Once you report abuse to the appropriate authorities, the abused child normally returns to your classroom. Hence, it is important that you display behavior as well as an attitude which will help to prevent any further psychological damage. Your classroom needs to be a safe nurturing place, as well as one which recognizes boundaries and expectations. You should concentrate on creating a supportive, structured environment, in which the abused child is regarded and treated as "normal", and is not singled out from the rest of the class. Abused children often have low self-esteem, lack basic survival and/or coping

skills, experience difficulty with making decisions, and have extremely good manipulative skills. The following are some suggestions which might be helpful in dealing with abused children in your classroom:

1. **Avoid** giving the impression that the child is fragile or different, **treat** him or her as "normal." **Make** sure that your expectations of an abused child are no different from those of any other child. **Do not** excuse him or her when homework assignments are not turned in on time, or when he or she expresses an unwillingness to cooperate. **Leave** the child with a message that says, "I'm sorry you were abused, but you do not have the right to continue disrupting the class."
2. **Seek** assistance in identifying and successfully implementing alternative methods of discipline for abused children. Many of these children may benefit from anger management programmes, as well as training in assertiveness or social skills, and you should facilitate for such programs in your classroom.
3. **Help** the child who misbehaves to identify the feelings which contribute to the misbehavior. **Show** the child more acceptable ways of coping with those feelings. **Be** consistent and predictable in your reaction to the child's behavior.
4. **Assist** abused children in developing different skills which will help them overcome their victimization, in the lessons you teach, and the work you assign. Having them keep daily journals which encourage the expression of feelings, and choosing stories which concentrate on decision-making, goal setting, and developing alternative actions may be helpful. **Look** at your curricula for the school year to see where you can integrate knowledge about healthy family living.
5. **Focus** on building feelings of self-worth. **Give** praise and positive reinforcement, but only when deserved, since children easily recognize false praise. **Attempt** to find out the special interests and talents of abused children and encourage them to work at developing these skills. This may help to build up their self-esteem, as well as provide a sense of achievement. **Do not** reinforce negative self-concepts, even though the child may expect it.
6. **Talk** about the abuse only when the child indicates a desire to do so. Any discussions should take place in private. **Respect** the child's need for and right to privacy. **Assess** and be **aware** of the child's needs (i.e., Is there a court date coming up?).

7. **Consider** how you would handle a child who is grieving over the loss/death of a loved one, and adapt such methods to help an abused child deal with his or her loss. Abused children may suffer the loss of either or both parents, their siblings, and friends, especially if they are moved to a foster home in a different school district.
8. **Give** the child time and space to rebuild relationships. **Remember** that it is likely people whom the child trusted proved to be unworthy of that trust, which may consequently leave the child wary of other adults.
9. **Help** the child to stay connected and to reconnect with his or her peers. It is common for abused children to experience difficulty in developing and maintaining positive relationships with their peers. You may assist in these type of situations by including activities in your classroom which encourage interpersonal interactions such as projects or assignments which require two or more children to work together as a team.
10. **Teach** and **model** appropriate behaviors for others. Your special relationship with children and their families, provides an opportunity for you to facilitate prevention curricula for students and parents, and to model nonviolent conflict resolution. Such activities create an environment conducive to a child's well-being. **Consult** with other professionals with respect to sharing of concerns and information, and **encourage** the facilitation of school-community programmes for families.



The following journal article has been included in this chapter in an attempt to increase your understanding of why abused children behave as they do, and to offer you some practical suggestions for working with abused children within your classroom. It explains how you can provide emotional support, and encourage social skills and self-empowerment in order for abused children to regain some control over their lives.

## Reaching and Teaching Abused Children<sup>8</sup>

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Marilyn E. Gootman

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Millions of children carry more than their book bags to school each day. They haul the baggage of abuse straight into the classroom. And what do they unpack? Pain masquerading in the guise of misbehavior and underachievement.

Teachers are not to blame! Standard classroom management techniques do not work so well for abused children as for children who misbehave and underachieve because of immaturity, lack of motivation or attention deficit disorder. Abused children's baggage is too heavy.

In the classroom, many abused children act out their searing pain because they cannot express it in words. They act out this pain in disruptive, annoying and frustrating ways - through behaving aggressively, hurting others without seeming to care, deliberately

annoying others, being hypervigilant, dissociating themselves, fearing failure, and other dysfunctional behaviors. By seeing these behaviors as frantic signals for help and by understanding their causes, teachers can help these students learn socially acceptable coping strategies.

Teachers can be "enlightened witnesses" for abused children. By believing that there is a core of goodness within each child and that children are not to blame for their abuse, an "enlightened witness" can help children overcome the trauma of mistreatment.

Research with adults who had been abused as children confirms the importance of such a witness. Abused children who grew up to be healthy, nonabusing adults knew an adult during their childhood who treated them with empathy and

encouragement and inspired confidence in them. Children whom did not have such an adult were not so fortunate. Their dysfunction continued into adulthood. Being such a supporter does not require extra time, just sincerity and confidence in these children.

Trust, empathy and the patience to help wounded children develop coping strategies can plant healthy seeds within the child that will flower in the future. The key lies in acknowledging that these children are not at fault, understanding the nature and origin of their behaviors, and then using the classroom experience to counterbalance the situation.

The behaviors discussed below are some of the more common dysfunctional behaviors manifested by abused children in the classroom.

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<sup>8</sup> Excerpt from "Reaching and Teaching Abused Children" p. 15-19, *Childhood Education*, (Fall, 1993).

Written by Marilyn E. Gootman, Assistant Professor, Department of Elementary Education, University of Georgia, Athens. Reprinted by permission of the author.

### **Behaving Aggressively**

Some children seem to be constantly fighting with others. They often pick fights for seemingly trivial reasons. They are aggressive and rarely to hit when angry.

#### ***Origin #1.***

All children identify with their parents. Abused children are no exception. As part of the process of identification, children copy parental behavior whether or not the behavior is worthy of copying. If parents hit their children, their children will hit others. If parents have no impulse control and lash out when they are angry, their children will do the same. Many children who have been treated aggressively at home carry that learned aggressiveness into the classroom.

#### ***Strategy #1.***

Children also identify with teachers. If teachers "keep their cool" when angry, restraining themselves from lashing out at students either verbally or physically, they can counterbalance aggressive models children may observe at home. A teacher who remains calm, yet firm, when angry can replace the aggressive parent model and become a constructive source of identification. Staying calm does not mean ignoring

inappropriate behavior. Rather, it means staying calm when dealing with it.

#### ***Origin #2.***

Abused children are usually enraged by their mistreatment. Anybody who is abused has a right to be furious. Their rage silently fomented within them, because expressing their anger would antagonize their abusers and generate further mistreatment. But rage can only boil within for so long before spilling out. Abused children spill their rage on "safe" targets, such as classmates and teachers, rather than on those who investigate it. They seem angry all the time and are constantly getting into fights.

#### ***Strategy #2.***

While their rage is certainly a justified response to abuse, taking it out on others is not. Angry children need to learn that while they are entitled to their anger (as well as to other feelings), they are not entitled to express their anger through hurtfulness and aggression toward others. Three basic components to helping abused children deal constructively with their anger are:

- ***Acknowledgment.*** Acknowledge when they are angry, recognizing that they are entitled to their feelings.

Bring the anger to the children's attention and then help them to recognize their own personal symptoms of anger - getting hot, shaky, sweaty, cold. Help them figure out their physical responses. Each person's reactions are different. Do not try to deny the anger or convince the children that they have no right to be angry. They will only become angrier. No one has the right to tell someone else how to feel. Try not to get angry at children for being angry. Remember, you are not responsible for their anger, so don't take it personally. Also, try not be afraid of angry children, lest it render you powerless.

- ***Cooling down.***

Once children recognize the symptoms of anger, help them learn cool-down techniques, such as deep breathing, counting backward from ten, writing, drawing, painting, scribbling, making something or listening to music. Find something that works for them personally and helps them release tension.

- ***Verbalization.***

Encourage children to put their feelings into words. Focus on the feelings behind the anger smokescreen. Listen. You do not have to agree, but they need to be heard. The goal is to teach



children to substitute words for actions when they are angry. Also, remember to be encouraging when children behave with self-control and do not act out.

### **Origin #3.**

There is absolutely nothing children can do to protect themselves from a powerful, abusive adult. Abused children are terrified of reexperiencing the utter helplessness and powerlessness they suffered during abuse. When they fear that their safety or self-esteem may be threatened again, they try to replace helplessness with power by becoming aggressive and lashing out. They try to achieve mastery over a previously passively experienced danger, by being able to predict when the punishment will come and thus preparing themselves.

### **Strategy #3.**

The key to helping abused children lies in giving them a positive sense of power and control over their own destiny. Allow them to make choices about their work. Involve them and all their classmates in determining classroom rules. When they break a rule, let them help you decide on an appropriate consequence. Encourage them to adapt a problem solving approach: "this is

what I did. This is what I can do next time instead."

### **Hurting Others Without Seeming To Care**

Some children hurt others and do not seem to care that they have inflicted pain. They seem cold, hard and unfeeling.

### **Origin**

Many abused children are hurt so often that they finally close off their minds from feeling. The only way they can tolerate their suffering is by suppressing their feelings so that they are no longer aware of them. But as Alice Miller notes, "The repression of our suffering destroys our empathy for the suffering of others." Children who cannot feel their own pain do not know that others feel pain, and therefore hurt without feeling empathy for their victims.

### **Strategy**

Even if they are ignorant about pain, no children should ever be allowed to hurt others. Children must be directly confronted and stopped when they cause pain and be told that they are hurting others. "Stop that. When you poke Billy with the ruler, it hurts."

Acknowledge when children are hurt. Because they have numbed themselves from

feeling pain, abused children are often unaware that they have been hurt. They may act totally unaware of an injury they have sustained, such as a serious cut or bruise. Saying "That must have hurt when you fell off the swing" helps them to acknowledge their own hurts. At first they may deny that they are feeling pain and may act as if they do not know what you are talking about. Nevertheless, they need to be reminded when they hurt in order to reawaken their feelings. Once they feel their own pain, they will learn to acknowledge the pain of others as well.

Try to help them see that pain is an alarm that warns them to cry for help. Do not be concerned if their initial response to pain is exaggerated. This is a common reaction when the senses are reawakened.

### **Deliberately Annoying Others**

Some children will do anything to deliberately annoy the teacher or classmates. They tap on desks, drop pencils, constantly interrupt, argue about everything and often go out of their way to disobey.

### **Origin #1.**

Often, abuse happens spontaneously, without misbehavior or provocative on the part of children. Abused children frequently have no idea when they will be hit. The unpredictability terrifies many children and renders them totally helpless. In order to overcome this sense of powerlessness, some children deliberately provoke as if to say, "I will misbehave so that I will be in control and know exactly when I will be punished."

### **Strategy #1.**

A predictable environment is essential for abused children. Knowing the routines of the day - when they eat, when they go to recess, when they study math - reassures them that order, rather than chaos, is the modus operandi in the class. They also need to know when routines will be changed (e.g., for a class play or field trip). Advanced preparation eliminates the fear of randomness and helplessness. In addition to routines, clearly stated rules and consequences are essential for creating a predictable environment. Knowing in advance what is expected of them gives children a sense of self-control and responsibility.

### **Origin #2.**

Some children receive very

little stimulation except when they are being abused. They so desperately want to be touched and noticed that they will even provoke punishment in order to get attention. They transfer this behavior into the classroom and deliberately annoy teachers to get attention.

### **Strategy #2.**

Annoying children are often ignored because "they are looking for attention." They are usually looking for attention because they need it and if positive attention is not given, these children will demand negative attention. Praising them for improvement or accomplishments is positive attention. Giving them responsibilities in the classroom - such as taking care of a pet, delivering messages to the office or erasing the blackboards - is positive attention (if you fear you cannot trust them alone, pair them up with a more responsible child). Calling when they are absent or listening to their ideas is positive attention. Having them share a hobby or special knowledge with the class is positive attention. Such positive recognition helps convince children that they are worthwhile human beings and encourages them to seek recognition in socially acceptable ways.

### **Being Hypervigilant**

Some children always seem to be on guard and are hypervigilant while sitting passively. They are fearful, suspicious and mistrustful - always on the lookout for potential dangers. These children are acutely sensitive to mood, tone of voice, facial expression and bodily movement. Often they are afraid to express their own ideas.

### **Origin**

Abuse is unpredictable. Children never know when they are going to "get it" next. Abusers are impulsive and often lash out unexpectedly with no rhyme or reason. Therefore, abused children have to remain constantly on guard. They also have to remain on guard in the outside world lest an event occur that might trigger the same feelings of helplessness and panic. Hence, their frequent state of "frozen watchfulness." Unfortunately, because they are using their receptors to identify potential dangers, they may not use them to process the environment, thus compromising their learning.

### **Strategy**

A predictable environment is essential for hypervigilant children. Clearly stated routines, rules and

consequences that are consistently followed will gradually help reduce their hyper-alertness. These children also need teachers who remain calm and who do not explode in unpredictable outbursts.

### **Dissociating Themselves**

Some children become trance-like in school. They may appear "spacey" and forgetful and frequently daydream. Through the process of dissociation, they remove their minds from their bodies. Some of these children read and do not seem to be processing what they are reading. When carried to the extreme, dissociation can lead to multiple personalities. Scientists believe that some children may have a genetic predisposition to this form of coping.

### ***Origin***

Many children dissociate or hypnotize themselves, separating their minds from their bodies to escape overwhelming thoughts, emotions and sensations they experience during abuse. They also dissociate to defend themselves against any event that might trigger memories of their original suffering. Therefore, they may become spacey or dissociate in school when they experience an echo of

their painful experience. Even a seemingly innocuous story in a reading book could trigger this reaction.

### ***Strategy***

First, try to recognize when this happens to your students. It is neither the children's fault nor yours. Children do not deliberately go into a trance and you have not knowingly caused it. Try to stand by these children and gently bring them back, perhaps by softly calling their name. Do not reprimand children for dissociating. Privately help children become aware of what is happening ("I notice that when . . ."). Also help children to identify and sort out feelings of sadness, anger and happiness. Make children aware that each person has many feelings and that thoughts and feelings are not the same as actions. Nobody will punish or reject them for their thoughts and feelings.

### **Fearing Failure**

Some children seem to give up before they even try. They may cry and tremble when faced with a new lesson or activity. "I can't" is their favorite phrase. Some try so hard to get everything just right, that they never finish their work.

### ***Origin***

Some parents hold unrealistically high expectations for their children. When the children fail to meet these expectations, they heap physical and/or emotional abuse on them. "How can you be so stupid?" and "What's the matter with you dummy?" can hurt just as much as the sting of a belt. These children are paralyzed by the fear that they will make a mistake.

### ***Strategy #1.***

Try to have a failsafe environment in the classroom. Allow children to correct papers until they are right, rather than grading them. Break work down into small segments that are easier to grasp. Also, your contact with parents must be very circumspect. Try to be as positive as you can, rather than venting your frustration with their child's behavior.

### ***Strategy #2.***

Use a problem-solving model for dealing with misbehavior: 1) state the problem, 2) brainstorm solutions, 3) choose a solution, 4) implement the solution, 5) if the solution fails, return to step 2. Problem solving helps children learn that we all make mistakes and that mistakes are part of learning.

## Conclusion

The key to working with the discipline problems presented by abused children lies in understanding the origins of their misbehavior and then designing strategies to counteract these origins. Ten basic strategies emerge from this approach:

- \* Modeling appropriate behavior. Children do as we do. If we want them to have self-control, then teachers must model self-control and not lash out hurtfully.
- \* Directly confronting hurtfulness. Regardless of children's pain, they must not be allowed to hurt others either physically or emotionally. Some children will assume approval of their actions if they are not directly told to stop them.
- \* Acknowledge pain and other feelings. Children who cannot feel for themselves cannot feel for others. Helping them acknowledge their own feelings will increase their awareness of others' feelings.
- \* Teach anger management skills. Expressing anger in words rather than actions is a skill that can and must be directly taught to children.
- \* Teaching problem-solving skills. Problem-

solving can help children who feel totally helpless and overwhelmed realize that they can gain some sense of control in many aspects of their lives.

- \* Establishing routines and predictability, stable environment. Chaotic home environments create anxiety and tension that are often transferred into the classroom. Classroom predictability and stability can help diminish this hyper-alert, hyper-reactive state.
- \* Setting fair, meaningful limits and consequences. Overly restrictive rules and harsh consequences are commonplace in abusive homes. It is essential that classrooms counteract this situation.
- \* Providing opportunities for choice and decision-making. Children who feel totally powerless in their home lives can gain a sense of self-respect and empowerment when given

the opportunity to make choices and decisions in school.

- \* Helping children find an area of interest and expertise. Children who feel doomed to failure and who are constantly reminded of their inadequacies can overcome their negative self-image by becoming an "expert" in an area that captures their attention.
- \* Focusing on the positive through recognition and encouragement. Honest, sincere, positive feedback is a basic need for every human being.

You will probably meet several abused children during your teaching career. Their behavior is often exasperating. They pose a challenge to the best of teachers. But remember, they will likely continue along this destructive path unless an "enlightened witness" steps forward.



### **Questions and Answers**

- 1. I have recently reported a case a child abuse and the student seems to be very angry with me. What should I do?**

This is a normal reaction which should not be taken personally. If this anger is not having a negative effect on the child's overall functioning at school, try not to worry about it and keep providing encouragement and support to the child. If this anger is interfering with the child's work or the work of others, respond as you would with any angry child. If the child continues to have difficulty meeting your expectations of class behavior and/or work habits, consult with your resource teacher, principal, guidance counsellor or helping professionals from outside agencies.

- 2. I am aware of a student in my class who has been sexually abused, and I am about to start a child abuse prevention program. What should I do?**

Inform parents before beginning the program so that they may withdraw their child from the program if they have concerns. High school students should be given the opportunity to choose whether or not to attend the program. At the beginning of the program, acknowledge that the subject to be discussed involves sensitive topics and matters of a confidential nature. Assure students that the class will not be talking about any of them personally, and provide the students with the names of persons (counsellors or social workers) whom they will be able to contact if they wish to speak privately with a trusted adult. Be sure not to "single out" any abused students, and remember that they are likely to be especially sensitive to the topics.

- 3. How can I help to prevent child abuse during my daily teaching?**

You can help to prevent child abuse in the lessons you teach by assisting children in developing different skills which will lessen their chances of becoming victims of abuse, by providing children with knowledge about healthy family living, and by developing and implementing child abuse prevention curricula. You can also help to prevent child abuse by providing a classroom environment which is a "safe haven" for children. That is, one which recognizes boundaries and expectations, and reinforces modelling of nonviolent conflict resolution. Most important, you can help to prevent child abuse by being the supportive and caring person, which initially brought you to and keeps you involved in the teaching profession.

## Chapter 7

### **Understanding Teachers' Dilemmas**

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#### **Contents**

- \* How does Child Abuse Reporting make You Feel?
- \* Taking Care of Yourself
- \* Questions and Answers

## Chapter 7 - Understanding Teachers' Dilemmas

In the real world, reporting child abuse means focusing on legal and criminal issues (especially for physical and sexual abuse) and on child protection matters (especially nutrition and hygiene). Referrals to Social Services can put pressure on families. Police referrals may be unsuccessful especially if children are older. The problem is largely one of criteria, law, and public will.

Therefore, your response to a child's disclosure or your suspicions of abuse can be very demanding and stressful. You may experience a period of doubt, even self-doubt, when you will carefully consider and reconsider the case. You may scrutinize the child, you may wonder how your principal or colleagues will respond if you make a report, and you may wonder what will happen to the family if you take action, or what will happen to the child if you do not. You may consider your own life, your childhood experiences, your own children, your job security, your legal liability, and your position in the community.

### How does Child Abuse Reporting make You Feel?

Undoubtedly, coping with the issue of child abuse can be very difficult, and may stir up many personal and professional questions, concerns, or emotions for you. Each teacher will react differently to child abuse reporting, but most will experience feelings of doubt, uncertainty, guilt, frustration, disappointment, fear, regret, hurt, and personal torment. That is, you may feel:

- *anxious* about having to deal with your past personal experiences with child abuse
- *uncomfortable* about accepting responsibility for reporting the case
- *uncertain* about becoming involved
- *fearful* of making the situation worse for the child
- *self-doubt* about your actions, abilities, judgement, and professionalism
- *hurt* about the anger the abused child is directing towards you
- *discouraged* because a child retracted the disclosure
- *worried* about damaging your relationship with the child
- *fearful* of retaliating parents and *anxious* about the criticisms of others
- *worried* about the difficulties associated with trying to maintain a good home/school relationship after the report has been made
- *guilty* and *responsible* for the breakup of the child's family or for what happens as a result of the report
- *guilty* for not being able to prevent the abuse or for not noticing it earlier

- *concerned* about personal liabilities
- *fearful* of what may happen if you make false allegations
- *frustrated and disappointed* about the lack of available resources
- *frustrated and disappointed* in the responses of outside agencies
- *worried* about the lack of feedback you will receive

You must realize that all of the aforementioned reactions to child abuse reporting are quite normal, but you should not allow them to prevent you from fulfilling your legal obligation or from keeping your commitment to the well-being of children.

### **Taking Care of Yourself**

In order to emotionally deal with handling disclosures and to provide the necessary support to an abused child, you will need support too. It is quite common to experience anxiety surrounding your own feelings, your response to the child, and your responsibility to the school or the community, but you must remember to take care of yourself. The following suggestions might prove to be helpful:

- ***Think*** about the issue of child abuse, and about your personal feelings and discomforts associated with this problem. You need to have a good understanding of your own reactions to the issue of child abuse in order to respond most effectively to a child in crisis.
- ***Talk*** to someone about your feelings. Confide in someone you trust or seek professional help. It is possible to get the support you need without sharing details about the report.
- ***Remind*** yourself that you are not responsible for the abuse. You are responsible for reporting it. You are responsible for taking the first and most important step towards generating help to a child.
- ***Recognize*** that your role of providing support to a child is a significant one.
- ***Remain*** in contact with the social worker responsible for the case to ensure that some follow-up action has taken place, and to discuss ways of working together in providing support to the child.



- **Read** about child abuse and related topics and find out about services available in your community. Chapter 8 contains a list of available resources.
- **Seek** professional development about child abuse awareness, reporting procedures, and prevention programs.
- **Review** child abuse prevention programs and materials before using them. It is important that you feel comfortable with this information before presenting it to students. If you don't feel comfortable, consider joining with the school counsellor or a local social worker in a shared teaching approach, or request that a trained presenter be invited to your classroom.
- **Draw** on your own knowledge and experience of curriculum, classroom management, pedagogy, evaluation, and communication to address the problem of child abuse.
- **Start or join** a special interest group for abused children. This type of group would help to alleviate some of your concerns, and would provide an opportunity for teachers to work together in developing coping strategies for abused children.
- **Facilitate** the education of parents about child abuse, its related topics, and your legal responsibility to report.
- **Protect** yourself from charges of child abuse by:
  - not inviting students to your home,
  - not remaining alone with children,
  - leaving your classroom door open,
  - refraining from physical contact,
  - not covering up windows in doors.

For more information about professional conduct contact your Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers Association.

### **Questions and Answers**

- 1. I realize the importance of exposing children to child abuse prevention programs, but I do not feel comfortable presenting them. What should I do?**  
If you don't feel comfortable presenting child abuse prevention programs, you should request that a trained presenter deliver a program to your class. Consult with your school counsellor, a local social worker, or call The Community Services Council for information about services available in your community, (709) 753-9863.
- 2. I have just been informed that a student in my class has disclosed that I have been sexually abusing her. This is not true, what should I do?**  
You should contact the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association for legal advice. Your union provides legal advice if you are charged with not reporting or if charges are brought against you.

## Chapter 8

### **Resources**

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#### **Contents**

\* Resources Available

\* Child Abuse Checklist for Teachers

\* Phone Numbers for Children's Protection Services  
in Newfoundland and Labrador

\* Reproducible Form, "Written Report of Disclosed or  
Suspected Child Abuse"

## Chapter 8 - Resources

### Resources Available

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The following list represents some materials about child abuse and related topics which are currently available from the various sources provided.

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#### Resources Available in Newfoundland and Labrador

##### Department of Education, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador:

- *Child Abuse Casebook for Educators* (1996)
- *Provincial Child Abuse Policy and Guidelines* (1993)

##### Department of Social Services, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador:

- *Child Welfare Act* (Revised, 1992)

**The Canadian Mental Health Association (Newfoundland Division):**  
has compiled a directory of self-help groups and counselling services available in the St. John's area, \$15 each.  
Phone: (709) 753-8550

**The Community Services Council:**  
has compiled a directory of community support services throughout the province, which includes a list of counselling services, as well as training workshops available in your area, \$8 a copy.  
Phone: (709) 753-9863

#### Other Resources Available

##### Active Parenting Canada:

Parenting education and training; includes on-site programs as well as the delivery of training to outside groups.  
Medicine Hat, Alberta  
Phone: (800) 668-5131  
Phone: (403) 526-4994

##### Canadian Council on Social Development:

A family violence newsletter, "Vis a Vis"; free.  
Phone: (613) 728-1865

##### Canadian Institute of Child Health:

885 Meadowlands Drive E.  
Suite 512  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K2C 3N2  
Phone: (613) 224-4144

- *Child Sexual Abuse Prevention, A Resource Kit:*  
Publication #73, \$40: A resource kit to help groups of parents/professionals to plan and implement child sexual abuse

prevention programs in their community.

- **Public Service Announcements (For Television):** Publication #72, \$7: Ready-to-use, 15 and 30 second public service announcements.
- **Max the Cat, Safe and Happy Personal Safety:** Publication #37, \$19: Max the cat addresses the sensitive subject of child sexual abuse. The kit includes a manual, 14 posters, and a Max puppet.

**Canadian Mental Health Association:**

180 Dundas Street West  
Suite 2301  
Toronto, Ontario  
M5G 1Z8  
Phone: (416) 977-5580

- **Living Colour: Building Self-esteem and Developing Communication Skills:** A program which teaches children how to cope with feelings; designed to develop self-confidence and a positive self-image, \$55 plus postage.

**C.A.R.E. Kit:** A child abuse prevention program for children ages four to nine. French version also available. \$200 plus shipping/ handling. Contact:  
C.A.R.E. Productions  
Box 183  
Surrey, British Columbia  
V3T 4W8  
Phone: (604) 581-5116

**Community Child Abuse Council of Hamilton-Wentworth:**

Lloyd George School, Rm 15  
360 Beach Rd.  
Hamilton, Ontario  
L8H 3K4  
Phone: (905) 549-1353

- **"Touching": A Child Abuse Prevention Program:** Teacher's kit and video (35 minutes), \$145 plus GST. Suitable for primary, elementary, and high school students. Includes problem solving activities, decision-making, assertiveness training, feelings identification, body ownership and personal responsibility.
- **A Handbook for the Prevention of Family Violence:** Soft cover book, \$30 plus GST. Includes topics such as: child abuse, dating violence, wife assault, effects on children who witness wife assault, elder abuse, role of the school, family violence in literature, media violence and children, as well as making the connection from family peace to world peace.
- **R.S.V.P. - Response by Schools to Violence Prevention:** offers practical strategies and resources to school staff to address the issue of violence prevention. Students are exposed to information and skills to help them deal with real life situations. Four Modules:  
  
*1) Family Violence Prevention . . . Getting Started*, \$35 plus GST.  
  
*2) The Elementary Experience*, \$45 plus GST.

**3) Planning Guide for the Transition Years**, \$55 plus GST.

**4) The Secondary Experience**, \$45 plus GST.

**Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse:** Research, public education, and training in abuse prevention.  
Phone: (416) 921-3151

**James Stanfield Publishing Company:** offers a number of programs for teaching assertiveness training, social skills, life facts and abuse prevention.  
Phone: (800) 421-6534

**Metropolitan Toronto Special Committee on Child Abuse:**  
443 Mount Pleasant Road,  
2nd Floor,  
Toronto, Ontario  
M4S 2L8  
Phone: (416) 440-0888

- **My Court Case: A Court Orientation Kit for Child Witnesses:** A kit designed to help prepare a child victim or witness to testify, \$185 plus shipping. Includes: an instructional video; hand puppets; 21 study cards; 17 plastic figures; a training manual; and a colouring workbook.

**National Clearinghouse on Family Violence:** has fact sheets and information kits about family violence and child abuse, free.  
Phone: (800) 267-1291

**National Film Board:** has approximately 60 films and videos available about family violence and child abuse.  
Phone: (800) 267-7710

#### **Outreach**

Prevention programs for preschool (*Safe and Happy*); primary school (*Personal Safety*); early adolescent (*KIDO*); and adolescence (*3R's of Dating*). Trainers will also come to your community. Contact:  
Box 1271, Station B  
Oshawa, Ontario  
L1J 5Z1  
Phone: (416) 728-3163

**R.A.P.P. - Relationship Abuse Prevention Project:** A domestic violence education and prevention curriculum for high school students. Contact:  
Marin Abused Women's Services  
1717 Fifth Avenue, San Rafael,  
California, 94901, U.S.A.  
Phone: (415) 457-2464

**Research Press:** has a number of practical resources available for counsellors, educators, and parents dealing with abuse and related issues.  
Phone: (800) 265-3375

**S.A.R.A. (Sexual Assault Recovery Anonymous Society):** Prevention curricula for preschool to senior high school students. Contact:  
S.A.R.A. Society  
Box 16  
Surrey, British Columbia  
V3T 4W4  
Phone: (604) 584-2626

**Skills for Violence - Free Relationships:**

A curriculum for children and Youth ages 13 to 18. Contact:  
Southern California  
Coalition on Battered Women  
Box 5036  
Santa Monica, California  
90405, U.S.A.  
Phone: (213) 578- 1442

**Taming the Dragon Project:** A program developed to address the incidence of aggression inside the classroom. Its main objective is to teach young children positive and constructive ways to express their feelings, \$25 a copy. Contact:  
3528 Boulton Road N.W.,  
Calgary, Alberta  
T2L 1M6  
Phone: (403) 282-5691

**Videos**

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- *Anger Management for Parents: The Rethink Method*
  - *Better Safe than Sorry I, II, III*
  - *Child Sexual Abuse: An Ounce of Prevention*
  - *Come in from the Storm*
    - Part I - *China Doll*
    - Part II - *The Diary*
    - Part III - *The Necklace*
  - *Cover-up*
  - *Creating Peaceable Schools.*
  - *Feeling Yes, Feeling No*
  - *How to Win at Parenting without Beating your Kids*
  - *Identifying, Reporting and Handling Disclosure of the Sexually Abused Child*
  - *Its not always Happy at My House.*

- *Little Bear*
- *Now I can Tell You My Secret*
- *Parents and Children: A Positive Approach to Child Management*
- *1, 2, 3 Magic*
- *Safe Child*
- *Strong Kids, Safe Kids*
- *The Peer Mediation Video: Conflict Resolution in Schools*
- *Thumbs up for Kids: Testifying in Court.*
- *Too Smart for Strangers*
- *Touch*
- *Two Kinds of Touch*
- *Violence Prevention: What every Parent should know*
- *Violence Prevention: What Middle School Teachers and Students should know*
- *What Tadoo*
- *Wednesday's Child*
- *Yelp for Help*

**Books for  
Children and Youth**

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Adams, C., Fay, J., & Loreen-Martin, J. (1985). *No is not enough: Helping teenagers avoid sexual assault.* San Luis Obispo, CA: Impact.

Anderson, D., & Finne, M. (1986). *Jason's story: Going to a foster home.* Minnesota: Dillon Press.

Anderson, D., & Finne, M. (1986). *Liza's story: Neglect and the police.* Minnesota: Dillon Press.

Anderson, D., & Finne, M. (1986). *Michael's story: Emotional abuse and working with a counsellor.* Minnesota: Dillon Press.

- Anderson, D., & Finne, M. (1986). *Robin's story: Physical abuse and seeing the doctor*. Minnesota: Dillon Press.
- Bauer, M. D. (1977). *Foster child*. New York: Seabury.
- Bean, B., & Bennett, S. (1993). *The me nobody knows, a guide for teen survivors*. New York: Lexington Books.
- Berenstein, S. & J. (1985). *Berenstein bears learn about strangers*. New York: Random.
- Black, C. (1979). *My dad loves me, my dad has a disease: a workbook for children of alcoholics*. Denver, CO: MAC Publishing.
- Boegehold, B. (1985). *You can say "NO": A book about protecting yourself*. Racine, WI: Western Publishing.
- Borich, M. (1985). *A different kind of love*. Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside.
- Buschman, J., & Hunley, D. (1985). *Strangers don't like the big bad wolf*. Edmonds, WA: Chas Franklin Press.
- Byars, B. (1985). *Cracker Jackson*. New York: Puffin.
- Crary, E. (1985). *I'm lost*. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press.
- Davis, D. (1984). *Something is wrong at my house*. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press.
- Dayee, F. (1982). *Private zones*. Edmonds, WA: Chas Franklin Press.
- Department of Justice Canada (1989). *The secret of the silver horse*. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services.
- Dolan, E. F., Jr. (1980). *Child abuse*. New York: Franklin Watts.
- Drew, N. (1987). *Learning the skills of peacemaking*. California: Jalmer Press.
- Foon, D., & Knight, B. (1985). *Am I the only one? A young people's book about sex abuse*. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre.
- Freeman, L. (1982). *It's my body*. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press.
- Freeman, L. (1982). *Loving touches*. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press.
- Gordon, S. & J. (1986). *A better safe than sorry book: A family guide for sexual assault prevention*. New York: Ed-U-Press.
- Harvey, W., & Watson-Russell, A. (1986). *So, you have to go to court; A child's guide to testifying as a witness in child abuse cases*. Toronto: Butterworths.
- Hindman, J. (1985). *A very touching book ... For little people and for big people*. Ontario, OR: AlexAndria Associates.
- Hochban, T. (1994). *Hear my roar: A story of family violence*. Toronto: Annick Press.
- Jance, J. (1985). *It's not your fault*. Edmonds, WA: Chas Franklin Press.
- Johnson, K. (1986). *The trouble with secrets*. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press.



Kellogg, M. (1972). *Like the lion's tooth*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux.

Kleeberg, I. (1985). *Latch -key kid*. New York: Franklin Watts.

Kute, K. S. (1983). *Play it safe: The kids guide to personal safety and crime prevention*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Montgomery, B., Grimm, C., & Schwandt, P. (1983). *Annie: Once I was a little bit frightened*. Fargo, ND: The Rape and Abuse Crisis Center.

Morgan, M. K. (1984). *A little bird told me about . . . My feelings*. Eugene, Oregon: Equal Justice Consultants and Educational Products.

Mufson, S., & Kranz, R. (1991). *Straight talk about child abuse*. New York: Facts on File.

Neiberg-Terkel, S., & Rensch, J. E. (1984). *Feeling safe, feeling strong: How to avoid sexual abuse and what to do if it happens to you*. Minneapolis: Lerner.

Otto, M. (1987). *Tom doesn't visit us anymore*. Toronto: Women's Press.

Phillips, L., Ringrose, P., & Winter, M. (1990). *Ask me no questions*. Scarborough: Prentice-Hall.

Satullo, J. A. W., Russel, R., & Broadway, P. A. (1987). *It happens to boys too*. Pittsfield, MA: Rape Crisis Center of the Berkshires.

Sondheimer, I. (1982). *The boy who could make his mother stop yelling*. Fayetteville, NY: Rainbow Press.

Stark, E. (1989). *Everything you need to know about family violence*. New York: Rosen.

Stark, E., & Marsha, H. (1988). *Everything you need to know about sexual abuse*. New York: Rosen.

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## Child Abuse Checklist for Teachers

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Possible Indicators of Child Abuse

The following is a *general* list of possible child abuse symptoms. If by using these indicators, a profile of abuse emerges for any child, you should report your suspicion to the Children's Protection Services in your area.

- ✓
- ☐ 1. Children who are frequently late or absent.
  - ☐ 2. Children who come to school very early, or who are reluctant to go home in the afternoon.
  - ☐ 3. Children who arrive at school with unexplained welts, bruises, or other physical injuries. Physical education teachers may notice these children more often.
  - ☐ 4. Children who are hyperactive, destructive, and/or aggressive.
  - ☐ 5. Children who are withdrawn, passive, or overly compliant.
  - ☐ 6. Children who appear undernourished or exhibit eating problems.
  - ☐ 7. Children who are tired, lethargic, or listless.
  - ☐ 8. Children who often express physical complaints, such as stomachaches or headaches.
  - ☐ 9. Children who exhibit infantile, fearful behavior toward adults of one sex, or toward one particular adult.
  - ☐ 10. Children who exhibit excessive separation anxiety.
  - ☐ 11. Children who show unusual fear of undressing at appropriate times, such as physical education classes.
  - ☐ 12. Children who exhibit radical behavior changes.
  - ☐ 13. Children who experience regressive toilet training problems.
  - ☐ 14. Children who exhibit inappropriate sexual knowledge or play for their age group.
  - ☐ 15. Children who exhibit noticeable physical, mental, social or emotional lags.
  - ☐ 16. Children who express failure to thrive.

***While all of the above signs could be symptoms of a variety of problems,  
if a continuing pattern exists,  
child abuse should be considered as one possibility.***

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR**

**Children's Protection Services**

**St. John's Region I**

St. John's and Mount Pearl. 729 - 6032  
Conception Bay South .... 834 - 2015

**St. John's Region II**

Bell Island ..... 488 - 3376  
Ferryland ..... 432 - 2892

**Eastern Region**

Bonavista .....	468 - 2461	Placentia .....	227 - 2132
Clarenville .....	466 - 4046	Marystown .....	891 - 2450
Harbour Grace .....	945 - 3063	Whitbourne .....	582 - 3721

**Central Region**

Baie Verte .....	532 - 8024	Lewisporte .....	535 - 6783
Botwood .....	257 - 2424	Milltown .....	882 - 2610
Fogo .....	266 - 2238	Springdale .....	673 - 3806
Gambo .....	674 - 5373	Twillingate .....	884 - 2413
Gander .....	256 - 1200	Wesleyville .....	536 - 3440
Grand Falls-Winsor .....	292 - 4231		

**Western Region**

Bonne Bay .....	453 - 2249	Piccadilly .....	642 - 5304
Burgeo .....	886 - 3353	Port Saunders .....	861 - 3509
Channel .....	695 - 7367	St. Anthony .....	454 - 3840
Corner Brook .....	637 - 2303	Stephenville .....	643 - 8608
Deer Lake .....	635 - 2124	Stephenville Crossing ...	646 - 2673
Englee .....	866 - 2773		

**Labrador Region**

Cartwright .....	938 - 7413	Mary's Harbour .....	921 - 6246
Davis Inlet .....	478 - 8844	Makkovik .....	923 - 2129
Forteau .....	931 - 2330	Nain .....	922 - 2871
Happy Valley .....	896 - 2494	Sheshatshiu .....	497 - 8280
Hopedale .....	933 - 3887	Wabush .....	282 - 6651

**Kids Help Line ..... 1 - 800 - 668 - 6868**

**NOTE: In cases of emergency CALL 911**

**CONFIDENTIAL**

**Written Report  
of Disclosed or Suspected Child Abuse**

**1. Student Information:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Classroom Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent(s)/Guardian(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone #: \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Person Making the Report:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_ School Board: \_\_\_\_\_

School Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone #: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Describe the Circumstances of the Disclosure or the Nature of your  
Suspicion. Be as detailed as possible; attach additional sheets if necessary.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

[illegible]

**4. Referral Agency Information:**

Name of Social Worker  
or Police Officer Contacted: \_\_\_\_\_  
District Office or Detachment Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date & Time of Referral: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Did the Social Worker and/or the Police Officer say they would be taking any follow-up action? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Describe the Plan of Action: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. **Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**NOTE: This form is to be kept in a confidential, secure file; it should not be kept in the child's cumulative record file. Remember to attach all of the child's writing or artwork which may support this report.**

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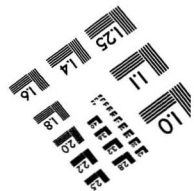
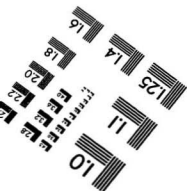
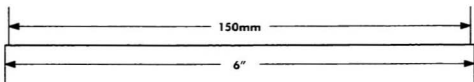
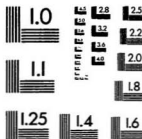
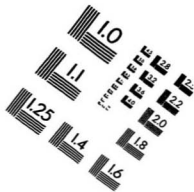
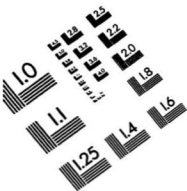
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# IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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