

Student Health and Safety Child Abuse / Neglect

Policy No. 304.2R

REGULATIONS

1. Handling Disclosures

Children may tell others directly that they are being abused or neglected, or may use indirect methods of communicating about their abuse or neglect. When abuse is disclosed, it is critical that leading questions not be asked of the child because they can result in inaccurate information.

When a child discloses abuse/neglect,

- a) Stay calm and listen
- b) Go slowly
- c) Reassure them that they have not done anything wrong
- d) Be supportive
- e) Gather essential facts
- f) Tell the child what will happen next
- g) Report
- h) Make notes

Refer to pages 15 and 16 of *The B.C. Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect*.

2. Child Abuse/Neglect - Reporting Procedures

2.1. When an employee of the School Board has reason to believe that a child has been or is likely to be physically harmed, sexually abused, sexually exploited, neglected or is in need of protection, that employee shall immediately inform the local Ministry for Children and Family Development at:

Vanderhoof 250-567-6347, Burns Lake 250-692-4142, 1-800-663-9122
Helpline for Children 310-1234

If a child is in immediate danger contact the local detachment of the RCMP.

2.2. The employee shall report the following as per page 19 of *The B.C. Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect*:

(Ensure the reporter's name, telephone number and relationship to the child is included in the report.)

- 2.2.1 The name and location of the child;
- 2.2.2. Any immediate concerns about the child's safety;
- 2.2.3. Any information as to why you believe the child is at risk;
- 2.2.4. Any statements or disclosures made by the child;
- 2.2.5. The age and vulnerability of the child;
- 2.2.6. Information on the family, parents and alleged offenders;
- 2.2.7. Information on siblings or other children who may be at risk;
- 2.2.8. Knowledge of any previous incidents or concerns regarding the child;
- 2.2.9. Information about other persons or agencies closely involved with the child and/or family;
- 2.2.10. Information about other persons who may be witnesses or may have information about the child;
- 2.2.11. Information on the nature of the child's disabilities, if any, his or her mode of communication, and the name of a key support person; and,
- 2.2.12. Any other relevant information concerning the child and/or family, such as language or culture.

The employee should also note the following:

- 2.2.13. The name of the intake social worker receiving the call; and,
- 2.2.14. The time and date the call was made.

2.3. The employee will then immediately inform the appropriate school district administrator.

It is not the role of school personnel to gather evidence of abuse or neglect, only to inform the Ministry for Children and Family Development of a reasonable suspicion of abuse or neglect. School personnel should not, therefore, actively seek a disclosure of abuse or neglect from the child as the number of interviews undergone by the child should be kept to a minimum.

3. Investigation of the Allegations

The investigation process lies exclusively with the Ministry for Children and Family Development and the RCMP.

- 3.1. A social worker from Ministry for Children and Family Development (and a police officer in cases of sexual abuse or serious physical abuse) will interview the child, usually on the same day the complaint has been made. This interview may take place in the school. Administrative Officers and/or teachers should not insist on being present when the child is interviewed unless specifically asked to do so by the investigating social worker. All parties should use discretion to protect the child's privacy.

- 3.1.1. The Ministry for Children and Family Development and/or the police will then interview the alleged abuser and other family members. A decision concerning the safety of the child will be taken by Ministry for Children and Family Development at this point.

Interviews conducted in the school should be completed prior to the conclusion of the school day. Teachers have no authority to detain a child at the request of a social worker. In the event that an interview is still in process at the end of a school day, it is the social worker's responsibility to contact the parent and assess whether or not the child will be allowed to return home.

Administrative officers may request the call to the family by the Ministry for Children and Family Development be made from their office before leaving the school. Administrative Officers should not contact parents when they are informed an investigation is taking place.

- 3.2. It is the responsibility of Ministry for Children and Family Development to report back to the school. The school administrator has the right to contact Ministry for Children and Family Development to learn the results of the investigation as those results pertain to the student's educational needs.
- 3.3. At the end of the investigation and disposition of the case, the school administrator and appropriate personnel should meet to discuss the steps the school could take to assist the investigated student.

4. Reporting Procedures When Child Abuse/Neglect is Believed to have Occurred in a Public School by District Personnel

- 4.1. When an employee of the board has reason to believe that a child has been or is likely to be physically harmed, sexually abused, sexually exploited, or is in need of protection from another district employee, the appropriate school district administrator should be contacted, as well as the superintendent of schools.
- 4.2. The reporting procedures outlined in sections 2.1. and 2.2. are then followed.
- 4.3. Upon notification of the Superintendent of Schools, an investigation will be conducted in a coordinated manner which may involve the RCMP and the Ministry for Children and Family Development.
 - the child protection social worker assesses the report to decide how to respond to it, and commences an investigation if there is reason to believe that a child may need protection;
 - The police conduct an investigation to determine if a criminal offence may have been committed; and,
 - The Superintendent of Schools or the senior authority of an educational institution investigates as part of his/her legal responsibilities.

In all cases, procedures will follow provisions as outlined in respective collective agreements.

The *School Act* provides authority for a school board to dismiss, suspend or otherwise discipline an employee for just and reasonable cause. If a Superintendent of Schools believes the welfare of students is threatened by the presence of an employee, the Superintendent of Schools may suspend the employee. The Board of Education has the power to confirm, vary or revoke that suspension. School boards must report to the Teacher Regulation Branch, without delay, the reason for any teacher's dismissal, suspension, or disciplinary action and any resignation in which circumstances are such that it is in the public interest to do so.

5. Reporting Procedures Where Abusive Behavior Occurs Between Children

Abusive behavior between children, including sexual behavior, generally involves an imbalance of power, where one child is significantly older than the other, or one of the children may be more vulnerable.

The decision as to whether to report to a child protection worker is made on a case-by-case basis. There is no need to report:

- Normal sexual play or exploration between children of similar ages;
- Minor altercations or aggression between children; and,
- Any other activity that is in the bounds of normal childhood behavior.

Factors to be considered when deciding to report include:

- The seriousness of the behavior;
- The existence of a power imbalance between the children;
- Whether the behavior resulted in harm to the child(ren); and,
- The willingness and ability of the involved children's parents to respond appropriately.

In deciding whether to report to a child protection social worker, ask yourself:

- Are the children behaving inappropriately for their age?;
- Are they being coercive or exploitative?;
- Is their behavior impulsive or premeditated?; and,
- Is there a pattern of domination, force, aggression (actual or threatened) or intimidation which endangers the physical or psychological well-being of another child?

If reporting, procedures may be followed as per Section 2.

Each school district work site shall maintain an up-to-date *The B.C. Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect* that is available to all school district employees.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE: It is very important that all persons involved with the procedure cooperate in the best interests of the child. If any school personnel have any questions or complaints about the handling of a child abuse or neglect case by Ministry for Children and Family Development or the RCMP, they should inform the Superintendent of Schools or District Principal of Student Services immediately. Only by correcting misunderstandings and mistakes can the necessary close cooperation be maintained.