

Reporting Concerns of Child Maltreatment in Field Placement Settings

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SCHOOL OF EARLY
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Reporting Concerns of Child Maltreatment in Field Placement Settings

Purpose

The School of Early Childhood Education is committed to the prevention of child abuse, neglect, and exposure to family violence. The purpose of these guidelines are to ensure that practices surrounding the reporting of concerns regarding the maltreatment of children in field placement are known to all students and employees and are aligned with relevant legislation in Ontario.

Scope

These guidelines apply to all employees and students in the School of Early Childhood Education. Employees are responsible for being familiar with these guidelines. The field team is responsible for reviewing this guideline document with students during field placement seminars that take place at the beginning of each semester.

Relevant Key Definitions

College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE): This College is a regulatory body that governs Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE) in the province of Ontario. One responsibility of the college is to establish and enforce ethical and professional standards for RECE's. In the context of this guidelines, one such standard would include reporting to the College concerns that a RECE is performing their duties in ways that could create a risk to the health, safety, or well-being of children.

Child Maltreatment: Child maltreatment is a comprehensive term that refers to the harm, or risk of harm, a child may experience while in the care of someone they depend on. Child maltreatment includes circumstances of harm related to all types of abuse (physical, sexual, emotional), neglect, and exposure to family violence/intimate partner violence. In these guidelines the terms "child maltreatment" and "child abuse and neglect" may be used interchangeably.

Children's Aid Society (CAS): Children's Aid Societies are non-profit agencies that support and protect infants, children and youth who are, or are at risk of, experiencing child maltreatment in the province of Ontario. CAS's must follow the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017 and are responsible for investigating any reports of child maltreatment for children under the age of 18. In Ontario there are 50 Children's Aid Societies of which 13 are Indigenous Child and Family Well-being Agencies, two are Catholic Children's Aid Societies and one is a Jewish Children's Aid Society (www.oacas.org). Some CAS's are referred to as Child and Family Services. The term "child protection agency" may also be used.

Indigenous Child and Family Well-Being Agencies: Indigenous Child and Family Well-being agencies provide support and protective services specifically to children and families that identify as First Nation, Métis, or Inuit. Services are culturally based with a focus on supporting the healing, well-being and strengthening of families. Some Indigenous Child and Family Well-being agencies provide additional services outside of child protection, such as mental health supports.

Guidelines and Relevant Legislation

Everyone in society shares a responsibility to protect the welfare and well-being of all children and youth. In Ontario, it is the law to report suspected child maltreatment, or risk of harm, to a Children's Aid Society (CAS) or Indigenous child and family well-being agency.

Students on field placement in the School of Early Childhood Education sometimes observe incidents involving the behaviour of employees or other adults that they feel is, or is likely to be, harmful to a child or children. Similarly, students may also observe possible indicators that a child is, or may be at risk of, experiencing child abuse, neglect, or exposure to family violence in their home environment. This protocol is designed to provide guidance to field placement liaisons, faculty, and students on reporting responsibilities when there are concerns regarding the maltreatment of children in field placement settings.

Legislation: Child, Youth and Family Services Act. 2017

The Child, Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA) is a law in Ontario that regulates a range of services for children, youth, and families. The central

purpose of this law is to promote the best interests, protection, and well-being of children (CYFSA Section 1). Section 125 of the act recognizes that every person in society plays a role in protecting the safety and well-being of children and youth by outlining the *duty to report child in need of protection*. Thus, all members of the public, and especially those who perform professional duties with respect to children, must report any suspicions that a child is, or is at risk of, experiencing maltreatment to a CAS or an Indigenous child and family well-being agency.

In the context of this legislation, a “child” is defined as anyone under the age of 18. However, mandatory reporting of suspicions of maltreatment only apply to those under the age of 16. Reporting suspicions related to a 16- or 17-year-old is considered *optional*.

Section 125: Duty to report child in need of protection

Section 125 of the CYFSA requires that anyone with reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is, or may be, in need of protection immediately report the suspicion and information upon which it is based to a CAS or Indigenous child and family well-being agency. This includes situations where children have been, or are at risk of being, abused, neglected and/or exposed to family violence while in the care of someone that child depends on (ie. anyone in a caregiving role). Section 125 (1) describe the specific circumstances that must be reported, which can be reviewed in Appendix A of this guidelines. The duty to report a child in need of protection overrides obligations to confidentiality.

One does not need to be *certain* a child is at risk of, or has experienced, abuse, neglect or exposure to family violence to make a report to a CAS or Indigenous Child and Family Well-being Agency. Anyone can report under the premise of good faith if they have “reasonable grounds” to suspect child maltreatment. Reasonable grounds refer to “the information that an average person, using honest judgment, would need in order to decide to report.” (www.ontario.ca/children). As students are working directly with children, they are considered to have a heightened responsibility to report suspected child maltreatment.

Even if a report has already been made about a child, further reports must be made if additional incidents occur and/or there are new reasonable grounds to suspect the child is or may need protection. This relates to ones *ongoing duty to report* as outlined in Section 125 (2) of the CYFSA.

Furthermore, when someone is concerned about the safety of a child, that *person must report directly* according to Section 125 (3) of the CYFSA. More specifically, if a student has concerns, they can not rely on anyone else to report on their behalf. The responsibility to report rests with the student.

Role of CAS in Ontario

The role of CAS’s and Indigenous Child and Family Well-Being Agencies is to protect the safety and well-being of children and youth up to age 18. CAS’s and Indigenous Family Well-Being Agencies have many mandates including, but not limited to, investigating situations where a child may be in need of protection and providing relevant support services to families to protect children and/or prevent circumstances requiring the protection of children (www.oacas.org).

When a call is made to a CAS, a child protection worker will listen to the concerns and record the information shared. The child protection worker may ask the caller a variety of questions, which should be answered as fully as possible based on the information known. Maintaining confidentiality is *not* required when reporting concerns related to child maltreatment. Using information gathered, as well as information already recorded in the child protection system, the worker will use comprehensive criteria to decide whether an investigation is required based on the assessed risk, and whether the child is in immediate danger. When follow-up is required, a child protection worker will complete an investigation and determine whether any formal supports to promote safety are required. Depending on the circumstances, other services or systems may become involved (ie. law enforcement).

Field Placement Agency Policies

While on field placement, students are responsible for reviewing the agency’s policies and procedures with respect to child abuse and family violence before beginning placement. Students are also responsible for following the policies of the agency/program where they are placed. This will include the need to notify the centre Executive Director in circumstances pertaining to maltreatment between children and staff on site.

Protocol for Making a Report of Suspected Child Maltreatment

