

Saskatoon Sexual Assault & Information Centre (SSAIC)



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Child Sexual Abuse Disclosure: What Should I Do?

What is child sexual abuse?

Any action involving a child in sexual exploitation or sexual activity including touching, exposure, using a child in the making of/or viewing pornography.

Duty to Report

The Duty to Report overrides professional confidentiality codes when there is reason to believe that a child may be abused or neglected. Failure to report child abuse or neglect may result in professional or legal consequences, depending on the code of professional conduct of any given organization or profession.

What should I do if I think a child is being sexually abused?

If you believe a child may be neglected or abused, you have a legal responsibility to immediately report your suspicions to the Ministry of Social Services, Child Protection, or to police. This duty arises out of the Child and Family Services Act of Saskatchewan and applies to everyone.

- Time is of the essence in ensuring the safety and well being of children.
Immediately report all incidents of suspected, observed or disclosed abuse.
- Do not wait until you have all information before reporting the abuse.
- You have an ongoing duty to report child abuse, even if you believe a report has already been made or someone else may also be reporting.
- If you believe the child or other children must be protected from further abuse, please contact the police.
- Do not contact the alleged perpetrator.

Try to stay calm. Child sexual abuse is a shocking and difficult thing to hear about. Take a deep breath and remember that you know what to do.

Tell the child you believe them. The most important thing any adult can do for a child who discloses is to accept that what you're being told is the truth. Often, a child's biggest fear is that people won't believe them. No matter what your relationship with the child may be, clearly demonstrate, through your calm, accepting and encouraging responses, that you do believe them.

Tell the child that this was not their fault. Reassure them that no matter what the circumstances were or how they responded, the abuse is not their fault. Responsibility for what happened belongs entirely with the offender, and it's extremely important that the child is told this because it helps to reduce feelings of guilt, denial and self-blame. Sexual abuse is NEVER the child's fault.

Don't make promises. Tell the child that you're going to get them some help with this problem, but don't make promises that you may not be able to keep. You don't know how the authorities will respond to the report, you don't know how the child's parents or other family members will respond, nor do you know what will happen to the offender.

DO NOT ask the child for details about the abuse, as this can further traumatize the child and compromise the criminal investigation.

What to Report

To report sexual abuse you only need enough information to make you suspect that sexual abuse has occurred—you don't need to be absolutely certain. Trust your instincts. It's up to the authorities to gather details and evidence to determine whether this has happened and what the next steps will be.

Your report should include:

- Your name, telephone number, and relationship to the child. (This remains confidential, unless your testimony is required in a court proceeding. You have the option of reporting anonymously.)
- Your concern for the child's safety (what did you see or hear about that made you worry?)
- The child's name, age, and gender
- Information about the alleged abuser
- Other children who may be at risk because of the situation
- Any other relevant information

Will anyone find out that I made a report?

A person reporting suspected neglect or abuse is not required to provide their name.

The social worker or police officer will not disclose the name of individuals making a report, AS LONG AS they request that their name not be disclosed.

In the event that proceedings move to trial, if you have provided your name, you may be required to give evidence in court.

What if I'm wrong?

There are no legal consequences for a report made in good faith.

Who do I report to, and how?

Report all incidents of suspected, observed, or disclosed abuse to your nearest Ministry of Social Services Office, First Nations Child and Family Services Agency or local police/RCMP.

For all after-hours incidents or concerns, immediately contact your local police or RCMP.