

3.10 ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF CHILDREN

Overview

Employees, volunteers and others who are involved in the lives of children that we serve are in positions of trust and authority. Children are often unable to protect themselves or look after all of their own needs. These circumstances make them vulnerable to abuse and neglect.

This policy is intended to guide employees and volunteers in (1) dealing with suspicions of abuse or (2) reports of abuse or neglect and (3) handling situations where abuse or neglect has occurred or might occur.

When the alleged abuse has occurred at a child care centre worksite (or in the community during operational hours) under the jurisdiction of Community Care Licensing, the reporting procedure is outlined through the *Community Care Facility Act*.

When the alleged abuse has occurred in a program (e.g. respite services) that is funded by the Ministry for Children and Families, the reporting process is outlined through the *Community Support Services Policy Manual*.

When the alleged abuse of the child has occurred in child's home, the report process is mandated by the Child, Family and Community Services Act.

Policy

The Burnaby Association for Community Inclusion will support children with safe, positive, and nurturing conduct at all times. This support will be free of abuse, neglect, and/or harm to the children. BACI is committed to the safe care of children and will not tolerate any form of abuse, neglect, and/or harm. If a child is at risk or the victim of abuse, harm, and/or neglect, BACI will take every measure to ensure the child is safe and no longer at risk.

Definition and Categories of Abuse

(From the Province of British Columbia Inter-Ministry Child Abuse Handbook)

"The following are working definitions to be used to determine whether child abuse or neglect has occurred.

ABUSE means physical, sexual or emotional abuse.

PHYSICAL ABUSE means any physical force or action, which results in or may potentially result in a non-accidental injury to a child and which exceeds that which could be considered reasonable discipline.

SEXUAL ABUSE means any sexual exploitation of a child whether consensual or not. It includes touching of a sexual nature and sexual intercourse, and may

include any behaviour of a sexual nature toward a child. In determining whether behaviour is of a sexual nature, one should ask whether a reasonable observer, looking at the behaviour in its context, would conclude that it is. This would exclude normal affectionate behaviour towards children and normal health or hygiene care.

Sexual activity between children may constitute sexual abuse if the difference in age or power between the children is so significant that the older or more powerful child is clearly taking sexual advantage of the younger or less powerful child. This would exclude consensual, developmentally appropriate sexual activity between children where there is no significant difference in age or power between the children.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE means acts or omissions of those responsible for the care of a child which are likely to produce long term and serious emotional disorder. This might include effects such as non-organic failure to thrive; developmental retardation; serious anxiety, depression or withdrawal; or serious behavioural disturbance.

NEGLECT means the failure of those responsible for the care of the child to meet the physical, emotional or medical needs of a child to an extent that the child's health, development or safety is endangered.

BACI's Responsibilities:

- Services will be provided in an environment that is safe and free from any abuse or neglect.
- Parents will be invited and encouraged to visit program sites at any time and need not ask permission to do so.
- Allegations of abuse will be reported to family members, except where family members are involved.
- Allegations of abuse will be reported to appropriate authorities.
- Allegations of abuse will be investigated. To ensure that individuals are supported without fear of abuse, every effort will be made to ensure that all reported incidents are investigated and dealt with quickly. We will try to maintain confidentiality but it cannot be guaranteed.
- Any necessary actions will be taken to ensure that individuals feel safe and secure and that abuse does not re-occur. Any employee who, upon investigation, has abused or neglected an individual that we serve will face disciplinary measures up to and including immediate dismissal.

Employees' and Volunteers' Responsibilities:

Employees or volunteers who suspect that abuse or neglect has occurred have the responsibility to report their suspicions immediately to their supervisor. If the

accused is a supervisor, the suspicions should be reported immediately to the manager.

Employees or volunteers who know or could reasonably be expected to know about an incident of abuse or neglect and who do not report it will be treated as having aided the abuse or neglect and will face disciplinary measures up to and including dismissal.

Employees or volunteers who suspect that the child is at risk of abuse or neglect at home, have an obligation to report their concern to the Ministry for Children and Family Development.

COMMISSION RESPONSE TO STAFF/VOLUNTEERS

- (a) Any allegation of child abuse against a Commission Staff/Volunteer even at a time when this person is not working will be considered as "work related". ----
- (b) If there is an allegation of Child Abuse against a Commission Staff/Volunteer, the responsible Commission supervisor will, wherever possible, remove the Staff/Volunteer from all activities involving supervision of children until such time as any allegation is proved to be false or shall ensure that a second Staff person is in attendance throughout the program activities.
- (c) All Staff and Volunteers must be sensitive to the need for confidentiality in the handling of information in this area and are instructed to discuss matters pertaining to alleged abuse only with the appropriate Commission supervisor.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

If an employee or volunteer has cause to report suspected child abuse, all information relevant to the matter must be held in the strictest confidence other than the making of a report to MCFD and to his/her immediate supervisor.