

GUIDE FOR PARENTS

A guide to protect children in child-serving organizations

Commit to Kids is a program of



CANADIAN CENTRE for CHILD PROTECTION[®] Helping families. Protecting children.



The *Commit to Kids Guide for Parents* is a component of the *Commit to Kids* program. The *Commit to Kids* program is intended to provide assistance to organizations that provide services to children, to help make organizations safer for children and to assist organizations in meeting their obligations to protect children in their care. THIS GUIDE IS NOT INTENDED TO PROVIDE LEGAL ADVICE, and users should not rely on the content for that purpose. The Guide is provided for informational and reference purposes only.

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The Canadian Centre for Child Protection (protectchildren.ca) is a national charitable organization dedicated to the personal safety of all children. Our goal is to reduce child victimization by providing programs and services to the Canadian public.

What is Commit to Kids?

Commit to Kids is a program to help organizations create safe environments for children. Organizations learn how to define and identify appropriate boundaries between adults and children and create safe, healthy and respectful environments. It provides policies, strategies and a step-by-step plan to help reduce the risk of sexual abuse, encouraging organizations to take an active, participatory role in protecting children in their care.

Guide for Parents

Children in Canada are involved in activities outside of their homes virtually every day. Child care, sports teams and other extra-curricular programs make up the dynamic life of a child; one where they are often in the care of other adults. The majority of these activities and experiences are fun, positive, and help children learn and grow into healthy adults. Just as we recognize the importance of ensuring physical environments do not pose safety risks to children, we must do the same in preventing child sexual abuse.

As a parent, you have received this guide because the organization that your child participates within is committed to ensuring that the highest standards of practice are adhered to when working with children.

This guide was created to give you the necessary information and tools to reduce the likelihood of children being victimized. The purpose of this guide is to educate parents about risks and help them mobilize their communities to create safer environments for children.

Why is the Guide for Parents Important?

Parents play the most important role in protecting children from child sexual abuse. Broadening your understanding of the process of child sexual abuse will only serve to better protect your child when s/he is participating in activities outside the home.



The Vulnerability of Children to Sexual Abuse

- They are still developing socially and emotionally, and therefore can be easy to confuse, control, and coerce.
- They are taught to respect and listen to adults.
- They do not have a developed understanding of sexuality.
- They do not interpret an adult's intent.
- They, like most people, respond to attention, affection, kindness, and gifts.
- They are inexperienced, curious, rebellious, and, especially during adolescence, easily aroused.

Sexual abuse is a process. It often begins before sexual touching starts.

The Scope of Child Sexual Abuse in Canada :

- Sexual offences are among the most underreported crimes in Canada.
- In 2009, 58% of all victims reporting sexual abuse to police were under the age of 17.
- In 89% of the child sexual abuse cases reported to police in 2011, the child victim knew the offender.
- Both girls and boys (children and youth) are vulnerable to sexual abuse.
- The rate of victimization for female child victims generally increases with age, with an increase in the number of female victims reporting abuse between the ages of 12 and 15. The rate of victimization for male victims remains relatively stable across the ages.

Source: Department of Justice Canada, "Backgrounder – Sexual Offending Against Children and Youth" based on statistics related to police-reported crimes, February 2013 (accessed online December 4, 2013)

Understanding Child Sexual Abuse

Understanding the issue of child sexual abuse – problematic behaviour, the importance of appropriate boundaries, as well as reporting procedures for addressing inappropriate behaviour and child sexual abuse – is the first step toward preventing it.

What is Child Sexual Abuse?

Child sexual abuse includes a range of behaviours, from obvious contact offences, such as sexual touching, to the less obvious non-contact offences, such as those listed below. It is important to note that children can experience sexual abuse and harm without a contact offence occurring.

Examples of non-contact sexual abuse:

- Asking sexually intrusive questions or making sexually explicit comments to a child (online and/or offline)
- Voyeurism (i.e. secretly watching or recording a child's private activities)
- Inviting a child to sexually touch her/himself or another person (online and/ or offline)
- Exposing a child to pornography or sexually explicit acts
- 'Flashing' or exposing genitals to a child



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Offenders and the Grooming Process

Individuals who abuse their positions of trust and authority with children:

- Usually know the child
- Are often well-liked by those within the community
- Come from all walks of life
- · Cannot be picked out or identified by their appearance or character traits



Grooming is a method used by sexual offenders to gain sexual access to children. It is often a slow, gradual and escalating process of building trust and comfort with a child, and the adults around the child.

The purpose of grooming is to:

- Manipulate the perceptions of people so they believe the person is safe to be with the child
- Desensitize a child and normalize inappropriate behaviour
- · Increase the compliance of the child
- Reduce the likelihood of a disclosure
- Reduce the likelihood of the child being believed if s/he discloses

The GROOMING PROCESS includes:

of adults



7. Maintaining control

To ensure the child's continued participation and silence, an offender can use secrecy, blame and guilt, as well as other control tactics. The child will sometimes continue the relationship out of fear or shame at the thought of having to tell someone about the abuse.

6. Sexualizing the relationship An offender will gradually desensitize the child by accidental touching, rough

housing (such as wrestling), massaging, talking

which the offender and/or the child are undressed.

The offender will then use the child's curiosity,

to confuse the child to engage in sexual activity.

feelings of stimulation and lack of experience

to, taking photos of, and even creating situations in

relationships with adults who are around the child and in the child's life. This will build the adults' confidence that this person can be around and spend time with the child without anyone questioning the relationship.

3. Gaining trust of the child

Through paying attention and gathering information about the child, an offender will become acquainted with the child's needs.

4. Coercion/ filling a need

An offender will often give gifts, extra attention and affection, as well as let the child get away with things her/his parents would not allow, in order to forge an emotional bond with the child.

5. Isolating the child

By developing a special relationship with the child, and sometimes the child's family, an offender will create opportunities to be alone with the child and to foster a dependency on her/him. The dependency may be emotional, financial, for child care assistance, etc.

Adapted from SafeSport - 2013 - SafeSport | 1 Olympic Plaza | Colorado Springs, CO 80909 | safesport@usoc.org)



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The abuse may go undetected because:

- The offender appears to be a dedicated employee/volunteer/person in the family's life (e.g. extremely friendly, helpful, great with children, well-liked).
- Fellow employees/volunteers and/or parents cannot imagine that such offences could or would be attempted.
- Fellow employees/volunteers and/or parents believe they would know or notice if misconduct or abuse was occurring.
- The offender concealed the behaviour under legitimate activities: caring for children, going on outings, spending extra time working alone with a child, participating in overnight trips, etc.

If something doesn't seem quite right, question it.

What is the age of Sexual Consent?

The age of sexual consent is in place to protect young people from being sexually exploited or abused by adults. It refers to the age that a person can legally consent to sexual activity. The age of consent is generally 16 years old. The table below sets out the age at which consent can be given based on the age of the child and the other person:

CHILD'S AGE	CAN CHILD CONSENT?
Under 12 years old	NO; no person under 12 is able to consent to sexual activity.
12 or 13 years old	SOMETIMES ; only if the age difference is LESS THAN 2 years*
14 or 15 years old	SOMETIMES ; only if the age difference is LESS THAN 5 years*
16 years old or over	YES; BUT there are exceptions. See next page.
18 years old	YES.

*The close-in-age exception will not apply where the other person is in a position of trust or authority over the child, the child is dependent on the other person, or the relationship is exploitative – just like the exceptions to consent for persons 16 years and over.

Exceptions to consent: persons 16 years and over

At age 16, a youth is able to consent to sexual activity, but not if:

- The other person is in a position of trust or authority over the youth (e.g. teacher, coach, relative, priest/pastor/minister, employer)
- The relationship is exploitative (e.g. prostitution, where the age difference is significant, where the older person has significant influence or control over the younger person, where the relationship began at a time when the older person was in a position of trust or authority)
- S/he is dependent on the other person in some way (e.g. for food or shelter)

Did You Know?

МҮТН	FACT
Children are more likely to disclose if directly questioned by their parent or an adult authority figure who can help.	Children often blame themselves for what has happened and feel enormous shame and embarrassment so they do not want people to know about it.
Disclosure is always a one-time event.	Disclosures often unfold gradually, and may be presented in a series of hints, over an extended period of time.

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Importance of Appropriate Boundaries

Healthy relationships between adults and children are key to a child's sense of safety and security. Children rely upon the guidance and judgment of adults to keep them safe. They are also vulnerable within the dynamics of the adult-child relationship given the imbalance of power in favour of the adult within the relationship. Consider what healthy boundaries are and know how to recognize interactions that cross the line. Remember, it is always up to adults to establish and maintain (regularly re-establish) boundaries with children.

Concerning adult behaviour to pay attention to:

- · Repeated use of poor judgment when interacting with children
- Normalizing or minimizing inappropriate interactions with children
- Distorting relationships with children (i.e. using children to meet their own emotional needs)
- Frequently initiating or creating opportunities to have exclusive time alone with a child (or certain children)
- Making others feel uncomfortable by ignoring social, emotional, or physical boundaries or limits with children
- Refusing to let a child set her/his own limits (e.g. may use teasing or belittling language to keep a child from setting limits)
- Excessive touching, hugging, kissing, tickling, wrestling with or holding a child
- Frequently making sexual references or telling sexual or suggestive jokes with children present
- Exposing children to adult sexual interactions without apparent concern
- · Encouraging children to behave sexually towards each other
- Giving special attention to certain children
- Displaying favouritism towards certain children
- Displaying preferences for children of a certain age and gender



Misconduct/Inappropriate Behaviour

It can be difficult to respond to a situation where you notice an adult-child relationship that appears inappropriate. People often question themselves or are reluctant to talk about the concerning behaviour of an adult towards a child. While there may be an element of discomfort in doing so, it is important to put the well-being of your child and/or other children first.

Reporting inappropriate behaviour creates accountability so proper action can be taken and expectations can be re-established. It holds adults interacting with children to a high standard. It may also prevent your child and other children from experiencing abuse by potentially disrupting an unhealthy situation. The following are examples of behaviours that may be inappropriate and warrant reporting:

1 Communication by adults working or volunteering with children that goes beyond their role with your child and/or is not occurring within the context of their employment/volunteer duties and responsibilities, including:

- Writing personal letters or text messages to your child
- · Making personal phone calls to your child
- Having personal Internet exchanges with your child (e.g. email, instant messaging, chatrooms, social networking, etc.)
- · Sending personalized gifts to your child

Note: It is not misconduct to give a contextually appropriate thank you card, seasonal card, or other nominal gift to a child, where such a gesture would be considered reasonable in the circumstances. All gestures taken together should not be excessive in number and any such exchanges should be carried out within the child-serving organization environment, in the presence of others, and with the knowledge of the organization.

2.

Inappropriate interactions with your child that go beyond the individual's role with your child, including:

- Offering unauthorized personal rides to your child
- Spending time with your child outside of designated work times and activities except when such activity has been disclosed to and approved by the parent and the organization in advance
- · Favouring your child and giving her/him personalized gifts
- Inappropriate physical boundaries, touch and sexualized behaviours

- Telling sexual jokes to your child
- Showing your child sexually explicit or sexist material (signs, cartoons, calendars, literature, photographs, etc.) or displaying such material in plain view
- Taking pictures of your child, except when specifically requested to do so by the organization and provided that only cameras owned or under the control of the organization are used to take such pictures

Note: An adult working with your child should not use her/his cellular phone or personal camera to take pictures of a child, nor upload or copy any pictures s/he may have taken of a child to the Internet or to any personal storage device without signed parental permission.

3 Behaviour that would be concerning to anyone who witnessed it.

- Behaviour that embarrasses, humiliates or shames your child.
- **5.** Physical contact with your child that makes her/him feel uncomfortable, violates reasonable boundaries, or is not appropriate for the context of the situation.
 - Inappropriate boundaries between an adult and your child, sexualized behaviours (e.g. sexual talk, leering, flirting) or touching that make the child and/or others feel uncomfortable.



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Reporting Child Sexual Abuse and Misconduct

What do you do if you have concerns about possible child sexual abuse?

When a person becomes aware that a child may be or has been abused, there is a legal and ethical responsibility to take action. The legal responsibility comes from child welfare legislation within each province and may also be a duty of a person's profession, or workplace (such as schools, daycares, after-school programs, religious organizations, etc.)

The responsibility to report means that a person who has knowledge or information that a child is or might be at risk must report it to someone:

- If the information relates to potential abuse of a child by the child's parent or guardian, the person who becomes aware of the information must report it to child welfare or police
- If the concern involves potential abuse of a child by any other person, the individual who becomes aware of it must report it to the child's parent or guardian and may also be obligated to report it to child welfare and/ or police

People are responsible for reporting concerns, not proving abuse.



Reporting information about potential child abuse allows:

- · An authority, like child welfare or police, to determine whether it is necessary to investigate the allegations
- The parent(s) or guardian(s) to proactively take steps to protect her/his child

Mandatary reporting legislation removes any personal or professional dilemma from becoming a barrier to someone reporting information. It is not uncommon for people to minimize or deny what a child tells him/her during a disclosure. People are often concerned about being wrong and causing problems. Remember that reporting may disrupt or prevent existing or future sexual abuse from occurring against other children.



Reporting knowledge about potential child abuse is not a personal decision, it is mandatory under the law.

If a person learns about past child sexual abuse that is no longer occurring – it is still important to report the abuse. The offender may still have access to other children and those other children may be at risk.

How do you report misconduct/concerning behaviour?

While obvious sexual acts are easier to identify and address, situations and behaviour that do not meet the threshold of abuse still need to be acted upon:

- If you observe or hear about concerning behaviour or an inappropriate/questionable situation between an adult and your child or another child within the organization, report your concerns to the organization
- If you have contact with the child outside the organization, report your concerns to the parents and/or the appropriate authorities

Flagging the concerning behaviour to the organization should trigger a review of the activities in an effort to correct and stop the possible misconduct. It will also allow an organization to address any behaviour that is not consistent with its policies and procedures.





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How to Support a Child During a Disclosure

Listen

What a child needs when disclosing is for you to listen. S/he fears an adult's reaction as well as not being believed. It takes incredible courage to share such an experience. Listen attentively and avoid sharing your own stories or experiences.

Control Your Reaction

Do not over or underreact. If the child believes they are being judged by you or that you do not believe her/him, s/he is likely to shut down and stop the disclosure.

Take it Seriously

Let the child know that what s/he is telling you is very important to you. Explain to the child that you are going to listen very carefully to what s/he has to share with you.

Praise a Child for Telling

It takes tremendous courage to disclose sexual abuse and a child will often assume responsibility for the abuse. Assure the child that it is not her/his fault, and that s/he did the right thing by telling you.

Protect the Child and Other Children from Overexposure

Respect the child's need for privacy and confidentiality, and make sure that no other children are around to hear the child's disclosure. Only adults who will be directly involved in taking action should be present.

Show Warmth and Caring

Use a calm voice and get down to the child's level in order to make eye contact with her/him. A child who discloses needs appropriate support and understanding.

Making Sure Organizations are Committed to Child Protection

As a parent, you have the right to ask questions about what steps an organization takes to create a safe environment for children. When selecting a program for your child, consider what strategies, policies and safety plans the organization has in place to protect the children in their care. Parents should be encouraged to ask and receive any information about ways in which the organization creates safe conditions for children. The following steps will help parents play a participatory role in ensuring that their child's experience with the organization is a positive and safe one.

Step 1 GET TO KNOW THE ORGANIZATION

- What do you know about the organization's history, goals for children and philosophy?
- Have you toured the organization? What impression were you left with?
- Is the organization transparent around questions about child protection?
- Does the organization have an open-door policy for addressing concerns?
- Is the organization part of a provincial or national governing body?

Step 2 ASK QUESTIONS

- What is your screening process, beyond criminal record checks, for hiring staff and/ or volunteers?
- What type of training do your staff and/or volunteers receive on misconduct, child sexual abuse and disclosure?
- Do you have a staff/volunteer code of conduct that outlines the expectation of boundaries between children and adults?
- What are your policies and procedures for reporting concerns or misconduct?
- How does your organization handle staff or volunteer misconduct?

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 Speak with your child's program coordinator, teacher, coach, etc. to inquire about steps they take to ensure safe conditions for the children

Step 3 EXPLORE HOW RISK IS MANAGED

Ask specific questions about how risk is managed for activities that may include:

- · Transportation of children
- · One-on-one time with children
- · Changing and showering needs
- Overnight trips
- Communication with children outside of program activities (e.g. texting, emailing, social networking sites, etc.)
- Any extended contact with children outside work/volunteer duties
 - Inquire about how the organization communicates issues or concerns to parents when an incident or situation takes place

Step 4 STAY INVOLVED

- Teach your child about personal safety. Visit **kidsintheknow.ca** for more information.
- Be present and involved in your child's activities. Pay attention to the interactions between the leaders and the children.
- Check in with your child and create opportunities for her/him to share her/his feelings, stories, opinions, and perspective about her/his experiences in the activities.
- Pay close attention to changes in your child's behaviour children communicate through their behaviour more than their words. Let her/him know that you notice if s/ he is 'out of sorts' or not her/himself. Ask the question "Is there anything I can help you with?" Let your child know that you are available when s/he is ready to talk.
- Model appropriate boundaries between adults and children. Boundaries are learned in the course of growing up – from caretakers, experiences and social norms. Develop your child's sense of healthy boundaries by modelling appropriate boundaries, respecting your child's boundaries, stopping others who try to disrespect your child's boundaries, and correcting your child when s/he begins to disrespect others.
- Get to know your child's friends and other parents from the organization.
- Pay attention and question inappropriate interactions between adults and children. Let the organization know about your concerns by reporting to them. Focus on the behavior of concern, not on the person.

Thank you for your commitment to child protection and for ensuring that the organization that your child participates in is safe. We encourage you to visit our website at **commit2kids.ca** to learn more.

Together, we are building safer communities for our children.



The Canadian Centre for Child Protection (protectchildren.ca) is a registered charitable organization dedicated to the personal safety of children. We offer a number of programs, services and resources for Canadians to help them protect children and reduce their risk of victimization. This includes:

cybertip ca

Cybertip.ca is Canada's tipline for reporting the online sexual exploitation of children. Cybertip. ca also provides the public with information and other resources, as well as support and referral services, to help Canadians keep themselves and their families safe while using the Internet.

missing**kids**.ca

missingkids.ca

MissingKids.ca is Canada's missing children resource centre. The program offers families support in finding their missing child and provides educational materials to help prevent children from going missing.

cybertip.ca

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education program for children from

kindergarten to high school. The

program is designed to empower

victimization. It uses a community-

children and reduce their risk of

based approach to heighten

kidsintheknow.ca

awareness of child safety and protection strategies.

Kids in the Know is an interactive safety





Commit to Kids is a program to help organizations create safe environments for children. It provides strategies, policies, and a step-by-step plan for reducing the risk of child sexual abuse.

commit2kids.ca



Learn more: https://protectchildren.ca/video-get_involved



