

Handling Disclosures of Abuse or Neglect

The purpose of this section is to provide guidelines for action when abuse is disclosed or suspected. A person who hears a disclosure or suspects abuse must make a report. According to all provincial and territorial child protection acts, the responsibility for keeping Canada's youth safe and free from abuse and neglects falls on all adults who play a role in the lives of young people.

When abuse or neglect has been reported or is suspected, it is imperative that if organizations are involved they act in a manner which:

- Protects the victimized child/youth
- Protects other children/youth within the organization
- Respects the rights of the alleged abuser by maintaining the appropriate confidentiality
- Works in cooperation with parents, child protection agencies or police
- Informs key players so that immediate action, such as suspension, is taken.

Responding to Disclosures

There are two types of disclosures: verbal disclosures and non-verbal disclosures. Both types of disclosure need to be handled sensitively while following specific procedures.

Verbal disclosures are when the individual decides to tell someone about his/her abuse. The youth usually wants the situation to change, but is also afraid of the consequences that the change may bring. It is important to listen using the guidelines below:

The procedure for reporting a verbal disclosure of child/youth abuse and neglect is:

Hear Honour the youth and the information

Emphasize Encourage

Affirm the youth Acknowledge the choices the youth has

Report/Refer Respond to organizational policies

Document accurately; determine care of self as hearing disclosures may be emotionally difficult

Non-verbal disclosures are when an individual reveals the abuse through behaviour or other external circumstances. Behaviours can have many meanings, and are the result of numerous factors. This complicates non-verbal disclosures as observers try to make sense of what they are seeing, hearing or sensing. Sometimes the behaviours are indicative of abuse or neglect. The procedure for reporting a non-verbal disclosure of child/youth abuse or neglect is:

Document accurately

Affirm the information – acknowledge and affirm the youth and acknowledge choices

Report/Refer – respond to organizational policies

Establish accurate records and execute care of self

For more information on handling youth violence and abuse, have your Red Cross contact connect you with local staff involved with Red Cross' RespectED programs.

Sources:

It's More than Just a Game: RespectED: Violence & Abuse Prevention

Put The Child First, National Youth Serving Organization, Ontario, 1989

Help Stop Child Abuse: A Handbook for Employers and Volunteer Coordinators, Ministry of Attorney General, Ministry of Social Services, Province of British Columbia, June 1994

Child Abuse Policy Handbook, Victoria YM/YWCA, June 1993

Adolescent Maltreatment: Overview and Response, Fairholm, J. The Canadian Red Cross Society, BC-Yukon Division, 1990

Ministry Child Abuse Handbook: An Integrated Approach to Child Abuse and Neglect, BC, 1988