



# Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect: It's Your Duty

Your responsibilities under the  
Child and Family Services Act

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The Child and Family Services Act (CFSA) recognizes that each of us has a responsibility for the welfare of children.

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## Introduction

We all share a responsibility to protect children from harm. This includes situations where children are abused or neglected in their own homes. Ontario's Child and Family Services Act (CFSA) provides for protection for these children.

Section 72 of the Act states that the public, including professionals who work with children, must promptly report any suspicions that a child is or may be in need of protection to a children's aid society (CAS). The Act defines the phrase "child in need of protection" and explains what must be reported to a CAS. It includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect, and risk of harm.

This brochure explains the "duty to report" section of the Act and answers common questions about your reporting responsibilities. It also includes relevant portions of Section 72 for your reference. It does not provide specific legal advice. Please consult a lawyer or a CAS about any specific situation.

## Who is a "child in need of protection"?

The Child and Family Services Act defines a child in need of protection as a child who is or who appears to be suffering from abuse and/or neglect. The Act clearly specifies how you can identify these children in Section 72 (1). (See pages 7 to 10). [CFSA s.72 (1)]

## Who is responsible for reporting a child in need of protection?

Anyone who has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection must promptly report the suspicion and the information upon which it is based to a CAS. Section 72 (1) describes the specific circumstances that must be reported (See pages 7 to 10). [CFSA s.72 (1)]

## What are "reasonable grounds" to suspect child abuse or neglect?

It is not necessary for you to be certain a child is or may be in need of protection to make a report to a CAS. "Reasonable grounds" refers to the information that an average person, using normal and honest judgment, would need in order to decide to report.

## What is the age of the children to whom the "duty to report" applies?

It applies to any child who is, or appears to be, under the age of 16 years. It also applies to children already under a child protection order who are 16 and 17 years old.

## What does an “ongoing duty to report” child abuse or neglect mean?

Even if you know a report has already been made about a child, you must make a further report to the CAS if there are additional reasonable grounds to suspect that the child is or may be in need of protection. [CFSA s.72 (2)]

## Can I rely on someone else to report?

No. You have to report directly to a CAS. You must not rely on anyone else to report on your behalf. [CFSA s.72 (3)]

## Do professionals and officials have any special responsibilities to report?

Professionals and officials have the same duty as the rest of the public to report their suspicion that a child is or may be in need of protection. However, the Act recognizes that people working closely with children have a special awareness of the signs of child abuse and neglect, and a particular responsibility to report their suspicions. Any professional or official who fails to report a suspicion is liable on conviction to a fine of up to \$1,000, if they obtained the information in the course of their professional or official duties. [CFSA s.72 (4), (6.2)]

## Who does the Act consider a person who performs professional or official duties?

- health care professionals, including physicians, nurses, dentists, pharmacists and psychologists
- teachers and school principals
- social workers and family counsellors
- religious leaders, including priests, rabbis and members of the clergy
- operators or employees of child care programs or centres
- youth and recreation workers (not volunteers)
- peace officers and coroners
- child and youth service providers and employees of these service providers
- any other person who performs professional or official duties with respect to a child

These are examples only. If you are unsure whether you fall into any of these categories, ask your local CAS, professional association or regulatory body. [CFSA s.72 (5)]

## What about professional confidentiality?

A professional must report that a child is or may be in need of protection, even when the information is otherwise confidential or privileged. This duty overrides any other provincial statutes, and specifically overrides any provisions that would otherwise prohibit someone from making a disclosure. Only lawyers may not divulge “privileged” information about their clients. [CFSA s.72 (7), (8)]

## Will I be protected from liability if I make a report?

Yes. If a civil action is brought against you for making a report, you will be protected unless you acted maliciously or without having reasonable grounds for the suspicion. [CFSA s. 72 (7)]

## What happens when I call a CAS?

The CAS will investigate the information. The CAS has the responsibility and authority to investigate allegations and to protect children. The CAS may involve the police and other community agencies. All CASs provide emergency service 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

## How do I contact a CAS or get more information?

You can find your local CAS in your local telephone listings or, where available, by dialing 411. In some communities, the CAS is known as “family and children’s services” or “child and family services”.

You can also find information about all of Ontario’s CASs at [www.oacas.org](http://www.oacas.org), the web site of the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies.

Anyone who has a reasonable suspicion that a child is or may be in need of protection must contact a CAS immediately.

If you think the matter is urgent and you cannot reach the CAS, call your local police.



## Section 72 (1) of the Child and Family Services Act

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Despite the provisions of any other Act, if a person, including a person who performs professional or official duties with respect to children, has reasonable grounds to suspect one of the following, the person shall forthwith report the suspicion and the information on which it is based to a society:

1. The child has suffered physical harm, inflicted by the person having charge of the child or caused by or resulting from that person's,
  - i. failure to adequately care for, provide for, supervise or protect the child, or
  - ii. pattern of neglect in caring for, providing for, supervising or protecting the child.
2. There is a risk that the child is likely to suffer physical harm inflicted by the person having charge of the child or caused by or resulting from that person's,
  - i. failure to adequately care for, provide for, supervise or protect the child, or
  - ii. pattern of neglect in caring for, providing for, supervising or protecting the child.
3. The child has been sexually molested or sexually exploited, by the person having charge of the child or by another person where the person having charge of the child knows or should know of the possibility of sexual molestation or sexual exploitation and fails to protect the child.

4. There is a risk that the child is likely to be sexually molested or sexually exploited as described in paragraph 3.
5. The child requires medical treatment to cure, prevent or alleviate physical harm or suffering and the child's parent or the person having charge of the child does not provide, or refuses or is unavailable or unable to consent to, the treatment.
6. The child has suffered emotional harm, demonstrated by serious:
  - i. anxiety
  - ii. depression
  - iii. withdrawal
  - iv. self-destructive or aggressive behaviour, or
  - v. delayed development,

and there are reasonable grounds to believe that the emotional harm suffered by the child results from the actions, failure to act or pattern of neglect on the part of the child's parent or the person having charge of the child.

7. The child has suffered emotional harm of the kind described in subparagraph i, ii, iii, iv or v of paragraph 6 and the child's parent or the person having charge of the child does not provide, or refuses or is unavailable or unable to consent to, services or treatment to remedy or alleviate the harm.

8. There is a risk that the child is likely to suffer emotional harm of the kind described in subparagraph i, ii, iii, iv or v of paragraph 6 resulting from the actions, failure to act or pattern of neglect on the part of the child's parent or the person having charge of the child.
9. There is a risk that the child is likely to suffer emotional harm of the kind described in subparagraph i, ii, iii, iv or v of paragraph 6 and that the child's parent or the person having charge of the child does not provide, or refuses or is unavailable or unable to consent to, services or treatment to prevent the emotional harm.
10. The child suffers from a mental, emotional or developmental condition that, if not remedied, could seriously impair the child's development and the child's parent or the person having charge of the child does not provide, or refuses or is unavailable or unable to consent to, treatment to remedy or alleviate the condition.
11. The child has been abandoned, the child's parent has died or is unavailable to exercise his or her custodial rights over the child and has not made adequate provision for the child's care and custody, or the child is in a residential placement and the parent refuses or is unable or unwilling to resume the child's care and custody.

12. The child is less than 12 years old and has killed or seriously injured another person or caused serious damage to another person's property, services or treatment are necessary to prevent a recurrence and the child's parent or the person having charge of the child does not provide, or refuses or is unavailable or unable to consent to, those services or treatment.
13. The child is less than 12 years old and has on more than one occasion injured another person or caused loss or damage to another person's property, with the encouragement of the person having charge of the child or because of that person's failure or inability to supervise the child adequately.

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If someone has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection, they must make a report directly to a CAS.