



Maple Hill School

SECTION	General School Administration
POLICY NAME	Child Abuse Policy
POLICY NUMBER	320
DATE CREATED	August 10, 2017
DATE REVISED	
DATE IMPLEMENTED	September 1, 2017

Preamble

Maple Hill School is committed to keeping the students safe from all forms of abuse and neglect, whether emotional, physical or sexual. Maple Hill School considers any form of abuse or neglect to be unacceptable and will do all it can to prevent abuse.

Policy:

To help protect students, Maple Hill School will train its staff to help them identify instances of child abuse, bullying and harassment. If an employee suspects a case of possible child abuse, he/she must follow the child protection laws of BC.

Implementation.

1. Definitions:
 - a. Child Abuse is any form of physical, emotional and/or sexual mistreatment or lack of care which causes physical injury or emotional damage to a child. In BC, a child is defined as anyone who is under the age of 19. Child abusers are often persons in power or trust over the child who misuse their power and breach their trust.
 - b. Physical Abuse: is the deliberate physical assault or action by a person that results in, or is likely to result in, physical harm to a child. It includes the use of unreasonable force to discipline a child and not preventing a child from harming him/herself. The injuries sustained by the child may vary in severity and range from minor bruising to major fractures and in some cases, death.
 - c. Emotional Abuse: is the most difficult type of abuse to define and recognize. Generally, it involves acts or omissions of acts by those in contact with a child that result in serious, negative emotional impact. Emotional abuse may occur separately from, or along with, other forms of abuse and neglect. It may include ignoring the child, verbal abuse, habitually humiliating the child, withholding needed care and nurturing, rejection, exposing the child to domestic violence, etc. Emotional abuse usually expresses itself in a pattern of behaviour.
 - d. Emotional harm: When emotional abuse is chronic and persistent, it can result in emotional harm to the child. Under the Child, Family and Community

Service Act, a child is defined as emotionally harmed if he/she demonstrates severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal, or self-destructive or aggressive behaviour.

- e. Sexual Abuse: is when a child is used (or likely to be used) for the sexual gratification of another person. It includes touching or invitation to touch for sexual purposes, intercourse (vaginal, oral or anal), menacing or threatening sexual acts, obscene gestures, obscene communications or stalking, sexual references to the child's body/behaviour by words/gestures, requests that the child expose their body for sexual purposes, deliberate exposure of the child to sexual activity or material, and sexual aspects of organized or ritual abuse.
- f. Sexual Exploitation: is a form of sexual abuse that occurs when a child engages in a sexual activity, usually through manipulation or coercion, in exchange for money, drugs, food, shelter or other considerations. Sexual activity includes: performing sexual acts, sexually explicit activity for entertainment, involvement with escort or massage parlour services, and appearing in pornographic images.
- g. Neglect: is a failure to provide for a child's basic needs. It involves an act of omission by the parent or guardian, resulting in (or likely to result in) harm to the child. Neglect may include failure to provide food, shelter, basic health care, supervision or protection from risks, to the extent that the child's physical health, development or safety is, or is likely to be, harmed.

2. Duty to Report

Every adult is required by law to report to the Ministry of Children and Family Development any suspected cases of neglect or abuse. This requirement to report includes if the adult has reason to believe the child may be at risk of abuse. Reason to believe simply means that, based on what the adult has seen, heard or been told or other information he/she received, the adult believes the child may be at risk. Usually, there are two ways that abuse is revealed: by *disclosure* by the victim or friend of the victim and/or by *indicators* such as bruising or changes in child's behaviour.

If a staff member has reason to believe, he/she must not attempt to conduct an investigation to verify if abuse has occurred – that is the job of the trained social worker at the Ministry of Children and Family Services. The anonymity of the identity of the adult reporting is protected by law.

If a staff member is in doubt of whether to report or not, he/she may contact the **Appointed School Official (ASO)** or **Alternate Appointed School Official (AASO)** for advice, however, the responsibility to report still lies with the first adult to have reason to believe that a child is at risk.

3. When a Child Discloses Abuse or Neglect

Children who may have been abused or neglected are particularly vulnerable. It is critical that, in responding to their needs, staff members take every caution to avoid upsetting or traumatizing them any further.

If the child is in immediate danger, the police should be immediately called (911).

When talking to the child, the staff member should be sensitive to the child's situation, supporting him/her while gathering basic information to report to the intake social worker at MCFD.

4. Suggested strategies when dealing with a possible victim of child abuse:

Stay calm and listen: An abused or neglected child needs to know that you are calm and available to help.

Go slowly: It is normal to feel inadequate or unsure about what to do or say when a child tells you about abuse or neglect. Do not let this discomfort rush you into asking questions. Gentle questions, such as "Can you tell me more about what happened?" are appropriate.

Be supportive: Reassure the child that he or she has not done anything wrong. It is helpful to let children know that they are not in trouble with you, the child welfare worker or the police. You should mention that you are glad that they have chosen to tell you about this; you are sorry that they have been hurt or that this has happened to them; you will do everything you can to make sure they get the help they need and you know others who can be trusted to help solve this problem.

Get only the essential facts: Once you have enough information and reason to believe that abuse or neglect has occurred, stop gathering facts and be supportive.

Tell the child what will happen next: Children who disclose their abuse feel anxious and vulnerable about what people think of them and what will happen next. Tell them only what you know (e.g., that they are not in trouble, and that you will help) and avoid making promises. Discuss with the child what you think will happen next and who will be involved.

Make notes: As soon as possible after the child's disclosure, write down as much as you can of what the child told you. This will help ensure accuracy when reporting to the appropriate authority.

5. Failure to report and making false reports

Failing to promptly report suspected abuse or neglect to a child welfare worker is a serious offence. So is knowingly making a false report. Both offences carry a maximum penalty of a \$10,000 fine, six months in jail, or both.

No action for damages may be brought against you for reporting information under the Child, Family and Community Service Act unless you knowingly reported false information or the report was not made in good faith.

6. What to Report to the Child Welfare Worker

When making a report to a child welfare worker, it is helpful to include your name, your phone number and your relationship to the child. But you can make an anonymous call if you prefer.

The child welfare worker will want to know:

- the child's name and location

- whether there are any immediate concerns about the child's safety
- why you believe the child is at risk
- any statements or disclosures made by the child
- the child's age and vulnerability
- information about the family, parents and alleged offender
- information about siblings or other children who may be at risk
- whether you know of any previous incidents involving, or concerns about the child
- information about other persons or agencies closely involved with the child and/or family
- information about other persons who may be witnesses or may have information about the child
- any other relevant information concerning the child and/or family, such as language or culture.

You do not need all this information to make a report. Just tell the child welfare worker what you do know. Time is of the essence in responding, so if you have concerns, do not delay.

7. Reporting Staff at Maple Hill School

If you have reason to believe (not necessarily proof) that another staff member is engaging in a relationship that may constitute abuse or neglect of a child, treat them as you would any other person. Take notes of the issues and other potential evidence without putting yourself at risk. Do not under any circumstances confront the staff member before or after reporting. You must also contact the ASO or AASO so that appropriate action can be taken to prevent further harm to the student(s).

Be assured that the school will never pursue retaliation against an employee for reporting a potential case even if the report proved to be unfounded. The ASO will also do everything reasonably possible to prevent retaliation by the accused against the accuser while on school grounds or around it.

The power differential inherent in student-adult relationships makes them especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Legally, no sexual relationship can occur with a teacher and a student that is under the age of 19 and doing so is a breach of trust and will lead to charges in a court of law. In addition to this Maple Hill has a rule that no staff member may have an amorous relationship, sexual or otherwise, with any student (regardless of the student's age) while they are attending Maple Hill School.