

Appendix A - Child Abuse: A Guide For Scouters



Volunteer youth leaders are a very important part of our society. Because of their effort and enthusiasm there is a wide range of valuable programs available in our communities.

We join organizations like Scouts Canada for many reasons, but primarily to assist with the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual development of our society's most precious resource - our children.

As we work hard to come up with interesting, informative and challenging programs, an essential aspect is safety, - protecting the child from physical, mental, emotional and spiritual harm.

Sometimes we learn of a danger that may pose a safety risk to the children under our care. In these cases, responsible volunteers have always done their part to assist in removing and preventing dangerous situations to keep children safe. Child abuse is a safety issue, just as much as a busy road, unsafe play area, or unfenced swimming pool. As volunteers it is essential that we recognize this danger so that we can do our best to prevent it.

The purpose of child abuse awareness is to give Scouters a better understanding of, and comfort level with, child abuse so that they can protect children by:

- responding appropriately to the needs of a child who may be suffering from or at risk of abuse,
- reporting suspected child abuse to the proper authorities, and
- conducting themselves in a manner which allows them to show warmth to children while protecting their own and the child's integrity.

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

Child abuse is any form of physical harm, emotional deprivation, neglect or sexual maltreatment, which can result in injury or psychological damage to a child.

WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT CHILD ABUSE?

Caring and responsible leaders often establish close relationships, based on mutual trust and respect, with the children in their care. Where this type of relationship exists, the leader may become aware of some physical or other danger, which may be posing a threat to a child. As discussed above, the leader has a clear responsibility to do what he or she can to protect the child. Here are some suggestions for dealing with child abuse.

REPORTING ABUSE TO CHILD PROTECTION AGENCIES AND/OR POLICE

While child protection legislation varies by province, every person who believes on reasonable grounds that a child is or may be in need of protection must report promptly the belief and the information upon which it is based to a child protection agency or the police. Every community has one or more agencies whose mandate it is to protect children. They work with police, health-care workers, teachers and families to investigate and resolve child abuse issues. If the abuse may involve scouting it should also be reported to the nearest appropriate scouting official (commissioner or scout executive) who will ensure that Scouting procedures are followed. To protect privacy and the integrity of any investigation, do not report or discuss an abuse situation with anyone else.





HOW SHOULD A VOLUNTEER TALK WITH A CHILD WHO DISCLOSES?

Even if you have read widely about child abuse or attended various kinds of training seminars, it may be a shock if a child comes forward to talk about abuse. Your duty is not to investigate the matter but rather to report. It is, therefore, most helpful to:

1. Believe in the child
2. Listen openly and calmly
3. Reassure the child
4. Write down the facts
5. Report immediately to the child protection authorities and Scouts Canada.

1. Believe In The Child

There have always been cynics who say that children have terrific imaginations and that stories about sexual abuse are just part of their fantasy worlds. For most children, sexual abuse is not a fantasy. Children who disclose sexual abuse often do not attach the same moral values of right and wrong to the sexual event that an adult would. They may be describing something that is confusing to them, such as the promise they had to make to the adult “never to tell.” A young child may be preoccupied with the concern that s/he has been awakened in the night to do something that is hard to understand and is a “nuisance” to a drowsy child. Often children are more upset by a threat or the psychological manipulation that has accompanied the sexual abuse than the physical nature of the violation itself.

Children who speak about sexual, physical or emotional abuse struggle with the desire to protect their abuser. They sense that by telling they may be responsible for bringing even more discomfort to their lives. Victims of all ages often believe that they are responsible for the abuse they receive and they hope the violence will just go away. They may delay the disclosure and endure the abuse a long time before telling.

As a volunteer, keep in mind your belief that this child has come to you with something to tell because of powerful, hurting feelings. Understand that your relationship has allowed that child to open up to you. Trust that the child is speaking from a great need and open your heart to believe what you hear.

2. Listen Openly and Calmly

As the child speaks, you may be overwhelmed with your own feelings of anger, of pain, and perhaps also of fear. At the time of disclosure, put your own feelings aside (you will have time to explore them later). Be emotionally available to the child, and listen. Give your full attention to the child and nod understandingly as the story pours out. Do not be judgmental or disparaging of the child, the family, or the abuser.

To ensure that others do not overhear the child’s message, remove yourselves the necessary distance from the others but stay in view of the group.

3. Reassure The Child

Let the child know that you believe in him or her. You must be honest with the child by saying that you cannot keep this a secret, that there are other people who need to know. Explain that you are going to do your best to help. You cannot promise that the offender will be punished or sent away, nor can you promise that you can find another home for the child. All that you can promise is that you will do your best to get the right kind of help. You know where to go for more information and how to bring the best helpers into the situation. You may also be able to promise that the child can count on your friendship and support, whatever happens.

Try not to ask questions. Do not suggest interpretations or solutions that might cause problems

in a court case. You do need to establish the immediacy of the danger to the child; you must not allow the child to return to a situation where his or her life would be in immediate danger. It would be best if you remained close by to provide comfort.

What if the Child Asks You Not to Tell Anyone Else?

Being an emphatic listener does not mean that you can abandon your own beliefs or that you can ignore your responsibilities. Children who tell you about abuse sometimes ask that you keep the information a secret. The first thing to do is to explore why the child wants to keep the information a secret. You may unlock fears about others in the family being hurt or even feelings of guilt. You need to let the child know that you understand why you are being asked not to tell. However, you must be honest with the child about your duties and responsibilities. You can be reassuring in offering to stay near by or in telling the child that the people who will pick up the investigation know about children and want to help. But you must let the child know what to expect from you and what should happen next. Don't make promises you cannot keep.

Remember, as an empathic listener you lend yourself for awhile to another to try to see the world as the other sees it, but the you must always return to your own frame of reference. It is when you return to your own perspective that you are able to turn the new understanding you have gained into helpful action. It is expected that, as a youth leader, you have the knowledge and strength to assure that an abused child gets needed help.

4. Write Down The Facts

Record the child's name, address and telephone number. The date and place of your conversation with the child are important. Details of what the child has reported should be recorded using the actual words that the child used. Do not try to interpret what the child said in your own words; if you do, make it clear that you are reporting as closely as possible or that you are inferring from what the child said. If the child has named someone, write down the identify of that person as the child has described him. Include information about how to locate that person. Write down as much as you know.

It is important to understand that children often "recant" or deny having been sexually abused even after they have disclosed to an adult and steps have been taken to bring the case to court. They do so because they feel guilty about causing trouble for the offender or because they have been threatened by the offender and are afraid of the consequences of telling. Sometimes children recant to protect others in the family. This kind of reversal can lead to anger and confusion on the part of those who have tried to help the child. As a volunteer who has to make considerable effort to help a child abuse victim, you should explore your own feelings and convictions about the sexual abuse.

Understand that you cannot control the events which will occur. Nevertheless, your recording of the information at the time when the child discloses can be a very important step in the investigation process; it must be done well.

5. Report Immediately To The Child Abuse Authorities

The volunteer, on becoming aware of a situation where a child is a victim, should immediately contact the child protection services or the local police and Scouts Canada.

Scouts Canada's officials understand both the requirements of Scouts Canada and those of the child protection agencies. They will support volunteers in the organization who receive disclosures, provide reliable information to volunteers about making reports to child protection services and assist volunteers, where necessary, in making the contact with the child protection officials.





APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR, PUTTING THE CHILD FIRST

It is important to show caring and to encourage children. There are sensible ways for volunteers to continue to show warmth to children while still protecting their own integrity.

1. Make a point of showing affection to all your children in open places where others can see and share in the warmth. If you are comfortable with others watching what you are doing with children, you are probably OK.
2. Touch children in safe places on their bodies, avoiding private places. The back, the head and the shoulders are acceptable; the buttocks, the breasts, the thighs and the groin are not acceptable.
3. If a child is hurting or feeling ill and needs to be examined, ensure that another person of the same sex as the child is present in the room while you are carrying out the examination. If possible, leave an examination of private places to health professionals. Don't force the child to remove clothing for an examination.
4. If a child is sad and needs to be comforted, show affection by placing your arm around a shoulder and giving a gentle hug or a good squeeze from the side.
5. If the child needs to have a private conversation with you, remove yourselves the necessary distance from the others but stay in view of the group.
6. Follow the policies and procedures of Scouts Canada concerning camping.
7. Don't be alone and naked with children anywhere. If you must change at public swimming pools, use the usual kind of discretion that is appropriate for such places.
8. Be cautious about any conversations with children that involve sex. It is understood that children ask honest questions about sexuality and teenagers might seek advice. Listening with respect for the child is appropriate; it is also appropriate to distribute and discuss Scouts Canada approved information which is part of a general educational program about sexuality. Joking around with youth in ways that encourage promiscuity or the acceptance of sexually explicit material is dangerous for you and the children.
9. In all things, respect the integrity of the child. Use your common sense and good judgement to guide you in protecting the personal space of the children in your care.



Scouts Canada Resources

- How to Protect Your Children From Child Abuse: A Parent's Guide (*refer to Scouts Canada's website, www.scouts.ca and Youth Handbooks*)
- Duty of Care: (*refer to Scouts Canada's website, www.scouts.ca and Section Leader Handbooks*)

