

Duty to Report

Guidelines for Schools

We all have a role to play in supporting children, youth and families in our community. We are proud to work with our partners in schools to make a difference in Peel.

School employees have daily contact with children and families. Your observations and rapport with children can provide the first clues about possible concerns for a child's safety and well-being. School board professionals in Peel region have a duty to report such concerns to the Peel Children's Aid Society.

Your duty to report

While everyone has a duty to report child protection concerns, professionals who work with children have a heightened responsibility. *The Child and Family Services Act* protects you from liability when you make a report based on reasonable grounds and when you do so in good faith and without malice. Peel CAS will decide if your concerns warrant an investigation.

It is expected, as a professional, that you will give your name to the Peel CAS worker when you call. This helps establish your credibility but also provides proof that you have upheld your duty to report. You can ask that you not be identified by name if the family is contacted. Instead, Peel CAS can identify "the school" as the source of the report. Of course, parents may deduce who at the school made the call. There is always the possibility that a case will eventually go to court, where the caller's name cannot be protected.

Sometimes parents contact the school after they hear from Peel CAS because they are upset about a report made. Always refer these parents to the principal. You may need to tell the parent about your duty to report and reinforce that it is Peel CAS that has made the decision to contact a family, not the school.

Students' disclosures

When a student discloses mistreatment, he or she may choose a school board employee to trust with the information. If a student comes to you with concerning information, it is important to listen and let the student tell his or her story. Be attentive to the student's description of the circumstances, the student's body language, and his or her current fears.

You can support the student by helping them clarify comments or expand on a story. You might choose to use non-leading statements like:

- "How did that happen?"
- "Tell me about what happened next"
- "Then what happened?"
- "Can you tell me all about that (day/hurt/mark/time/bad thing)?"

Allow the student to use his or her own language and use this language when talking with the student. Support the student for disclosing and let the student know that he or she did the right thing. Never promise to keep a student's information a secret. If asked to keep a secret, you might say "There are some things that should not be kept secret." Try not to make any promises about what will happen next. Instead, reassure the student that she or he did the right thing by telling you, and make it clear that the student is welcome to return to you with any other concerns. When you make a report, you can ask the worker to advise you how to talk to the child about what might happen next.

A student may approach you to report concerns about a friend's well-being. Ask the student to tell you more about what he/she knows and praise the student who has come to you. If the other student does not speak to you directly, you should make the report if you know the identity of the student who is the subject of the concern.

Making your report

Everyone has beliefs and biases and they operate consciously and unconsciously, influencing how people perceive themselves, others and society. When considering whether there is reasonable grounds to suspect a child is at risk, it's important to engage in self-reflection and discern whether concerns are related to any bias held about racialized children, their families or communities they belong to.

If you believe that there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a child needs protection, you should call Peel CAS as soon as possible. You can have the support of your administrator, but you should place the call yourself and speak personally to an Advice and Assessment worker.

When you call to make a report, you will be asked for the following information:

- The names of all parents/guardians (OSR/SIS)
- Address and phone numbers
- The cultural background and language spoken in the home
- Name/birthdate of the student and any siblings, if known
- Any custody/access arrangements
- In addition, you may be asked to comment on the physical well-being of the student, and their learning, developmental and social needs.
- The presence of injuries or pain. If the student reports an injury that you cannot see or that the student will not reveal, you are still required to make the report. Do not remove clothing on a child to view an injury that cannot be publicly viewed.
- Document the details of the disclosure as soon as possible. Complete the forms available from your school regarding reporting a child protection concern immediately after you make the telephone report.

Reporting a child protection concern is an ongoing responsibility. If you know a report has already been made about a child, but you have new or additional information, you must make a further report to CAS.

Peel CAS response

After your call, Peel CAS will determine whether the agency can provide service. About half the reports received by Peel CAS are not investigated, though the information they contain is vital to maintaining an updated record of the student's well-being and safety. When an investigation does occur, in most cases a Peel CAS worker will contact the family directly within seven days of the report. Confidentiality policies do not allow the agency to tell you whether there will be an investigation.

We believe that children belong with their families, and 99 per cent of our work is done with families and children in their own homes. All of Peel CAS's work is guided by our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-oppressive practice. We work collaboratively with families and community partners to create strong and safe environments for children and youth to thrive, while respecting the family's culture, religion and social identity.

Peel CAS also offers early help services, to get support to a family in need before the situation becomes a crisis. Our focus is to identify and respond to the unique needs of families early on while connecting them quickly to appropriate and effective community-based supports. It is our goal that early help and prevention will work to increase positive outcomes for the families we serve while reducing the number of children and youth that come into our care.

To learn more about the services Peel CAS provides, please visit www.peelcas.org.

If you require the information contained in this brochure in a different format, please contact 905-363-6131 or mail@peelcas.org.