

# Duty to report - Schools

We all play a vital role in the larger community effort to prevent child abuse. The process of intervention often starts with a call. Through the reporting process, School Board employees, together with workers from Peel Children's Aid, can begin to address safety concerns for students and their families.

*Together with our partners in Peel, we can make a difference. This brochure was developed in partnership with the Peel District School Board and Peel CAS.*



Supporting. Protecting. Caring. Together.  
Soutien. Protection. Bienveillance. Ensemble.

School Board employees have regular contact with children and families. Your observations and rapport with children can provide the first information about possible mistreatment. The duty to formally report information about a student's possible maltreatment to Children's Aid may raise a number of concerns.

## Your duty to report

As a School Board professional, you have a heightened responsibility to report child protection concerns than you would as a private citizen. *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. Remember, it is Peel Children's Aid that decides whether or not 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. Rather, Peel CAS can identify "the school" as the source of the report. Of course, in some instances parents can deduce who at the school made the call. There is always the possibility that a case will eventually go to court. Then the caller's name cannot be protected.

## 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. In particular, try to listen for the following information:

- Who hurt the student?
- Was this person a caregiver?
- Is there a mark, pain, or injury?
- Was any object used?
- When did it happen/when was the last time it happened?

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 more 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 secrets 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 has permission to return to you with any other concerns.

A student may approach you to report a friend's maltreatment. 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**

When you have reasonable grounds to suspect that a student is in need of protection, you, with the assistance of your administrator, must place a call to Peel Children's Aid immediately. Remember, your Duty to Report includes reporting your concerns and also reporting the information on which your concerns are based. Always speak personally to a worker. Do not leave your concerns on voicemail. 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 his or her learning, developmental and social needs.
- The presence of injuries or pain is a critical piece of information. There are circumstances under which school employees may check a student for marks or signs of trauma. Check with your principal before examining a student. 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.
- 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.

## **Peel Children's Aid's response**

Following a report, Peel CAS will make a decision about whether the agency can provide service. If there is an immediate risk to the student or an injury is present, the CAS worker will contact the school. A worker will either come to the school to see the student or inform you of next steps.

In some instances the CAS worker will contact the school to request to see a student if there is a moderate risk to the student.

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 occurs, 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. When you make a report, ask the worker to advise you how to talk to the child about what might happen next. When the situation is critical or an injury is present, a worker may visit the school to interview the student and any siblings. The school may be requested to keep the student after dismissal time for this interview.

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 your duty to report and reinforce the fact that it is Peel Children's Aid that has made the decision to contact a family, not the school.

