



Understanding Sexual Abuse and Managing Disclosures

In-Service Training

Course Description

Some children and youth in care may have experienced a range of sexual abuse and/or exposure to sexual behaviors of others (which is a form of sexual abuse). Sexual abuse can be a complex issue. In this module, caregivers will be provided information about sexual abuse and the impact it has on children, youth and families. In addition, participants will learn how to respond to and report disclosures of sexual abuse in a way that supports the child or youth, while also protecting the integrity of any potential evidence and investigation. Lastly, the important role as a caregiver in helping children and youth understand and heal from their experience of sexual abuse is explored.

Learning Objectives

At the end of this three-hour module you will be able to:

- define childhood sexual abuse;
- describe the impacts that sexual abuse has on children and their families;
- recognize and address signs and behaviours which may be associated with experiences of sexual abuse;
- describe the key steps to take when a child or youth discloses their experiences of sexual abuse;
- identify resources to assist the child or youth through legal and therapeutic processes;
- understand the need and plan for self-care.

Key Messages

- Childhood sexual abuse is a complex issue that impacts individuals, families and communities.
- Trauma-informed caregiving means being aware of the events and experiences of the child and responding to the effects on the child's development and well-being.
- Caregivers have a legal obligation to report any suspicion of abuse to the child's caseworker and law enforcement.
- The effects of sexual abuse may include physical, social, behavioural and psychological impacts.
- Caregivers should be aware of signs that may indicate sexual abuse and communicate concerns to the child's caseworker immediately.
- Children and youth who disclose sexual abuse need their caregivers to respond calmly while validating and reassuring them.
- Caregivers supporting a child who has disclosed sexual abuse must maintain ongoing communication with the child's caseworker and respond to the expectations of legal, medical and therapeutic supports.
- Children and youth who have experienced sexual abuse require ongoing emotional and behavioural support.
- Problematic sexual behaviours must be addressed in a way that supports and does not label or stigmatize the child or youth.
- Children need to be provided with age-appropriate education regarding their bodies and their rights.

Guided Discussion Questions

1. What are you going to be doing to help a child/youth feel safe enough to tell you about their experiences of trauma (including sexual abuse)?
2. What would you do if a child/youth disclosed to you that they had experienced sexual abuse?

Resources

Please note - caregivers are provided an electronic version of the Participant Materials which includes other useful resources and appendices relevant to the course content.

Resource One: Child Advocacy Centres <https://www.albertacacs.ca/>

Resource Two: National Child's Alliance [Homepage - National Children's Alliance](#)

Resource Three: Establishing Family Guidelines for Safety and Privacy. (Adapted From: Parenting a Child or Youth Who Has Been Sexually Abused: A Guide for Foster and Adoptive Parents — https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/f_abused.pdf)