

# Disclosures (Part 1): What Constitutes a Student Disclosure

In the province of Saskatchewan, the Child Abuse Protocol 2019 (CAP) confirms every person's *duty to report* suspicions of child abuse, defines what constitutes child abuse and neglect under the law, and describes the processes by which people must respond. Specifically for educators, the CAP identifies the important roles educators play in students' lives, and confirms that it is educators' responsibility to report all suspected and disclosed cases of child abuse immediately and directly to child protection services and/or the police. It also notes that the duty to report cannot be delegated to another individual. It is important for educators to continuously refamiliarize themselves with both the CAP and the Ministry of Education's policy:

<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/education-and-child-care-facility-administration/services-for-school-administrators/student-wellness-and-wellbeing/child-abuse-prevention-education-and-response>

Ministry of Social Services  
Child Protection Lines:  
Prince Albert (North) 1-866-719-6164  
Saskatoon (Centre) 1-800-274-8297  
Regina (South) 1-844-787-3760

## What is a Disclosure?

Disclosure is when a student reveals previously unknown information to a teacher/educator. For young people who have been exposed to ACEs, a part of their healing process with a trusted adult may be a disclosure of those adverse experiences. These disclosures may reveal circumstances that have negatively impacted the student's physical, emotional, spiritual, or psychological health.

## Common ACE Disclosures:

The following are some descriptors of common adverse experiences students may disclose to teachers and/or school staff:

- Physical abuse – any action, including discipline, causing injury to the child's body.
- Sexual abuse – any action involving a child in sexual exploitation or sexual activity including internet child exploitation.
- Emotional maltreatment – refers to emotional abuse and emotional neglect that may impact the child's growth and development.
- Neglect – failing to provide a child with enough basic necessities, including supervision.
- Domestic violence – exposing a child to a pattern of abusive behaviour or threats of abusive behaviour by one caregiver against another, against a sibling, or against themselves.

## Types of Disclosures

Disclosing personal information to trusted adults is difficult for students, due to many of the societal barriers they face and the fear they might have of the repercussions. Because of this, there are two ways through which students may disclose: direct and indirect.

**Direct disclosure:** In a direct disclosure students are comfortable in approaching the adult they trust and initiate the conversation in which they make a disclosure.

**Indirect disclosure:** Indirect disclosures may be interpreted as accidental, but may just be masked as an accident in order to gauge the reaction of the trusted adult. In educational settings, indirect disclosure can be seen through a student's behaviours, art, writing, and appearance, among others. Indirect disclosure can also be communicated verbally as issues not directly attached to the student such as stories of a "friend" experiencing problems and needing help.

## Recognizing Indirect Intent to Disclose

### Indirect Behaviours

- Communicating they are afraid to go home (sticking around after school)
- Flinching when approached by a teacher (physically or verbally)

### Art

- Drawing or representing in other artistic ways abuse or maltreatment on one's desk, assignments, or other related material that is interacted with by both teacher and student

### Appearance

- Intentional displaying/showing of self-harm marks (may hide from peers but not from a teacher)
- Making no efforts to attempt hiding visual markers of physical aggression (ex: blackeye, bruises, bleeding)
- Inadequate clothing, shelter, supervision, or medical care to the extent that the child has already suffered or is likely to suffer serious illness or injury.

### Writing

- Students may disclose through a variety of assignments by using themselves or just a general story of events happening to them past or present or that have been witnessed
- Students may write concerning information in their immediate surroundings such as their agenda, desk, and notebooks

## Why is This Important?

Initiating a disclosure is difficult for students, particularly those who don't feel they have many trusted adults in their lives with whom they can speak. It has been shown that if students are not able to make contact with mental health services, or other community institutions/interventions, schools are the most common place where they seek and access support.

Being able to recognize the direct and indirect intents to disclose experiences of maltreatment and neglect (from others, or of oneself) from students, better equips teachers to recognize those who have something to share. This enables educational institutions to continue providing children/youth with places of support for social-emotional growth and justice, while adhering to their professional responsibilities to report suspected or disclosed abuse.

