

Child Maltreatment: How to Respond to Disclosures

While the Prairie provinces have seen a decrease in child abuse reporting in the midst of COVID-19, reports of child maltreatment are expected to increase when children return to school in September

What you can do and what you should know:

- Be vigilant in assessing manipulation tactics (trauma-bonding; virus-related threats).
- Increase communication with vulnerable populations (e.g., rural and remote women and girls, and LGBTQ2S+ individuals).
- Continue to improve virtual services.
- Be aware of the indicators of child maltreatment.
- If you suspect child abuse you have a legal obligation to report it.
- Recognize signs of maltreatment that are specific to COVID-19. A child may be very avoidant of any abuse-related questions if they are being threatened that they will contract COVID-19 if they disclose the abuse.
- Know that a child may appear to be triggered or retraumatized while wearing a mask if they have experienced or are currently experiencing sexual abuse that involved their mouths covered or face pushed into a pillow.

If a child discloses maltreatment:

- do not ask leading questions or push for too many details
- remain calm and do not react with shock, anger, or sadness
- vocalize that you believe them, it is not their fault, and they did the right thing by telling a trusted adult
- report all disclosures to the police/RCMP or Child and Family Services.



Appropriate Responses:

- I believe you; it's not your fault
- It's good you told me; you are safe
- You can trust me. If you tell me someone is hurting you, I cannot keep it a secret. But I promise not to tell anyone other than the people who need to know.
- You mentioned something happened at home.
- Would you like to tell me more?
- I will do everything I can to help you.