

# Ministry of Education Policy Statement

## Child Abuse Prevention Education and Response

**Number:** To be assigned

**Authority:** This policy statement was developed pursuant to the following statutes, resource and international documents:

### Statutes

- *The Saskatchewan Education Act, 1995* – Pursuant to Section 3(1), the Minister of Education is responsible for all matters relating to elementary and secondary education. This responsibility endows the minister with the authority to issue this policy statement.
- *The Child and Family Services Act – Section 12(1)* directs that every person who has reasonable grounds to believe that a child is in need of protection shall report the information to an officer or peace officer.
- *The Emergency Protection for Victims of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Act – Section 4(1)* requires every person who has reasonable grounds to believe that a child has been or is likely to be subjected to sexual abuse to report the information to a child protection officer or peace officer.

### Resource Documents

- *2017 Saskatchewan Child Abuse Protocol* – According to the *2017 Saskatchewan Child Abuse Protocol*, child abuse refers to physical, sexual abuse and exploitation, physical neglect, emotional maltreatment, exposure to domestic violence or severe domestic disharmony, and failure to provide essential medical treatment.
- *Model Administrative Procedure for Boards of Education on the Reporting of Child Abuse* – This document contains information on the collaborative roles of schools and police for the reporting of child abuse.
- *Investigation of Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect Fact Sheet for School and School Division Personnel.*

### Saskatchewan Child and Youth First Principles

We believe that all children and youth in Saskatchewan are entitled to:

- Those rights defined by the United Nations [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).
- Participate and be heard before any decision affecting them is made.
- Have their 'best interests' given paramount consideration in any action or decision involving them.
- An equal standard of care, protection and services.
- The highest standard of health and education possible in order to reach their fullest potential.
- Safety and protection from all forms of physical, emotional and sexual harm, while in the care of parents, governments, legal guardians or any person.
- Be treated as the primary client, and at the centre, of all child serving systems.
- Have consideration given to the importance of their unique life history and spiritual traditions and practices, in accordance with their stated views and preferences.

## International Documents

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
  - Article 9 states, “Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child. Such determination may be necessary in a particular case such as one involving abuse or neglect of the child by the parents, or one where the parents are living separately and a decision must be made as to the child's place of residence.”
  - Article 19 states, “Children have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, physically or mentally. Governments should ensure that children are properly cared for and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents, or anyone else who looks after them.”
  - Article 34 states, “Governments should protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse.”
  - Article 39 states, “Children who have been neglected, abused or exploited should receive special help to physically and psychologically recover and reintegrate into society. Particular attention should be paid to restoring the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.”

In accordance with the above statutes and resource and international documents, the Government of Saskatchewan promotes a comprehensive approach to child abuse prevention and response that encompasses the following elements: child abuse education to students and school personnel; the identification and reporting of child abuse as legally prescribed; and, linking victims and their families/guardians to healing supports.

### Intent:

Child abuse takes many forms, as described in the 2017 Saskatchewan Child Abuse Protocol. Child abuse often involves adults exploiting their power over children rather than respecting the needs and rights of children<sup>1</sup>. As a form of child abuse, sexual abuse is vastly under-reported across Canada and the majority of reported sexual assault victims are children and youth<sup>2</sup>. Among the provinces, Saskatchewan has the highest rate of police reported child sexual abuse<sup>3</sup> and the highest rates of family violence against children and youth<sup>4</sup>. According to a Canadian study, the two most frequent categories of substantiated maltreatment are intimate partner violence and neglect<sup>5</sup>.

The Ministry of Education recognizes the legal obligations established in section 12 of *The Child and Family Services Act* and under *The Emergency Protection for Victims of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Act*. The safety of children and youth is foundational to delivering education services that place students first; therefore, school divisions are supported in their efforts to work with staff, students and parents/guardians to implement a comprehensive approach to protect children and support child abuse victims, their families, and the school staff, including teachers and administrators who report child abuse.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://www.childmatters.org.nz/58/learn-about-child-abuse/myths-and-realities>

<sup>2</sup> Perrault, S. 2015. Statistics Canada. Catalogue no. 85-002-X

<sup>3</sup> Allen, M. 2016. Statistics Canada. Catalogue no. 85-002-X

<sup>4</sup> Ibrahim, D. and Karam, M. 2016. Statistics Canada. Catalogue no. 85-002-X

<sup>5</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada. Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2008: Major Findings. Ottawa, 2010.

School divisions are encouraged to deliver age appropriate child abuse education to all students, beginning in the early years. Child abuse education should instruct a child to report the abuse to an adult.

School divisions have an important role to utilize qualified professionals to provide professional development opportunities to their staff to identify the signs of child abuse and report it. Signs of child abuse can be difficult to detect; therefore, the Ministry of Education supports school divisions in their efforts to train staff to identify signs of child abuse and report it according to section 12 of *The Child and Family Services Act* and subsection 4(1) of *The Emergency Protection for Victims of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Act*.

Families and guardians of victims may not know how to access programs and supports for healing. The Ministry of Education recognizes that school staff are often members of the support network for victims and their families/guardians. The Ministry of Education encourages school divisions to work with qualified human service agencies to establish and maintain a list of key contacts for local communities to assist in linking victims and their families/guardians to healing services and programs in the community.

Teachers, administrators and school division staff who report child abuse may experience secondary traumatic stress. School divisions are encouraged to support staff to access healing supports and services from qualified human services professionals if required.

#### **Policy Statement:**

- School divisions are encouraged to create a policy/administrative procedure to mandate the teaching of child abuse prevention education for all students in Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12, to support and extend the required outcomes of grades 1 to 9 health education.
- School divisions are encouraged to provide professional development for staff by qualified professionals to identify the signs of child abuse.
- School divisions are encouraged to work with qualified human services agencies to develop and maintain a list of community contacts for healing resources and supports for victims, their families, and school division staff experiencing secondary traumatic stress.
- School divisions are encouraged to assist staff in understanding their legal duty to report child abuse. All people in the province, including educators, school administrators and other school personnel, have a legal responsibility to report child abuse to the police or child protection workers. The role of the employee is not to investigate, but rather to report. Procedures for doing so are outlined in the 2017 Saskatchewan Child Abuse Protocol, section 12 of *The Child and Family Services Act* and subsection 4(1) of *The Emergency Protection for Victims of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Act*. Even if a staff member believes that someone else has reported the situation, the staff member nevertheless has a duty to report. The duty to report is a personal “Duty to Report” and it cannot be delegated to another individual.
- School divisions are encouraged to promote the practice of self-care to their staff.

#### **Resources to Support a Comprehensive Approach to Child Abuse Education**

A compilation of resources to support the implementation of a comprehensive approach for protecting children and youth from child abuse can be found at <https://www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca>.