3.10 ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF CHILDREN

Overview
Employees, volunteers and others who are involved in the lives of children that we serve are in positions of trust and authority. Children are often unable to protect themselves or look after all of their own needs. These circumstances make them vulnerable to abuse and neglect.

This policy is intended to guide employees and volunteers in: (1) Dealing with suspicions of abuse, or; (2) Reports of abuse or neglect, and; (3) Handling situations where abuse or neglect has occurred or might occur.

When the alleged abuse has occurred at a child care centre worksite (or in the community during operational hours) under the jurisdiction of Community Care Licensing, the reporting procedure is outlined through the Community Care Facility Act.

When the alleged abuse has occurred in a program (e.g. Respite Services) that is funded by the Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD), BACI will follow all reporting guidelines outlined by MCFD.

When the alleged abuse of the child has occurred in the child's home, the report process is mandated by MCFD.

Definitions and Categories of Abuse
(The B.C. Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect)

"The following are working definitions to be used to determine whether child abuse or neglect has occurred.

Abuse means physical, sexual or emotional abuse.

Physical Abuse is a physical assault or action by a person that results in, or is likely to result in, physical harm to a child. It includes the use of unreasonable force to discipline a child or prevent a child from harming themself or others. The injuries sustained by the child may vary in severity and range from minor bruising, burns, welts or bite marks to major fractures of the bones or skull to, in the most extreme cases, death.

Sexual Abuse is when a child is used (or likely to be used) for the sexual gratification of another person. It includes:

- Touching or invitation to touch for sexual purposes.
- Intercourse (vaginal, oral or anal).
- Menacing or threatening sexual acts, obscene gestures, obscene communications or stalking.
- Sexual references to the child's body/behavior by words/gestures.

- Requests that the child expose their body for sexual purposes.
- Deliberate exposure of the child to sexual activity or material.
- Sexual aspects of organized or ritual abuse.

Sexual Exploitation is a form of sexual abuse that occurs when a child engages in a sexual activity, usually through manipulation or coercion, in exchange for money, drugs, food, shelter or other considerations. Sexual activity includes:

- Performing sexual acts.
- Sexually explicit activity for entertainment.
- Involvement with escort or massage parlour services.
- Appearing in pornographic images.

Emotional Abuse is the most difficult type of abuse to define and recognize. It may range from ignoring to habitually humiliating the child, to withholding life-sustaining nurturing. Generally, it involves acts or omissions by those in contact with a child that are likely to have serious, negative emotional impacts. Emotional abuse may occur separately from, or along with, other forms of abuse and neglect. It includes the emotional harm caused by witnessing domestic violence. Emotional abuse can include a pattern of:

- Scapegoating
- Rejection
- Verbal attacks on the child
- Threats
- Insults
- Humiliation
- Discrimination

Emotional Harm is when emotional abuse is chronic and persistent, it can result in emotional harm to the child. Under the Child, Family, and Community Service Act, a child is defined as emotionally harmed if they demonstrate severe:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Withdrawal
- Self-destructive or aggressive behavior.

Neglect is the failure to provide for a child's basic needs. It involves an act of omission by the parent or guardian, resulting in (or likely to result in) harm to the child. Neglect may include failure to provide food, shelter, basic health care, supervision, or protection from risks, to the extent that the child's physical health, development or safety is, or is likely to be, harmed."

Policy
BACI will support children with safe, positive and nurturing conduct at all times. This support will be free of abuse, neglect and/or harm to the children. BACI is committed to the safe care of children and will not tolerate any form of abuse, neglect and/or harm. If a child is at risk or the victim of abuse, harm and/or neglect, BACI will take every measure to ensure the child is safe and no longer at risk.

BACI's Responsibilities

- Services will be provided in an environment that is safe and free from any abuse or neglect.
- Parents will be invited and encouraged to visit program sites at any time and need not ask permission to do so.
- Allegations of abuse will be reported to family members, except where family members are involved.
- Allegations of abuse will be reported to appropriate authorities.
- Allegations of abuse will be investigated. To ensure that individuals are supported without fear of abuse, every effort will be made to ensure that all reported incidents are investigated and dealt with quickly. We will try to maintain confidentiality but it cannot be guaranteed.
- Any necessary actions will be taken to ensure that individuals feel safe and secure and that abuse does not re-occur. Any employee who, upon investigation, has abused or neglected an individual that we serve will face disciplinary measures up to, and including, immediate dismissal.

Employees' and Volunteers' Responsibilities
If an employee or volunteer witnesses the abuse or neglect of a person served, they must immediately intervene – if safe to do so – to ensure the individual's safety and then report the incident to the supervisor immediately afterwards.

Employees or volunteers who suspect that abuse or neglect has occurred have the responsibility to report their suspicions immediately to their supervisor.
If the accused is a supervisor, the suspicions should be reported immediately to the manager.

Employees or volunteers who know, or could reasonably be expected to know, about an incident of abuse or neglect and who do not report it will be treated as having aided the abuse or neglect and will face disciplinary measures up to, and including, dismissal.

Employees or volunteers who suspect that the child is at risk of abuse or neglect at home, have an obligation to report their concern to the Ministry for Children and Family Development.

Response to Staff/Volunteers

(a) Any allegation of child abuse against a staff/volunteer, even at a time when this person is not working, will be considered as "work-related."
(b) If an allegation of child abuse against a staff/volunteer occurs, the responsible supervisor will immediately direct the staff/volunteer to leave the centre. The supervisor will then contact the CEO for further direction and next steps, as per BACI's policies and procedures.
(c) All staff and volunteers must be sensitive to the need for confidentiality in the handling of information in this area and are instructed to discuss matters pertaining to alleged abuse only with the appropriate supervisor.

Confidentiality

If an employee or volunteer has cause to report suspected child abuse, all information relevant to the matter must be held in the strictest confidence, other than the making of a report to MCFD and to their immediate supervisor.

For more information about MCFD reporting guidelines, go to www.mcf.gov.bc.ca

Linking Policies

1.8 Code of Ethics
9.1 Rights & Responsibilities of People
9.2 Family Involvement
9.3 Advocate & Friend Involvement
9.4 Promoting Friendships of People with Disabilities
9.5 Involvement in Decision-making
9.6 Personal Care Assistance
9.7 Behavioural Interventions

Statement of Compliance

I have read BACI's policy on the Abuse and Neglect of Children.
I fully understand the terms of this document and agree to abide by them.

_____ _____
(Board, employee, or volunteer name) (Date)

_____ _____
(Witness) (Date)