Your Children



Children and abuse

Children often see and hear more than we think. They have probably seen or heard the abuse, and it has likely affected them.

Children who see or hear abuse at home can be as severely affected as children who are direct victims of physical, psychological, or sexual abuse. They might:

- be scared, confused, and unhappy
- have physical signs such as headaches or stomach aches
- blame themselves
- experience insomnia, nightmares, or bed-wetting
- have speech difficulties or stop talking
- harm or cut themselves
- behave aggressively or become withdrawn
- cling to the abused parent or try to take care of them
- exhibit disrespectful or abusive behaviour toward the abused parent
- feel responsible for the abuse
- seek attention by lying or stealing

When children experience abuse in their home, even at a young age, they are at risk of getting stuck in a cycle of abuse.

Children who are exposed to abuse often believe that it's okay to hurt people they love. They learn that it's normal for someone who loves them to hurt them.

Children from violent homes may end up believing that:

- it's okay to hit, boss, or control their partners
- abuse is normal
- abuse is a way to win arguments and get your own way
- it's okay to bully and control others
- some people are naturally inferior to others
- some people must put up with abuse to be in a relationship
- "real men" don't feel or show weakness, fear, sadness, or confusion
- adults have power they often misuse
- all men are bullies who push women and children around, and women are weak and can be pushed around
- punishment means love
- women can't take care of themselves or their children
- you can only express anger through aggression and abuse

If a child is exposed to family violence, it is the responsibility of all community members and professionals to report it to Child and Family Wellbeing. The Nova Scotia Children and Family Services Act (2018) recognizes family violence as a form of child abuse. This includes a child being directly exposed by witnessing and/or being harmed during an incident as well as a child being indirectly exposed to violence, such as seeing or hearing an incident of violence or being aware of the violence through seeing physical injuries, tension in the home, broken objects, or arguments.

It is important to note that exposure to family violence as defined in the Children and Family Services Act includes circumstances where "the child has been exposed to, or has been made aware of, violence by or towards a parent or guardian, or another person residing with the child, and the parent or guardian."

Anyone who suspects that a child under the age of 19 is experiencing child abuse or neglect is required by law to report it. Anyone who suspects a child under the age of 16 is being abused by a third party is also required by law to report it.

The safety of children is always a priority for people who work with victims of violence and abuse. In all cases of family violence service providers, outreach services, and transition house staff must report to Child and Family Wellbeing if they suspect abuse or neglect. This includes direct and indirect exposure to abuse.

Indirect exposure is when children can see or hear family violence.

When incidents of alleged abuse or neglect are reported to Child and Family Wellbeing, a social worker may visit your home to talk to you and gather information to ensure everyone is safe. If safety planning is needed, the social worker can help you find services and supports.

Bullying and being bullied

Children who are exposed to abuse may become insecure and be at risk of bullying or cyberbullying. They may also become bullies themselves.

Bullying is when someone repeatedly tries to hurt another person's body, feelings, self-esteem, reputation, or property.

It is also bullying to help or encourage someone to bully another person.

Bullying is an expression of aggression and an abuse of power that is similar to the abuse children might see at home.

Help for children and youth

Children and youth who are exposed to abuse are probably confused, scared, and angry. They may need help dealing with their feelings.

Children need to know that:

- they are safe and will stay safe
- the abuse is not their fault
- they are loved
- it's alright to feel whatever they are feeling
- it's okay to talk about it
- they will be listened to and understood
- it's not okay for anyone to hurt other people

You may need to tell your children it is still okay to love the abusive parent, but they also need to understand that it's not okay for someone to hurt another person. They need to know that you are alright even if you cry or get upset.

__Remember:__ Children show their anger and fear to the people they trust. They need to learn how to express their feelings without using abuse.

Children may need someone to blame. They may see you as the one to blame because you are the one who left or reported the abuse. Perhaps they often saw your partner blame you for things, and so they do the same.

It can be difficult for you if your children blame you. You will need to have patience in order to help your children understand why change is necessary.

What about parenting responsibilities?

Get legal advice right away about parenting responsibilities. If you want decision-making responsibility for your children, apply for a **Parenting Order** right away. The most important thing in parenting arrangements is what would be in the best interest of the child. A judge will consider the abuse when they decide what is in a child's best interests.

Usually you apply for decision-making responsibilities at the court closest to where the children usually live. The Justice Centre in your area can provide the name and location of the court where you can start the application.

Court staff can give you information about the documents you need to apply for a parenting order. It is best if you speak to a lawyer before you start your application, but you can get a lawyer at any time during the court process, even if you start the application on your own.

If your partner does not follow the terms of the parenting order, you should contact your lawyer.

RESOURCES

For more information about Parenting Plans or Parenting Orders, you can refer to the Family Law Nova Scotia website: nsfamilylaw.ca/children/general-information/parenting-arrangements-faqs

If you are afraid that your partner may try to take the children to another country, you can ask the **Passport Office** to put the children's names on a security list so that you are called if your partner tries to get passports for them.

You can apply in person or by mail and must give them:

- your own identification
- the children's birth certificates
- court documents (such as parenting arrangements, peace bonds, etc.) and
- a letter explaining why you want the children's names on the security list

The Passport Office usually keeps names on this list for 90 days. After 90 days, you must reapply or provide related court documentation.

To learn more about this, visit: www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/canadian-passports/child-passport/child-safety-list.html

To find the nearest Passport Office, visit: cic.gc.ca/english/passport/map/map.asp

If your children have another nationality and you are concerned that your partner will try to take them to another country, you can contact that country's **embassy or consulate** and ask them to refuse to issue passports for the children. Consulate and embassy phone numbers can be found in the government blue pages in the phone book, or at travel.gc.ca/assistance/embassies-consulates

You can also learn more from the government of Canada at www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/canadian-passports/child-passport/child-safety-list.html

The law says that you and the other parent must both agree if one of you wants to take the children out of the province, or even move to another city, town, or community in your province. If you want to move and take the children and the other parent doesn't agree, you need to apply for a court order.

Supervised parenting and exchange

Courts often decide that it is in the child's best interests to continue their relationship with both parents. In some cases, a judge might decide that a child should only see a parent when another adult can be there, too.

This is called the **Supervised Parenting and Exchange Program**. It provides a safe setting for visits or exchanges. Safety is the top priority in supervised parenting and exchange.

Supervised parenting time allows children to visit with the parent who doesn't have decision-making responsibilities while a trained person from a community agency supervises the visit.

Supervised exchange allows the parents to drop off and pick up the child without having to meet.

If the judge or court thinks your child needs supervised parenting time with their parents, the judge will make a court order.

If the court thinks a parent needs help or support caring for a child, the judge might also order that a family friend or family member, like a grandparent, supervise visits.

To find out more about the different types of exchange, visit nsfamilylaw.ca/programs-services/supervised-parenting-and-exchange-program

Supervised parenting and exchange visits are meant to last only a short time. A typical order might be 12 visits for an hour and a half, or 18 one-hour visits. After that, there should be a plan in place to help parents work toward caring for children on their own during parenting visits. But the court can give more time for supervision if parents need more support.

Contact a court near you to find out if they offer a Supervised Parenting and Exchange Program.

For more information about the Supervised Parenting and Exchange Program, visit: www.nsfamilylaw.ca/sites/default/files/editor-uploads/supervised_access_parent_brochure_rev.pdf

Child support

If your children live with you, you can apply for child support or maintenance from their other parent.

You must try to get a **maintenance order or maintenance agreement** for yourself and your children if you want to apply for Employment Support and Income Assistance. For more information, visit: novascotia.ca/coms/employment/income_assistance/index.html.

You can apply for maintenance through the Family Court. The court will work out the amount of support to be paid. Support payments can also be worked out during a divorce proceeding.

Transition house staff can give you information and may be able to help you apply. You can also get forms and ask questions about them at Family Law Information Centres in Family Courts across the province. If you have questions about applying for maintenance, you can read more at nsfamilylaw.ca or call the Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia at 1-800-665-9779.

Try to get legal advice about child support. The court can only work out the amount of child support if the other parent gives their financial information. If your partner will not give you the information, a lawyer may be able to help.

If you do not have a maintenance order or if you think your child support or maintenance payments are too low, you may be referred to the Maintenance Enforcement Program.

Maintenance Enforcement Program

Once you get a child support order, your partner should send you money for the children regularly (usually every month). If they are not making payments, you can register your court order with the Nova Scotia Maintenance Enforcement Program.

This program aims to make sure you get your child support or spousal support payments.

You can find out more about the Maintenance Enforcement Program on page 86.

Cut or tear along this line. Fold up and keep in a safe place.

Safety Alert

If you have experienced domestic abuse, know that you are not alone, and that there are a variety of supports available to you.

If you are in immediate danger, call 911.

If you are seeking help or are looking for information about abuse, you can call the **Transition House Association of Nova Scotia 24-hour toll-free line**: 1-855-225-0220

Women's, Men's, and All Genders Helplines: 211

Help Lines

Crime Stoppers 1-800-222-8477

Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-6868

Mental Health Crisis Line
Serves all of Nova Scotia (24/7)1-888-429-8167

Avalon Sexual Assault Centre
Crisis Line 902-422-4240

Your local number:

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Quick connect

Community and social services 211
ns.211.ca

HealthLink 811
Hearing impaired 711
811.novascotia.ca

Women's, Men's, and All Genders Helplines:211

Mi'kmaw Family Healing Centres

Millbrook 902-756-3440
Toll-free: 1-800-565-4741

We'koqma'q 902-756-3440
Toll-free: 1-800-565-3440

Transition Houses and Shelters Crisis Lines

Amherst, Autumn House 902-667-1200

Antigonish, Naomi Society. 902-863-3807

Bridgewater, Harbour House 902-543-3999

Digby, Juniper House 902-742-8689
Toll-free: 1-800-266-4087

Halifax, Bryony House 902-422-7650

Kentville, Chrysalis House 902-679-1922
Toll-free: 1-800-264-8682

New Glasgow, Tearmann House . 902-752-0132
Toll-free: 1-800-831-0330

Port Hawkesbury, Leeside Transition House
. 902-625-2444
Toll-free: 1-800-565-3390

Shelburne, Juniper House 902-742-8689
Toll-free: 1-800-266-4087

Sydney, Cape Breton Transition House
. 902-539-2945
Toll-free: 1-800-563-2945

Truro, Third Place 902-893-3232
Toll-free: 1-800-565-4878

Yarmouth, Juniper House 902-742-8689
Toll-free: 1-800-266-4087

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