

Reporting a Concern

When you contact The Children's Aid Society of Hamilton regarding a child's safety and well-being, a Child Protection Worker (CPW) will answer your call. At this time, you can make a report or ask for a private consultation.

Private Consultation

A private consultation allows the caller to anonymously provide non-identifying information about the child or family and a brief scenario on why he/she is calling. Through this process, the CPW can recommend whether or not the caller should report his/her concerns.

Making a Report

When a report is received, a CPW will assess a situation carefully by asking detailed questions, gathering as much information as possible. Callers may be asked to identify themselves, but for non-professionals (like a neighbour or friend) this is not required.

One report may not always result in an investigation. Depending on the nature of a reported concern, there may only be telephone contact between a family and CAS. However, different reports about the same child or family allow the agency to identify patterns of concern which may indicate the need for further assessment.

Where concerns about the safety and well-being of a child exist, but the child is not deemed to be at immediate risk of harm, a CPW must see the child within seven days of a report being made. This is a Ministry of Children and Youth Services standard for all investigations. If a child is deemed to be at immediate risk of harm, a CPW must see the child within 12 hours of a report being made.

During a visit with the child and family, the CPW will further assess the situation to determine if the child is at risk, and if so, work with the family to discuss what steps need to be taken to protect the child and help the family. The CPW may offer families support in the community or through the agency.

In some instances, it is determined that it is in the child's best interest to reside outside of the family home for a period of time, until some of the concerns can be addressed and the safety of the child ensured. In this situation, placement with family or friends is discussed with parents and whenever possible considered.

Who works with the families involved with the CAS of Hamilton?

The Society is divided into different departments in order to provide the best possible services to both children and families involved with CAS.

Intake Services

Intake Services is the first point of contact at The Children's Aid Society of Hamilton. When concerns about a child's safety and well-being are received, a Child Protection Worker in Intake Services obtains as much detailed information as possible from the caller in order to assess how best to address the concerns being presented. The plan may include a referral to community services, or an investigation by the agency.

Family Services

Child Protection Workers in Family Services work with families experiencing to help resolve problems and develop skills for coping with crises so that parents can provide their child(ren) with a safe and nurturing home environment. Services are made available to help prevent children from coming into CAS care and to promote the reintegration of children back into their parents' homes. Services focus on teaching parents important life skills such as budgeting, nutrition and problem solving, as well as addressing concerns such as addiction or anger management. In addition, staff in Family Services can connect and provide referrals to community resources and other service organizations.

Children's Services

Child Protection Workers (CPWs) in Children's Services work directly with the children in the Society's care to ensure that each child is provided with a safe and healthy environment where his or her needs are being met appropriately. These CPWs oversee such things as a child's education, medical and dental care, cultural and religious involvement, recreation, etc. In addition, they will monitor a child's emotional, behavioural and developmental needs and arrange for services (if needed), such as counselling, psychological assessments, and speech therapy.

Providing a safe place for children

The Children's Aid Society of Hamilton strives to keep children living with their families whenever possible. Unfortunately, even after receiving support services, some parents cannot provide their children with adequate care.

If it is determined that a child is unsafe, or if a family indicates that they need help parenting their child(ren), Child Protection Workers will work with the family to find a suitable relative, friend of the family or community members that may be able to provide a safe and nurturing alternate living arrangement. Placement with extended family or community members ensures the transition is made easier for the child and the family. The process of placing a child with family/friends is referred to as kinship service.

If a suitable placement is not available, children will be placed in a foster home, group home or other residence depending on their specific needs. Some children may need to be in care for just a few days while others may remain in care for several months or years. Often, placements are short-term and most children are reunified with their families.

In some circumstances, children are unable to be returned home and CAS will then develop a permanent plan for the child. Whenever possible, CAS tries to find an adoptive home for the child. When a child is not eligible for adoption and must remain in the permanent care of the CAS, every effort is made for the child to be cared for in a family setting. Children in the care of the Society can continue to receive support until the age of 21 years.



The Children's Aid Society
OF HAMILTON

Supporting Children & Families



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OF HAMILTON

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About Us

The Children's Aid Society (CAS) of Hamilton is a non-profit agency that, by law, is required to protect children from physical, sexual and emotional abuse and harm. The agency also helps to build healthy families and provides safe, nurturing environments for youngsters that cannot live at home due to family issues.

There are 47 children's aid societies in Ontario. Each agency is funded by the government to provide child protection services to its designated community, according to Ontario's Child and Family Services Act [CFSA s. 72 (1)].

Legal Responsibilities of CAS

- Investigate calls regarding concerns about the safety and well-being of children up to the age of 16 years;
- Speak with children, parents, caregivers and other people involved with a family to assess situations, determine family strengths and the possible risk of harm to a child(ren);
- Report to the police if there is a possibility a law has been broken (ie, a child has been injured by an adult as the result of punishment or neglect);
- Take necessary steps to protect a child from possible harm;
- If there is significant danger for a child to remain in their home, the Society and the family will try to find suitable alternative care for the child(ren), while the parent works with the Society to address concerns;
- As a last resort, take the matter to Family Court where a judge will decide what plan of action is in the child's best interest.

THE FACTS ON CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

What is PHYSICAL ABUSE?

Physical abuse is any deliberate physical force or action (usually by a parent or caregiver) that results, or could result, in injury to a child. It can include punching, slapping, beating, shaking, burning, biting or throwing a child.

What is REASONABLE DISCIPLINE?

The law presently allows parents to use "reasonable force" to discipline children. What is considered reasonable depends on the situation, the child's age and the child's development. Any form of physical discipline that requires medical attention, or results in bruising, welts or broken skin, is not considered reasonable discipline.

Physical discipline of babies is also unacceptable. Handling babies roughly, whether in anger or playfulness, is extremely dangerous. Shaking can cause serious injury including brain damage, blindness and even death.

What is EMOTIONAL ABUSE?

Emotional abuse is a pattern of behaviour that attacks a child's emotional development and sense of self-worth. It includes excessive, aggressive or unreasonable demands that place expectations on a child beyond his/her capacity. Such acts include constantly criticizing, teasing, belittling, insulting, rejecting, ignoring, or isolating the child. This kind of abuse also includes failure by a parent or caregiver to provide their child(ren) with love, emotional support and guidance.

What is SEXUAL ABUSE?

Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used for the sexual gratification of an adult or older child. Coercion (physical, psychological, emotional) distinguishes sexual abuse from consensual play with peers.

It is against the law for an adult or older child to:

- touch a child in a sexual way;

- encourage or force a child to touch another person in a sexual way;
- encourage or force a child to participate in any sexual activity;
- tell a child to touch him or herself for an adult or older child's sexual purposes.

Sexual abuse of children can take many forms. Examples include sexual intercourse, exposing a child's private area, indecent phone calls, fondling for sexual purposes, watching a child undress for sexual pleasure, allowing a child to look at, or perform in pornographic pictures or videos, or engage in prostitution.

What is NEGLECT?

Neglect is the failure to meet a child's basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, sleep, medical attention, education and protection from harm. This can occur when parents are unable or don't understand how to provide appropriate care for children, or when they're not able to plan ahead for a child's needs. In addition, young children should never be left unattended, not even for a few minutes.



Child abuse is against the law. It is ***everyone's responsibility*** to help protect children from all kinds of child abuse: physical, emotional, sexual and neglect.

Prevention is Key

We believe that the best way to deal with child abuse and neglect is to prevent it. That is why individuals are encouraged to contact the Society before family problems get out of control.

All families experience difficulties, and during these times there may be a number of things that make it hard for parents to meet the needs of their child(ren). Unemployment, illness, loneliness, isolation, mental health issues, addictions, lack of family support, a child with special needs and domestic violence can all take a toll on parents.

Our programs and services can help families through challenging times and teach parents to provide a safe and nurturing environment for their child(ren). CAS can also connect families to other community resources, and often works in partnership with other organizations to match families with appropriate programs and services that can address problems and help improve family situations.

Protecting children from potential harm is a priority for CAS. We attempt to do this by working together with parents and members of the community. We try to help parents solve problems and eliminate the risk of harm to their child(ren). We can also teach parents new ways to deal with problems and assist in developing skills for handling crises.

