



Caregiver Guide

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Welcome to Oak Child and Youth Advocacy Centre

Oak Child and Youth Advocacy Centre (Oak CYAC) is one of 11 operational and in-development Child and Youth Advocacy Centres (CYACs) in British Columbia. We follow the guidelines set by the BC Network of Child and Youth Advocacy Centres (BC Network). Oak CYAC is a partnership between a group of agencies in the North Okanagan who are committed to leading the response to abuse and violence against children, youth, and their families. The CYAC is a child-friendly space where children and youth who have experienced abuse, sexual assault, or witnessed a crime, can share their story with police and/or social workers, and be connected to support services. Our goal is to make this experience as comfortable as possible, and to support your family throughout the process. One of the ways we do that, is by connecting you and your family to a Child and Youth Victim Service Advocate (Advocate) or Victim Service Worker.

An Advocate provides support and assistance for children and youth **aged 18 or younger** (and their families) who have been the victim of abuse, sexual assault, or witnessed a crime. Our Advocates can:

- Meet you before interviews or meetings with police and social workers, and offer emotional and practical support afterwards;
- Communicate with police and criminal justice personnel, as it relates to your case;
- Help you access Crime Victim Assistance Program funding and Victim Safety Unit;
- Provide you with support and information about what to expect in court, and about the criminal justice process for children, youth and supportive family members;
- Provide accompaniment to court appointments, meetings and appearances, and provide you with emotional support and information throughout the process;
- Help you write a Victim Impact Statement (VIS) for court;
- Provide accompaniment to forensic medical examinations;
- Give you information about your rights under the *Victims of Crime Act*; and,
- **Advocate** for you, making sure your rights are respected and your voice is heard.

What brings your child to Oak CYAC

There are many reasons why children, youth, and their families may come to Oak CYAC. We acknowledge that the circumstances that bring you and your family here may be very difficult. It may be related to concerns of abuse, your child may have witnessed a crime, or your child may be exhibiting behaviours that have caused concern... whatever the reason, our team is here to help.

The most common referral to CYACs is related to abuse, including:

- **Physical Abuse:** the intentional use of force against a person without that person's consent. It can cause physical pain or injury that may last a long time.
- **Sexual Abuse:** all unwanted sexual activity, such as unwanted sexual grabbing, kissing, intercourse, and fondling.
- **Emotional Abuse:** a pattern of behavior that uses words or actions to control, frighten, isolate, or diminish a person's sense of self-worth, or negatively impact a person's emotional development or well-being.

- **Neglect:** not providing essential requirements for a child's emotional, psychological and physical development, such as adequate shelter, clothing, food, cleanliness, medical care or protection from harm.

How your child may be feeling

Regardless of what brings your family to the CYAC, it is important to remember that every child is an individual, and will react differently under these circumstances. There is no normal reaction to look for, but you know your child best and if you have concerns about them, we can help you find the right supports. Your child may be feeling:

- Sad
- Guilty
- Confused
- Embarrassed
- Angry
- Fearful
- Anxious
- Betrayed

Every child will act differently when they have these feelings. Your child might deal with their feelings in the following ways:

- Upset stomach, change in appetite
- Crying more than usual
- Changes in sleep pattern or upsetting dreams
- Wanting to be near the caregiver at all times, or more often than usual
- Wetting the bed, or daytime wetting
- Returning to earlier behaviors such as thumb sucking
- Increased fear of situations
- Attention seeking
- Highly active and alert
- Easily startled
- Mood changes, mood swings, or angry outbursts
- Irritability
- Difficulty staying still or concentrating
- Thoughts about death or dying
- Rebelliousness
- Avoidance

Some children may behave like their regular self, pretend that nothing has happened, and/or may avoid talking about the event. In this case, continue to support them, and let them know that help is available if needed.

How to help your child

Right now, the best thing you can do is to help your child understand that they did nothing wrong, and that this is not their fault. Let your child know that you believe them and that you will be there for them no matter what happens.

Things you can say to help:

- “I believe you”
- “It’s not your fault”
- “I’m sorry this happened”
- “I’ll take care of you”
- “It’s okay to cry”
- “It’s okay to be mad (let’s find a safe way to work that out...)”
- “I’m upset, but not with you”
- “I don’t know why the person did this, but nothing about you made this happen”
- “I’m not sure what will happen next, but we’ll figure it out together” (*when you do know next steps, you may choose to share that with your child/youth in short, practical terms*)

- “Thank you for telling me what happened”
- “This doesn’t change how much I love you”

What you can do to help:

- **Don’t ask investigating or probing questions.** Try not to coach or pressure your child to talk about their experiences and/or about the interview. It is important not to jeopardize any part of the investigation. However, you **can listen supportively** when your child wants to tell you about it.
- **Show your child you believe them**, and respect that they may not feel safe around others;
- **Take care of yourself**; you cannot help your child if you do not eat, rest, and take time for yourself;
- **Ask for help** from friends, family, or a counsellor;
- **Return to your normal routine** at a pace that feels comfortable for you and your children and family;
- **Be aware of the needs of the other family members** and how they may be impacting you and your child;
- Work with the CYAC to **find supports** for your child, your other children, and yourself;
- **Tell your child what will happen next and why** (such as going to the doctor, talking to the victim service worker or Advocate, talking to law enforcement, etc.);
- **Follow the directions of the investigator** to keep you and your child safe; and,
- Don’t wait until the investigation is over to **start putting supports in place**.

Remember, you matter too!

Caregivers often focus only on how they can help their child, and neglect their own needs. Try to:

- Do your best **not to dwell** on what you should have done differently.
- **Ask questions** if you’re not sure what to do next, or need more information.
- **Be aware of your own feelings** and how they may be impacting your child. If sharing your emotions with your child will cause them more stress, speak to a support person such as a friend, family member, or counsellor.
- **Let yourself go through the emotional process** in your own time. Don’t let the experiences of others dictate how long this takes or what the process looks like.
- At your own pace, **add parts of your normal routine** back into your day.
- **Seek out and utilize the supports** you feel are necessary. Oak CYAC can help you find support services that might be good for you.

What to say to others

If you have struggled with the question of what you should be telling others about your situation, you are not alone. Many Caregivers are unsure of who to talk to, and what to say. You do not need to tell anyone about what is happening with your family if you do not want to. If you are unsure about which friends or family members to speak to, we encourage you to talk about this with your Advocate or Victim Service Worker.

If you would like to speak with a friend or family member, here are a few things to consider:

- Will this person be a good support for you, or will they create more stress for you?

- Will they respect you and your child's privacy, or are they likely to share your story with others?
- How does this person usually react to troubling or stressful news?
- How much information does this person need to support you; do they need to know everything, or some basic information?
- Has the investigator (police or social worker) asked you not to share information with anyone outside of the investigation team?

When you've chosen someone who can support you, remember:

- You do not need to explain or defend yourself, or your child.
- They are not entitled to know anything more than what you think they should know.
- You can choose to tell them as much or as little as you like.
- You can be clear about what you need/want from them.
- You can ask them to keep this information to themselves.

If family, friends, or acquaintances are asking for information that you are not comfortable giving, you can tell them:

- "Out of respect for my child's privacy, I'd rather not talk about it"
- "We're going through a difficult time right now, but we're dealing with it as a family"
- "I've been told that I can't talk about it until the investigation is over"

What happens next

Your Advocate or Victim Service Worker can provide emotional and practical support, as well as service referrals for both you and your child/youth. If you choose to have Oak CYAC contact you after your initial visit, they can continue to provide support as your journey progresses, either over the phone or in-person. The Advocate can also act as a liaison or contact with other agencies, making sure all relevant agencies involved are keeping your child's best interest at the forefront of the case.

If the investigator (police officer or social worker) lets you know that the investigation is over and your file is closed, you can still continue to get support from Oak CYAC. You and your child may still feel you need support, even if there is no disclosure of abuse, or if the investigation was closed.

If you have further questions about what happens next for your family, we encourage you to contact your Advocate or Victim Service Worker.

Crime Victim Assistance Program (CVAP)

Your Advocate can assist with filling out paperwork or application for CVAP funding. This funding provides a wide range of benefits to assist victims, immediate family members of victims, and certain witnesses, in coping with the effects of violent crime, where same or similar benefits are not available from another source.

You do not have to wait for charges to be laid or for the offender to be convicted before applying for benefits.

You can read more about CVAP online: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/criminal-justice/bcs-criminal-justice-system/if-you-are-a-victim-of-a-crime/victim-of-crime/financial-assistance-benefits>

Important Contacts

Advocate or Victim Service Worker Name: _____
778-475-2920 extension 301 or 302

MCFD Social Worker Name: _____
250-558-2700 (for child protection emergencies dial 1-800-663-9122)

RCMP Member Name: _____
250-545-7171 (for emergencies dial 9-1-1) RCMP file # _____

(Other) _____ Name: _____

(Other) _____ Name: _____

To make a child protection report, please call:

Ministry of Children and Family Development (24-hour line): 1-800-663-9122

To report a crime, please call:

9-1-1 in an emergency

Vernon RCMP non-emergency line: 250-545-7171

Armstrong RCMP non-emergency line: 250-546-3028

Enderby RCMP non-emergency line: 250-838-6818

Lumby RCMP non-emergency line: 250-547-2151

If you are looking for support services, please call:

RCMP Victim's Assistance: 250-260-7171

Vernon Women's Transition House (24-hour line): 250-542-1122

PEACE Child and Youth Counselling: 250-558-3850 ext. 201 (Vernon)
250-546-6744 (Armstrong)

Stopping the Violence Counselling: 250-558-3850 ext 221 (Vernon)
778-442-2200 (Armstrong)

Women's Outreach Program: 778-212-3259

Community Based Victim Services: 250-542-3322

North Okanagan Youth and Family Services: 250-545-3572

Family Resource Centre: 250-545-3390

Kid's help phone: 1-800-668-6868

Crisis Line: 1-888-353-2273

Youth Safe House: 250-260-7077

Your notes/questions
