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**Child Abuse and Neglect: Preventing, Responding and Supporting**

**Considerations for Organizational Policies, Procedures and Practices**

The following checklist was created to support organizations in building their capacity to prevent and respond to concerns related to child abuse and neglect.

**Policy Considerations**

* Develop a policy and related procedures which provides clear guidelines employees follow when they are concerned about the safety and wellbeing of a child or youth.
* Refer to the OACAS handout related to the “Duty to report”.
* The person with the direct knowledge is to report their concerns to CAS in a timely manner. Delaying reports in order for management approval is not consistent with the CYFSA duty to report requirements.
* If additional concerns arise after the initial report, they are expected to call back and report the new information.
* Information about the indicators of Child Abuse and Neglect, or a link to external resources may be helpful.
* Often these situations are stressful for staff involved. Ensuring that there are internal supports in place for staff to consult about a situation or debrief is critical.
* Your policy should provide guidance about what to share with families when a report is required to be made. Your judgement is used in these situations, as there are multiple factors to consider. If informing the parent would compromise safety of the child / parent or interfere with the CAS investigation process, then it is not recommended to inform the family. However, in other situations calling with the family or letting them know prior to report is appropriate. If you are not sure, being cautious is better. You can also call the CAS to consult with them and seek their advice. Depending on the knowledge and skills of your staff, your agency practices to support making this decision may vary.
* Ensuring that all service consent forms include information related to the duty to report is critical.
* Duty to report extends to individuals agencies serve and to the public in general. HR Policies related to situations when there is a duty to report on a staff member help guide the process when those situations arise.
* Although within the CYFSA there is a provision that individuals who report could be anonymous, most professionals are identified. The details provided in the report often are identifying.

**Duty to Report- Making the report to CAS**

* Prior to contacting the CAS, usually by phone, the staff making the report should be prepared with the following information:
	+ Details about the incident, or information which lead them to be concerned.
	+ The names and demographic info (as much that is known) of all the family members and any potential witness.
	+ What prompted them to call, what is their concern?
	+ Based on their knowledge of the family, are there protective factors, strengths or resources that may help address the concern?
	+ If the staff members is nervous, they can have someone sit in with them or provide them support to ensure they have the info needed.
* During the call
	+ It is normal to feel anxious or stressed.
	+ The CAS worker will be asking a lot of questions to understand the information. If you don’t know the answer to a question, that is ok. Reporters share what they know.
	+ You can ask questions about the process. Confidentiality limits what CAS is able to share, but they can share some info about the next steps.
* After making the report:
	+ If you are feeling stressed or anxious, debrief with a colleague or supervisor.
	+ If you have follow-up with the family after CAS gets involved, seek consent to work with CAS in a supportive manner.
	+ If the report caused tension in the working relationship with the family;
		- Listen to the family
		- Be empathetic
		- Be honest- the law required you to report, and you were concerned about their wellbeing.
		- Offer to be part of the support plan.
		- In most situations, you are able to repair any ruptures to the working relationship.

**Onboarding and Professional Development**

* As part of a new employee or student onboarding to the agency, ensuring that they are aware of their duty to report and related policies / procedures are critical.
* Staff should sign off annually that they have reviewed the policy.
* Proving staff PD opportunities- webinars, workshops- where they can better understand the indicators of abuse / neglect and develop skills to support families they are concerned is essential. There are resources within this toolkit to support that work.
* Specific training related to the root causes (listed below) are essential for prevention work.

**Prevention Practices**

* Prevention activities usually involve addressing root causes of the issue. For child abuse and neglect, some of the root causes are;
	+ Poverty
	+ Homelessness
	+ Inadequate food security
	+ Discrimination
	+ Addictions
	+ Parental Mental Health
	+ Violence
	+ Woman Abuse
* Supporting families to address some of these risk factors prevents child abuse and neglect.
* Agencies could also consider contributing to addressing these issues at a systemic level.
* When working with families, ensure there is cross-sector collaboration.
* It is critical that families (parents, youth and children) are actively engaged- they are the experts of their families.
* Develop interagency policies/protocols in collaboration with parents and children that include a performance management and evaluation framework to ensure their use in everyday practice.
* Develop information-sharing and joint working policies/protocols to improve communication, coordination and collaboration within their organization and across agencies.