

Prevention of Child and Youth Abuse

STATEMENT OF POLICY

1. The Church is under a special obligation, mandated by our Lord Jesus Christ and articulated in the Scriptures, to watch over and protect children and youth (Mark 10:14, 16).
2. The Church recognizes that the risk of abuse is a real and present danger to the well-being of children and youth.
3. The Church is morally, ethically, and legally obligated to take prudent, reasonable, appropriate, and effective measures to respond to and prevent abuse of children and youth, abuse perpetrated by people who may or may not be members of the Church and who may or may not be acting on its behalf, on church premises and properties, and/or in church programs, services, and activities, wherever they take place.
4. The Church recognizes that it has moral, ethical, and legal obligations to the leaders who care for, teach, run programs, or assist children and youth, as well as obligations to the Church itself, to protect it and them from false and spurious allegations of abuse.
5. The Church is committed, through a formal written policy, to provide a safe and secure environment for children and youth entrusted to our care.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS IN THE POLICY

6. **Child / Youth:** A person who is under nineteen (19) years of age as defined in the child protection legislation from the province of Nova Scotia.
7. **Leader:** A leadership role occupied by an employee or volunteer where there is expected to be direct interaction with children or youth.
8. **Volunteer helper:** A lay person who is involved peripherally in programs with children or youth, but has not chosen to become a leader. For example, someone who delivers cookies to a children's program, or helps prepare snacks in the kitchen for a program or event.

WHAT IS CHILD AND YOUTH SEXUAL ABUSE

9. The term "child abuse" refers to the violence, mistreatment or neglect that a child or adolescent may experience while in the care of someone they either trust or depend on, such as a parent, sibling, other relative, caregiver or guardian. Abuse may take place anywhere and may occur, for example, within the child's home or that of someone known to the child. There are many different forms of abuse and a child may be subjected to more than one form:

- **Physical abuse** may consist of just one incident or it may happen repeatedly. It involves a deliberately using force against a child in such a way that the child is either injured or is at risk of being injured. Physical abuse includes beating, hitting, shaking, pushing, choking, biting, burning, kicking or assaulting a child with a weapon. It also includes holding a child under water, or any other dangerous or harmful use of force or restraint.
 - **Sexual abuse** and exploitation involves using a child for sexual purposes. Examples of child sexual abuse include fondling, inviting a child to touch or be touched sexually, intercourse, rape, incest, sodomy, exhibitionism, or involving a child in prostitution or pornography.
 - **Neglect** is often chronic, and it usually involves repeated incidents. It involves failing to provide what a child needs for his or her physical, psychological or emotional development and well being. For example, neglect includes failing to provide a dependent child with food, clothing, shelter, cleanliness, medical care or protection from harm.
 - **Emotional abuse** involves harming a child's sense of self-worth. It includes acts (or omissions) that result in, or place a child at risk of, serious behavioural, cognitive, emotional, or mental health problems. For example, emotional abuse may include aggressive verbal threats, social isolation, intimidation, exploitation, or routinely making unreasonable demands. It also includes terrorizing a child, or exposing them to family violence.
10. An abuser may use a number of different tactics to gain access to a child, exert power and control over them, and prevent them from telling anyone about the abuse or seeking support. A child who is being abused is usually in a position of dependence on the person who is abusing them. Abuse is a misuse of power and a violation of trust. The abuse may happen once or it may occur in a repeated and escalating pattern over a period of months or years. The abuse may change form over time.

SCOPE AND APPLICATION

11. This policy will apply to each and every program, service, and event organized or run or sponsored by the Church, including those organized, run or sponsored jointly with another church or organization. Every individual involved with such programs, services, or events - whether or not he or she is a member of the Church - is subject to this policy. Likewise, each official office, committee, or ministry team is also subject to this policy and must abide by it.
12. The Church will never compromise its obligation to promote and protect the well-being of children and youth by putting the interests of any individual, or its own interests, ahead of those of a child or youth who has made an allegation, disclosure, or report of abuse, or who, it is suspected, has been abused.
13. The Church will abide by all applicable, relevant municipal, provincial, and federal law and regulation, including, but not limited to, the reporting requirements and other obligations set out in provincial child welfare legislation with respect to the abuse or other mistreatment of children or youth.

14. The Church will cooperate with child welfare/protection agencies and other civil authorities (e.g., the police) in any investigation of allegations, reports, disclosures, or suspicions of abuse of children or youth at Church programs and events, and the Church expects all staff, leaders, volunteer helpers, and all other Church personnel to do the same.
15. The Church will never initiate or undertake an internal investigation of an allegation, suspicion, report, or disclosure of abuse of a child or youth, unless and until the civil authorities – including child welfare/protection agencies and the police – have made a final disposition in the matter and have indicated that it is appropriate for the Church to undertake such an investigation.

PROHIBITED BEHAVIOUR IN VIOLATION OF THE POLICY

16. The following behaviours are violations of the policy and will not be tolerated or accepted during any program or event and are to be immediately reported to the designated leader after the safety of the child or youth has been assured.
 - Any direct observations of evidence of sexual activity in the presence of or in association with a child or youth.
 - Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct.
 - Making any kind of sexual advances, or making a request for sexual favours, or engaging in other verbal, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
 - Threatening or inflicting physical injury upon a child or youth, other than by accidental means.
 - Physical neglect of a child or youth, including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the activities of the Church.
 - Mental or emotional injury to a child or youth.
 - The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any function of the Church.
 - The presence, possession, or being under the influence of any illegal or illicit drugs or alcohol while leading or participating in a function for children or youth at the Church.

WORKER ENLISTMENT AND SCREENING

17. Individuals considered for a position to work with children and youth must be a member in good standing of Pleasantville Baptist Church, or a recognized adherent who has attended consistently for at least six months.
18. All leaders must be nineteen (19) years of age or older. Responsible teenagers, ages thirteen (13) to eighteen (18) may also be recognized as a leader by the Christian Education Team provided they serve under the supervision of an approved adult leader.

19. Whether a paid employee or a leader, whether an adult or a teenager, every person desiring to work with children or youth in any capacity will be required to go through the entire volunteer screening process. This applies even to those who volunteer occasionally. There are to be no exceptions for anyone to go through the complete process. Teen leaders will be exempt from the criminal records check.
20. A volunteer helper will not be required to go through the leader screening process provided they will not have direct access to children, or have very limited access as long as other leaders are always present.
21. A person who has been a member or adherent for less than a year must provide the names of two references. The references will be contacted by the Pastor, a Deacon, or Chair of the Christian Education Ministry Team. References can be from previous pastors, teachers, employers, friends and colleagues.
22. A background check will be performed on each applicant and includes the following:
 - The Vulnerable Sector Check. Those who live in the town of Bridgewater need to go to the Bridgewater Police. Those who live elsewhere in the municipality will go to the Cookville detachment of the RCMP. A letter from the Pastor or Clerk will affirm that the person is applying for a non-compensated volunteer position and state that the person will be in a position of trust and authority over children and youth (**Appendix A**). Two pieces of ID are required, one being a government issued photo ID. (Note - If the address on the ID does not match the physical address of the applicant, a piece of mail verifying the physical address is necessary.) Any expense for this process shall be reimbursed by the church.
 - The Child Abuse Registry check done through the Department of Community Services. The application form is available from the Department of Community Services website.
23. Individuals who have been arrested for, charged with, under probation for, or convicted of the following will **never** be able to serve in any activity or program for children or youth: sexual abuse; sexual assault (rape); aggravated sexual assault; injury to a child; incest; indecency with a child; inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a child; possession or promotion of child pornography; the sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor; employment harmful to children; abandonment or endangerment of a child; kidnapping or unlawful restraint; public lewdness or indecent exposure; and enticing a child. Charges and/or convictions for other crimes will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the Deacons.
24. A Criminal Records Check must be renewed every five years. A person who has stopped attending church for more than six (6) months and returns will need to get a new criminal records check to resume working with children and youth even if they were previously a leader. The chair or a designated person from the Christian Education Team will monitor the records and inform a person when an updated is needed.

25. If at any time a volunteer has been arrested, charged, is under investigation, or been convicted of a crime, then full disclosure must be done by the individual to the pastor or chairman of the Deacons Board. The deacons shall review the situation in light of this policy and determine if he/she is still able to volunteer with children and youth.
26. Personal interviews of applicants will be conducted by at least two (2) persons from the Christian Education Ministry Team after receiving the criminal records check forms. The Pastor may be one of the two persons conducting the interview. Standard interview questions may be developed and used for the interviews.
27. Each new worker will be given a copy of this policy to help them gain an understanding and appreciation for the reality of the concern, and to be able to identify abuse more easily. Orientation and training may be done at various times by the Christian Education Team in order to better equip leaders for their roles and responsibilities.
28. Adult survivors of child abuse will be asked to meet with the Pastor prior to working with children and youth.
29. All volunteers are required to sign the Declaration of Understanding and Agreement with the Policy and Procedures for the the Prevention of Child and Youth Abuse (**Appendix B**).
30. At the applicant's request, the Church shall allow the applicant to review or photocopy his/her Vulnerable Sector Check and Child Abuse Registry Letter on file at the church, but in no event shall the church allow the applicant to retain or take back these documents as they are on file as a permanent record at the church.

WORKER SUPERVISION AND SAFETY GUIDELINES

31. Whenever possible, at least two leaders should be present during any program. An approved youth helper may be recognized by the Christian Education Team as one of the leaders. When it is not possible for two leaders to be present, then the "three-person rule" should be followed, which specifies that there should always be three people present - i.e., one leader and two or more children, or two leaders with one child. Unsupervised children do not meet the criteria of this rule. Children should always be within sight of a leader. Leaders shall know the whereabouts of the children in their care at all times. Parental permission must be obtained in advance for involvement in a programs or activity whenever an adult might be spending time alone with a child or youth in an unsupervised situation.
32. In keeping with the previous guideline (31), a reasonable ratio of adult workers shall be maintained in each situation involving the supervision of children. If the required number of leaders cannot be obtained, then the class or group must be cancelled or combined with another class or group. The ratio of children to leaders should never exceed the following:

- Newborn - 2 years: One (1) leader to four (4) children
 - 2 -5 years: One (1) leader to five (5) children
 - 5 years - grade 5: One (1) leader to seven (7) children.
 - Additional precautionary measures will be taken for all off-site activities such as field trips and camping. The ratio of workers must be 1:4 for such activities. Children will be placed in groups and the groups must remain together.
33. In the context of middle and high school activities, youth leaders should not hold a youth group meeting or event without appropriate or sufficient supervision. Youth group activities must be under the supervision of more than one youth group leader. These guidelines also apply to activities away from the church site. A specific ratio of leaders to youth is not suggested; instead, the ratio shall be appropriate for the activity being undertaken.
34. Any child or youth who attends a program more than three times must be registered for the program. The registration form shall include such things as the parents' and child's names, allergy information, and any other additional instructions. Parents are asked not to bring their child to a program if the child has a fever or other illness.
35. All effort shall be taken by the leaders to ensure that children do not leave the building unless they are with a leader, parent or guardian.
36. Church staff and ministry leaders will supervise on an ongoing basis and make unannounced visits into classes or other programs from time to time.
37. The following washroom procedures shall be observed:
- Ask parents of pre-school children to take their child to the washroom before class.
 - For nursery aged children, diaper changing is to be done by one leader within the view of another leader. If possible, diapering should be done by the child's parent or guardian. Bathrooms will not be used to change diapers.
 - Children under the age of 6 who need to go to the washroom should be accompanied by a leader who escorts the child to the washroom and checks the bathroom for safety. No leader is ever to be in a closed washroom or cubicle with a child. If another leader is not available, the leader who accompanies the child should remain outside the washroom. If assistance is required, then the bathroom or cubicle door must remain open.
 - Children aged 6 and over may go to the washroom with a "buddy."
 - If there is an emergency bathroom situation, the parent and/or another leader should be notified immediately.
38. It is essential to be careful regarding physical contact with children and youth. A touch can convey a multitude of positive messages and communicate care, comfort and love; however, it is important to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate touching. It is also important to be aware of, and sensitive to, differences in interpretation to touching

based on sex, culture or personal experience. A student's or teacher's right to refuse a display of affection will be respected.

39. Displays of affection between leader and student should be limited to such actions as a brief hug from the side and not from the front, an arm around the shoulder, an open handed pat on the back, a handclasp or handshake, or a light touch on the forearm. Displays of affection should be restricted to public areas. Taking a child by the hand and leading him/her to an activity, or holding hands when changing locations is also appropriate based on the age group. Tickling, horseplay, piggy-back rides, and roughhousing are not allowed. A child should not be touched in any area normally covered by a modest bathing suit (except changing a diaper). Children in first grade or older shall not sit in the lap of workers.
40. Parental permission must be obtained prior to a pastor counselling or meeting privately with a child or youth, or another adult leader (not a leader who is a teenager) must be present. If possible, a parent or guardian should remain in close proximity. Prior permission may be granted by parents to cover a particular time period (i.e., a school year) for their child to receive counselling from a particular pastor.
41. Leaders must not contact a pre-school or elementary school age child through social media, text message, email, telephone, written message, blogs, chat rooms, or any other personal manner. Any communication that is required must be done directly through the parent or guardian of the child. Any gifts or other items, i.e, birthday card, may be given to a child as long as a parent or guardian is present.
42. Leaders may interact with middle or high school youth through social media, text message, email, telephone, written message, blogs, chat rooms, or other personal ways as long as the parent or guardian is aware that such communication is taking place. A leader should not "friend" a youth on social media who has not met the age requirement for that platform.
43. It is never appropriate for a youth leader and a youth group member to date each other. Also, a youth group leader should not date the close friend of a member of the youth group.
44. If transportation is involved, the driver must be at least nineteen (19) years old, must have a valid driver's license and proof of insurance, and must not be a newly licensed driver according to the Graduated Drivers Licence System for Nova Scotia. All provincial rules of the road must be followed. The number of occupants in the car shall not exceed the number of available seatbelts. An Activity Release Form must be signed by parent/guardian when a leader will be transporting a child/youth for an offsite activity (**Appendix C**).

DISCIPLINE GUIDELINES

45. Corporal punishment (slapping, hitting, pushing) is not permitted. Abusive verbal discipline (yelling, hurling insults, threatening) is not permitted. Using physical restraint to prevent a

child from doing something disruptive or dangerous is permitted and may, in some instances, be necessary, although it should be used as a last resort. If the leader determines that restraint is needed, the child's parent will be notified immediately and the child may be removed from the class until the parent arrives.

46. Concerns about a child's continued misbehaviour shall be discussed with the Chair of the Christian Education Ministry Team or at a leaders meeting.
47. Another worker, parent, or legal guardian should assist the leader in classrooms where misbehaviour is an ongoing problem.
48. Parent(s) or guardians of a child/youth are to be informed and involved whenever a child/youth misbehaves beyond minor correction, or if a pattern of misbehaviour increases.
49. Children are to be reminded of the kind of behaviour that is appropriate for the setting. Expectations of children's/youth's behaviour must reflect their age and level of comprehension. Similarly, discipline must reflect their age and level of comprehension. Older children and youth may benefit from having these expectations in written form.
50. For young children, time-outs should not last longer than 1 minute per the age of the child. For example, a three-year-old should not have to sit for a time-out any longer than three minutes.
51. Whenever possible, leaders should try to avoid having to discipline a child/youth by choosing one or more of the following options:
 - distract the child/youth with another activity
 - help the child/youth focus on other more appropriate behaviour
 - isolate the child/youth from others if another volunteer/staff is available to assist
52. When nothing seems to be working, volunteers, staff and leaders should get help before "losing their cool".
53. The Christian Education Team will review appropriate techniques of behaviour management with volunteers as it is needed.

PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

54. The Church will take immediate action if an allegation, report, or disclosure of child abuse is made, or a suspicion raised about an individual who is involved with the church.
55. It is essential to take allegations of child abuse seriously:
 - Do not treat the suspicion as frivolous
 - Stay calm and do not overreact - keep your emotions in check

- Presume the child is telling the truth
 - Reassure the child they have done the right thing in reporting this incident
 - Tell the child you are glad he/she has told you.
 - Advise the child that others will have to be involved.
 - Do not make promises you cannot keep - i.e., never promise that you will not tell anyone
 - Do not make judgements about the alleged abuser or defend the alleged perpetrator by making comments like, "I can't believe they did that."
 - Staff or leaders should never interview the concerned child in detail about any signs or symptoms and must never suggest to the child that he/she has been abused.
56. In all cases where any child or youth worker has reasonable cause to believe that a child or youth may be abused or neglected, the worker shall make a report to the Department of Family and Community Services - the local phone number is: 902-543-4554. If the child or youth worker is in doubt, then they will telephone the Department to discuss the situation with an intake worker to determine whether a report shall be made. The child or youth worker shall make a written record of the name of the Department person with whom he or she spoke and the recommendation made by the Department.
57. The incident shall also be reported to the Pastor or paid pastoral staff member. The reporter shall inform him or her of all relevant facts with respect to the incident of abuse. Upon receiving a report of an incident of abuse, the person receiving the report, together with the reporter, shall complete an Incident Report Form (**Appendix D**). However, in all cases where the alleged wrongdoer is a person to whom the report shall be made, he or she shall be considered absent for the purposes of this reporting procedure.
58. The individual will be immediately suspended from his or her position, in particular from any and all ministries and church programs, services, and activities that involve children and/or youth, pending the outcome of any investigation by civil authorities and any later internal investigation. The Church will seek to maintain confidentiality of information in relation to any allegation, report, disclosure, or suspicion of abuse, subject always to the need to protect children and youth.
59. The person receiving the report shall immediately contact parents or guardians of the alleged victim to inform each of them about the incident, and shall ensure each parent or guardian has been notified. If one parent or guardian is the alleged wrongdoer, the person receiving the report shall contact the other parent or guardian and inform him or her of the incident individually.
60. The person responding to the report shall notify the Deacons of the church. The Deacons will immediately contact its insurer in the event of an allegation, disclosure, report, or suspicion of the abuse of a child or youth.

61. If the incident of abuse involves a member of the clergy, the incident shall be reported to the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada for further consultation.
62. If possible, continue to keep the victim's family advised of the status of the investigations. If child abuse is confirmed, ask the victim and the victim's family what action they would like to take in the matter, and fully cooperate to address their request with the bounds of a legal and prudent response (church legal counsel should assist in this determination).
63. In instances where child abuse is confirmed, the church should immediately dismiss the worker from that position. Consideration of member termination should be considered, as appropriate in the circumstances, and shall be done in accordance with the Policy for Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution.
64. In cases where the evidence is inconclusive, the church must take action depending on the strength of the evidence available and after consideration of the victim's family's request.
65. Keep the congregation informed of the investigation with respect to matters which are not confidential, so that the congregation will hear about the investigation from within the church rather than from the news media.
66. The Church will remind all involved in such a situation that an individual is innocent until proven guilty and will refrain from any public disclosure of the individual's name or content of allegations, reports, disclosures, or suspicions, unless the individual himself or herself consents to the disclosure, or unless the safety of children or youth is put at risk by non-disclosure of this information, or unless or until the individual is charged with an offence and the information is made public by child welfare authorities, the police, or the court.
67. If an individual who receives a salary, wage, stipend, or other payment from the Church is the subject of an allegation, report, disclosure, or suspicion of abuse of a child/youth in the Church's care, the Church will consider whether payment should continue pending the outcome of the investigation of child welfare/protection authorities and/or the police. The Deacons will make this decision within 72 hours of an allegation, report, disclosure, or suspicion being reported to the child protection authorities and/or the police. The Deacons will communicate their decision in writing within twenty-four (24) hours to the individual.
68. The Deacons will appoint one individual to be the public spokesperson for the Church in the event of an allegation, disclosure, report, or suspicion of the abuse of a child or youth. No other person will speak for the Church on this matter. The Church shall emphasize its position on child abuse, its concern for the victim, and the steps being done to address the present occurrence and to reduce the risk and provide a safe environment for all children.

INSURANCE

69. The church shall obtain a sufficient level of liability insurance coverage that would cover child abuse and sexual misconduct claims.

CONCLUSION

70. Churches need to be prepared! This is the legal reason for creating safety policies, but there's a deeper, more significant reason – to protect the children. Policies are only printed expressions of the value placed on children. If the only reason for safety policies is to protect the organization, the church has missed God's love for children.

71. Some people may think that our church is too small or that our church “knows” everyone to worry about these safety problems. Remember it's much easier to make plans and develop safety policies as a means of prevention, rather than wait until they are needed as a reaction to an abuse case.

72. Some churches tend to take the biblical concept of trusting God to an extreme. They think nothing bad can happen to Christians. We must not be unwise regarding children's safety. There is no automatic protection from evil for the faithful. We're to watch and be ready. Accidents will always happen and unforeseen circumstances will need to be handled, but the church should always have safety policies in its ministries in order to protect children.

APPENDIX A: VULNERABLE SECTOR CHECK LETTER

PLEASANTVILLE BAPIST CHURCH
27 Church Road
Pleasantville, N.S. BOR 1G0

Founded 1869

DATE

To Whom It May Concern:

This is a letter to verify that _____, is a member or adherent of Pleasantville Baptist Church, which is a registered Canadian charity. He/she will be participating as a non-compensated volunteer in the ministry of this church. He/she will be in a position of trust and have authority over children and youth. We require a Vulnerable Sector Check in order for him/her to participate as a volunteer in the aforementioned areas.

Sincerely,

SIGNATURE AND POSITION

**APPENDIX B: DECLARATION OF UNDERSTANDING AND AGREEMENT WITH
POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR PREVENTION OF CHILD AND YOUTH ABUSE**

- I promise, in all my relationships with children and youth, to follow appropriate action as defined in this policy and explained through training or information received.
- I promise to use only the physical contact that is deemed appropriate by the document (Abuse prevention policy), which I have read and understand;
- I promise to use appropriate language;
- I promise to show no bias based on gender, ethnic background, skin colour, intelligence, age, religion, sexual orientation or socio-economic status;
- I promise that I will not harass others;
- I promise to respect confidentiality and privacy, unless a child, youth, or vulnerable adult is in danger, then I will report to a child protection agency or the police.
- I also promise, whether a member or adherent, to live by the principles of the relationship commitments as described in our Membership Covenant in order to be an example of following Jesus to the children and youth who are in my care.

My signature acknowledges my understanding and agreement with these guidelines.

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C: CHILD AND YOUTH ACTIVITY RELEASE FORM

Children/Youth will not be permitted to travel for activities without a signed permission form. By signing this form, parents/guardians are giving permission for their child to participate in and be transported for the noted activity, and are acknowledging the risks associated with travel and the participant(s) of the trip are assuming these risks.

I _____, the parent/guardian of _____
("my child/teenager"), give permission for my child/teenager to attend the:

Date of trip: _____ Departure Time: _____ Expected Return Time: _____

Health Card Number: _____ Expiry: _____

Home Phone: _____ Work: _____ Other: _____

Medications, Allergies, Health Concerns? _____

Alternative Emergency Contact: _____ Phone: _____

I waive any and all claims I may have against, and release all liability and agree not to sue, Pleasantville Baptist Church, its officers, employees, agents, volunteers, and representatives for any personal injury, paralysis, death, property damage, or any loss whatsoever sustained as a result of my child's participation in the activity, arising out of any cause whatsoever.

I agree to accept full responsibility, financially or otherwise, for any damage my child may do to the property of Pleasantville Baptist Church, properties visited on outing, other's personal property, or vehicles used for transportation.

Should an incident arise whereby my child requires medical attention, the person responsible for the church activity shall attempt to contact me in order to obtain my consent regarding all medical treatment to be carried out on my child. Should it not be possible to contact me, I hereby give my permission to the person responsible for the church activity to consent to any and all medical treatment for my child recommended as necessary by a physician. I agree to be liable for and to pay all costs incurred in connection with such medical attention.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D: INCIDENT OF SUSPECTED ABUSE REPORT

This report is for the purpose of reporting any incident of suspected abuse.

Name of person making report: _____

Position: _____

Date of Report: _____

Phone number: _____

Date of Incident: _____

Name(s) and Age(s) of Minor(s) _____

Briefly Describe What Happened: _____

Name any other potential witnesses _____

What action did you take? _____

Signature of person making report: _____

Report submitted to: _____

Date received: _____

APPENDIX E: POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF ABUSE

Some possible signs of child abuse and neglect are:

Unexplained injuries. Visible signs of physical abuse may include unexplained burns or bruises in the shape of objects. You may also hear unconvincing explanations of a child's injuries.

Changes in behaviour. Abuse can lead to many changes in a child's behaviour. Abused children often appear scared, anxious, depressed, withdrawn or more aggressive.

Returning to earlier behaviours. Abused children may display behaviours shown at earlier ages, such as thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, fear of the dark or strangers. For some children, even loss of acquired language or memory problems may be an issue.

Fear of going home. Abused children may express apprehension or anxiety about leaving school or about going places with the person who is abusing them.

Changes in eating. The stress, fear and anxiety caused by abuse can lead to changes in a child's eating behaviours, which may result in weight gain or weight loss.

Changes in sleeping. Abused children may have frequent nightmares or have difficulty falling asleep, and as a result may appear tired or fatigued.

Changes in school performance and attendance. Abused children may have difficulty concentrating in school or have excessive absences, sometimes due to adults trying to hide the children's injuries from authorities.

Lack of personal care or hygiene. Abused and neglected children may appear uncared for. They may present as consistently dirty and have severe body odour, or they may lack sufficient clothing for the weather.

Risk-taking behaviours. Young people who are being abused may engage in high-risk activities such as using drugs or alcohol or carrying a weapon.

Inappropriate sexual behaviours. Children who have been sexually abused may exhibit overly sexualized behaviour or use explicit sexual language.

Source: <https://www.brightfutures4kids.org/programs/signs-of-abuse/>