

Looking out for our 0-5 year olds

Boscoville supports the recommendations of the Commissioner, Ms. Régine Laurent, and the Government of Quebec to increase our collective vigilance for children at risk of abuse while currently confined within their families.

Abuse involves negligent, violent, or abusive acts that jeopardize the safety or development of the child. This can appear as inappropriate parenting practices such as physical correction, leaving the child unsupervised, denigrating or insulting the child, ignoring the child's needs, exposing the child to spousal violence, or failing to offer the stimulation necessary for the child's development.

Why are some children more vulnerable at the moment?

Child abuse has long lasting impacts on many different spheres of children's development and functioning, so it is important that we all take responsibility and keep our eyes open. This is especially important given our current living conditions as certain risk factors, like stress, social isolation, and job loss, can

- place families who were previously secure in a vulnerable situation;
- exacerbate the risk factors in vulnerable families.

Families are currently experiencing a higher level of stress than usual given that confinement combines both proximity and limited access to support structures. Children are relying heavily on their parents to meet their needs and the safety net provided by daycares is currently weakened, which unfortunately places some children in a very vulnerable situation.

How to remain vigilant in the face of child abuse

Maintain a connection with the child. The quality of the child's social support network and frequency of positive interactions with others is a protective factor. It is essential to keep in touch with the children in your group or your class, to contact families, to offer support when possible or to refer to various organizations that are still active during the crisis.

Signs to spot abuse

During your telephone or virtual communications, do not hesitate to ask questions directly to parents about their current situation and stay alert to signs of distress. Also, ask to speak directly to the child to hear from them.

Remember that from a developmental point of view toddlers are inclined to represent reality based on events that have occurred very recently. For example, they might tell you they haven't eaten if your call comes right after a snack is refused or tell you that their parents are fighting all the time if they just heard them raise their voices. Having said that, here are a few things you should pay attention to when speaking with children that may indicate the experience of abuse at home.

- The child says that they are left alone or that they are doing their daily routines alone.
- The child is aggressive during the encounter.
- The child is 'spacey' and lethargic while usually very energetic or vice versa.
- The child is silent when they are usually very talkative or vice versa.
- The child shows excessive fear or anxiety.
- The child says that there is nothing to eat.
- The child has visible marks on their body.
- The child puts themselves down or makes negative self-directed comments.
- The child seems to have regressed in development.

Remember, it is entirely normal for your contact with the children to elicit many emotions ranging from joy to sadness to anger. Children miss you, their friends, and their routine. Be proactive and listen carefully.

What to do if you are concerned about a child

Whatever the context, it is important that you share your concerns about the child's safety. You can:

- Call the DYP for a consultation without necessarily making a report
- Ask for help from your colleagues, educational advisors or the management of your daycare.

If a child discloses an act of abuse:

- Do not promise to keep what he/she tells you a secret
- Let the child know that you believe them
- Let the child speak freely and don't ask too many questions
- Let them know that they have made a good decision to tell you about what they experienced
- Listen actively to the child without judgment
- Remain warm and reassuring
- Stay calm and in caring contact with the child (leading questions may trigger or influence the child)
- Write down the words the child spoke as soon as you can

Report any concerning situations that compromise the safety and positive development of the child.

To make a report you can contact the DYP offices in your region. In case of emergency, call 9-1-1.

Who to contact for family support

If you think that a child and their family are going through a particularly difficult time, there are lots of organizations that can offer them the support that they need.

Here are some organizations that are offering phone or online services.

SOS violence conjugale : 1 800-363-9010

Tel-Aide : 514 935-1101

LigneParents : 1-800-361-5085 <http://ligneparents.com/>

Suicide Action Montréal : 1 866-277-3553

Première Ressource (aide aux parents) : 514 525-2573
<https://premiereressource.com/>

Info-Social : 811

Centre de Référence du Grand Montréal : 211

PRO-GAM : 514 270-8462 *

* Exceptionally, psychological follow-up for all