

Program Overview Guide



Helping Organizations Prevent Child Sexual Abuse





What is Commit to Kids?

COMMIT TO KIDS is a program to help organizations create safe environments for children. It provides strategies, policies, and a step-by-step plan for reducing the risk of child sexual abuse. The program encourages organizations to take an active, participatory role in protecting children in their care.

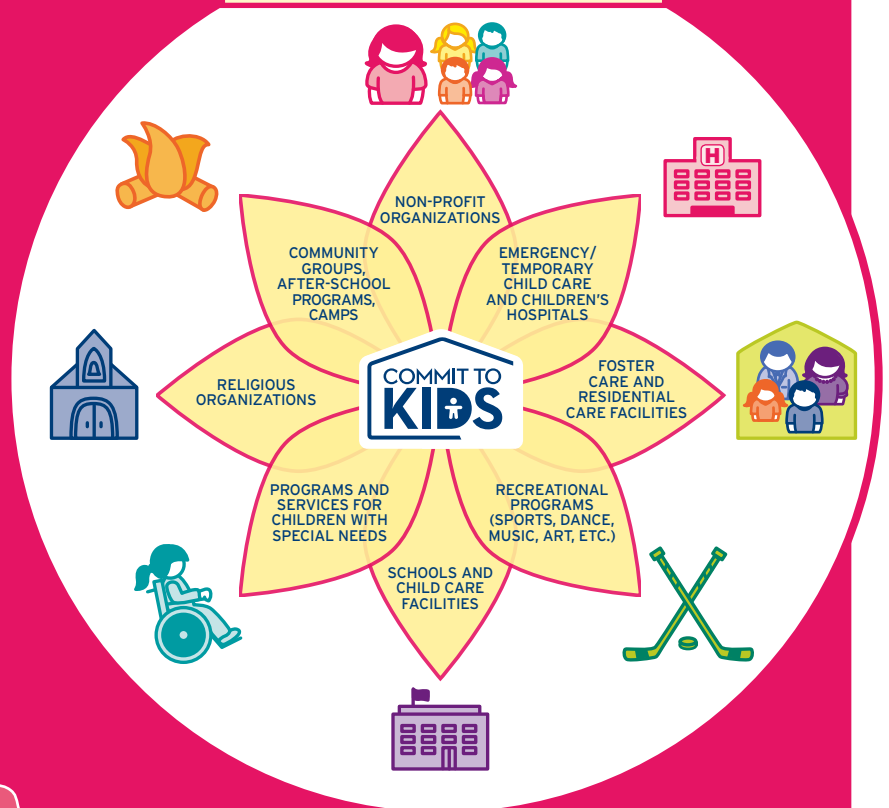
Sex offenders often intentionally target child-serving organizations.

WHO SHOULD USE THE COMMIT TO KIDS PROGRAM?

All organizations working with children and youth should implement this program.

COMMIT TO KIDS WILL HELP ORGANIZATIONS:

- Prevent child sexual abuse through increased awareness and education
- Teach employees/volunteers (who will then teach children) the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour
- Provide employees/volunteers with specific strategies on how to prevent abuse
- Design programs that focus on child safety and supervision
- Establish clear boundaries between employees/volunteers and children
- Ensure that allegations of abuse are handled in a sensitive, timely and effective manner
- Understand their legal obligation to report child sexual abuse
- Ensure the highest standard of practice when working with children



Children are especially vulnerable to victimization by adults who are well-known to them.



Step 1: Assess Your Organization

Before you begin, complete the child protection questionnaire found on page 19 of the Commit to Kids program to highlight any strengths and gaps in your organization for preventing child sexual abuse.



Step 2: Understand Child Sexual Abuse

In order to prevent child sexual abuse in organizations, it is first necessary to understand what child sexual abuse is, the offending process, disclosures of abuse, and its impact on victims. Without this understanding, organizations will not be able to implement effective prevention measures or identify when sexual abuse is taking place.

Child sexual abuse can occur through behaviours that do not involve actual physical contact between an adult and a child.

For example:

- Encouraging a child to touch themselves in a sexual way
- Exposing a child to sexual pictures
- Flashing or showing genital areas to a child
- Making sexually suggestive comments to a child

Sexual abuse almost always begins with subtle instances of inappropriate behaviour.

Grooming is the technique an offender uses to manipulate a child into trusting him/her and feeling comfortable so that s/he can gain and maintain sexual access to that child. Grooming usually begins with subtle behaviours that do not look inappropriate, or that suggest the offender is very good with children.

In the grooming process, the offender:

- Begins by establishing a friendship and gaining the child's trust
- Tests the child's boundaries perhaps by telling sexual jokes, deliberately walking in on the child when they are changing, or engaging in roughhousing, backrubs, tickling, or sexual games
- Progresses from non-sexual touching to "accidental" sexual touching. This can occur during play, so the child will not likely identify it as purposeful, inappropriate touching.

Grooming is often a slow, gradual, and escalating process of building trust and comfort with a child.

OUTCOME: Your organization will understand child sexual abuse, which is an important step toward preventing it.



Step 3: Manage Risk

Child sex offenders will take advantage of environments that are unsafe, lack protocols and supervision, and are careless in managing risks.

OUTCOME: Your organization will create a plan to reduce risk in the following areas:

- Organizational culture
- Programs, activities and services
- Physical space and environment
- Hiring
- Supervision
- Reporting abuse
- Suspension and dismissal
- Confidentiality

Child sexual abuse occurs when opportunity exists and organizations fail to pay attention.

SAMPLE: RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE				
Risk (examples)	Level of risk	Strategies to reduce risk	Lead individuals	Implementation date
Employees do not understand the issue of child sexual abuse and their obligation to report suspicions of abuse	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees will receive training on child sexual abuse • Employees will receive training on mandatory reporting for suspicions of child sexual abuse • Clear policies will be written to outline reporting procedures • Internal accountability and reporting chains will be established and clarified for employees/volunteers 	Director of human resources	January



Step 4: Create a Code of Conduct

A code of conduct is the most important tool an organization will develop to help establish boundaries between adults and children. It is a written overview of the organization's expectations regarding interactions with children, and it outlines that discipline will be enforced if expectations are not met. An organization should post its code of conduct and readily share it with everyone.

OUTCOME: Your organization will create and enforce a code of conduct.

Adults are often unsure about what constitutes misconduct so it tends to go unreported.

EXCERPT FROM A SAMPLE CODE OF CONDUCT

Employees/volunteers of our organization must NOT:

- Engage in any activity that goes against (or appears to go against) the organization's mandate, policies, or code of conduct, regardless of whether or not they are serving the organization at that moment
- Make any sort of remark, comment, or joke to/regarding a child that is in any way suggestive, explicit, or overly personal
- Engage in any sort of physical contact with a child that makes the child feel uncomfortable or that violates reasonable boundaries
- Offer the child any 'special' treatment that falls outside of the organization's mandate, or that may (or may appear to) place a child in any sort of risk of exploitation



Step 5: Hire the Right People

Hiring the right people is crucial to building a child-safe organization. A well-defined process that includes policies on recruitment, interviewing, screening, and employment offers will help keep sex offenders from working or volunteering in your organization.

Did you know criminal record checks do NOT:

- Identify arrests that did not result in convictions
- Necessarily include convictions from other jurisdictions in Canada

Did you know child abuse registry checks do NOT:

- Capture every individual who has abused a child

Interview Process:

Sex offenders do not look strange or act sinister. Rather than judging a candidate based on appearance, pay attention to situations and behaviours. Be aware of adults who seem to cross boundaries with children or have distorted perceptions of appropriate relationships. Ask situational and behavioural questions like:

- What would you do if a child in your organization said s/he was attracted to you?
- What age or gender do you like to work with? Why? Give some examples of your experience with this age group.

- What would you do if you noticed a child being picked on by another employee?
- How would you build a relationship with a child?

OUTCOME: Your organization will create a more robust process for recruiting, interviewing, screening and hiring better employees to work with children.

Child-serving organizations must have screening tools in place to ensure they hire the right people to work with children.



Step 6: Supervise and Monitor

Orientation, supervision, and monitoring are required to keep children safe in your organization. Child sexual abuse is more likely to occur in organizations that do not have these adequate structures in place.

Sex offenders often conceal inappropriate behaviour as legitimate job duties (spending extra time with a particular child, going on outings, seeking assistance from a child, etc.).

Ask yourself some of the following questions when creating an orientation process:

- What key policies and procedures do new employees/volunteers need to understand in order to work with children in the organization?
- What do new employees/volunteers need to understand to avoid inappropriate behaviour and prevent child sexual abuse?

Provide an opportunity for employees/volunteers to see how policies and procedures work in practice – how they apply to the day-to-day work of the organization. Give them numerous opportunities to ask questions and seek clarification.

Supervision is the key to:

- Ensuring that children are safe
- Creating opportunities for success
- Identifying and correcting inappropriate behaviour
- Strengthening general work performance and promoting accountability

Informal and formal employee/volunteer supervision provides opportunities to observe interactions between children and adults and helps detect early warning signs of misconduct. Supervision provides occasions to teach and model appropriate behaviour.

Monitoring performance allows supervisors to immediately address behaviours that require corrective action. This could prevent the inappropriate conduct from continuing or escalating to sexual abuse, and will help deter similar conduct in the future. Supervision should begin the first day a new employee/volunteer starts and should continue throughout employment.

OUTCOME: Your organization will learn how to create an orientation process for new employees/volunteers – your first opportunity to share child protection policies. You will also enhance employee/volunteer supervision while promoting clear communication and accountability.

Situations that require the greatest supervision are those where employees/volunteers spend one-on-one time with children. Proactively managing risk is essential in these instances.

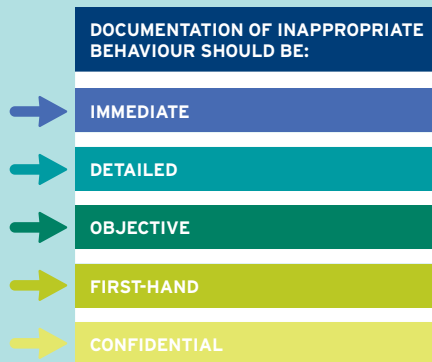


Step 7: Report Abuse and Misconduct

Children can only be protected if suspicions of child abuse or inappropriate behaviour are reported and action is taken. It is important for organizations to distinguish between:

- Disclosures or reasonable grounds to suspect child abuse
- An employee/volunteer's inappropriate behaviour or misconduct

Events must be considered together. A complaint may not seem like cause for concern when considered in isolation; however, when considered with other actions, behaviours, or complaints, may require serious and immediate action.



Employees/volunteers are more likely to report if:

- They know they are legally obligated to act on suspicions of abuse, and that they do not have to prove abuse
- The organization has a clear code of conduct, and policies and procedures regarding reporting
- They are clear about the process of reporting
- The organization will support them
- Confidentiality is maintained

It is critical that you control your reaction when hearing a disclosure.

A child will often delay disclosure or not disclose at all if s/he fears judgment.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE STEPS FOR REPORTING:



1 Child discloses abuse by an employee. (Document disclosure)



2 The employee/volunteer who receives the disclosure notifies the manager. (Document discussion)



3 Manager notifies the head of the organization.



4 Employee who receives disclosure notifies the appropriate child welfare agency about the incident and consults with child welfare about notifying parents. (Document discussion)

See your Reporting Tree for the rest of the steps.

OUTCOME: Your organization will learn about reporting obligations and the importance of addressing inappropriate behaviour.



Step 8: Write Policies and Procedures

In order to prevent child sexual abuse in organizations, child protection policies and procedures are essential. Such documents clearly state what will and will not be permitted by your organization. Child protection policies create barriers for sex offenders; the more regulations in place, the less likely an offender will want to work there.

Child protection policies help:

- Prevent sexual abuse and protect children who have been abused
- Promote early identification of sexual abuse
- Ensure all employees/volunteers understand what is expected of them in all circumstances
- Ensure that all complaints about employee/volunteer misconduct are investigated and evaluated fairly
- Address issues of confidentiality
- Enforce disciplinary action for employee/volunteer violations
- Recognize and abide by existing laws

OUTCOME: Child protection policies will be created in the areas of:

- Education and awareness
- Hiring
- Orientation and supervision
- Reporting and documenting complaints
- Suspension and dismissal
- Accountability and confidentiality
- Programs, services, and activities

SAMPLE POLICY: All employees/volunteers will be subject to criminal record, vulnerable sector screening, and child abuse registry checks every three years.



Step 9: Create Your Child Protection Manual

This is where you consolidate everything your organization has learned by creating a child protection manual. The manual is a summary of how your organization will use policies and procedures to protect the children in your care.

OUTCOME: Your organization will have a child protection manual that it can distribute to all employees/volunteers.



Step 10: Train Everyone

Training is required in the following areas for:

- **All new and existing employees/volunteers**
 - Recognizing and preventing child sexual abuse
 - Managing risk
 - Following the code of conduct
 - Policies and procedures, especially relating to reporting, documenting, and handling disclosure
 - How to teach prevention skills to children
- **Parents/guardians**
 - Your organization's child protection policies
 - Information on child sexual abuse and how offenders target children
 - Steps for handling a disclosure of abuse
 - Information on healthy development
 - How to talk to children about personal safety

→ **Children in the care of your organization**

- Risk and protective factors
- Communication and assertiveness
- Identifying and labelling emotions
- Appropriate boundaries and touching
- Healthy relationships

It is a good idea for employees/volunteers to attend annual training sessions. This is an excellent opportunity to review your child protection manual, discuss new policies and concerns, and rehearse sample case scenarios.

OUTCOME: Your organization will have trained employees/volunteers and parents on recognizing and preventing child sexual abuse, as well as on relevant child protection policies.

WHAT YOU WILL GET WITH THIS PROGRAM:

Commit to Kids program



Commit to Kids is operated by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection.

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection Inc. is a charitable organization dedicated to the personal safety of all children. Our goal is to reduce child victimization by providing programs and services to Canadians.

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection

615 Academy Road | Winnipeg MB R3N 0E7
800-532-9135

www.protectchildren.ca

DISCLAIMER: The Commit to Kids program is intended to provide assistance to organizations which provide services to children, to help make organizations safer for children and to assist organizations in meeting their obligations to protect children in their care. IT IS NOT INTENDED TO PROVIDE LEGAL ADVICE, and users of the program should not rely on the content for that purpose. Every effort has been made to provide accurate and up-to-date information, but the Commit to Kids program cannot take account of the particular legal obligations which may apply to an organization. You should seek legal advice before taking action which may create liability.