

# Teacher/Education Professional Guide



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## Introduction

Thank you for your interest in the Ontario Dress Purple Day Prevention Classroom Resources. This year, Ontario Dress Purple Day will take place on October 25, 2024. The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) worked with Boost Child & Youth Advocacy Centre and Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society to develop the classroom resources in response to feedback from education professionals who want more detailed messaging to make the day meaningful for their students.

The online classroom resources are built around the theme "It takes a community to care for kids." They are intended to support teachers and education professionals to engage with their students in conversations about safety and well-being in all aspects of their lives, helping adults in the community, and how to ask for help.

The classroom resources are evidence-based primary prevention materials, empowering students to think and act in positive ways appropriate for their age and stage of learning and development. The goal of the materials is to help all children and youth, regardless of the situation they are in, to acquire skills and attributes that lessen their vulnerability to harm. To learn more about the research informing the Ontario Dress Purple Day classroom resources, read the following articles: [Getting Help](#), [Self-Esteem](#), and [Physical Touch](#). Learn more about how the neglect of basic needs can impact children and youth [here](#).

The Ontario Dress Purple Day classroom resources include an equity perspective that discusses how intolerance and discrimination can be forms of emotional abuse, and reasons why children and youth may need to reach out for help from trusted adults. A youth's well-being is damaged when their gender identity, race, ability, sexual orientation, culture, language, and religion is not respected, and



when they encounter discrimination and prejudice at the individual level, as well as at the institutional and systems levels. At the individual level, [Children's Aid Societies](#) are legally mandated to protect children from abuse, including emotional abuse, from caregivers in the home and in the community. At the institutional level the [Ontario Human Rights Commission](#) investigates discrimination complaints that relate to services, workplaces, housing, and facilities.

Although these are serious topics, our goal is to leave students, teachers, and families feeling uplifted by the campaign's positive message that help is available and that nobody is alone.

As we partner on the Ontario Dress Purple Day campaign, we thank education professionals across Ontario for the difference they make every day in children's lives. Together, we can ensure the very best outcomes for all the children and youth in our community.

## About Children's Aid Societies

In Ontario, Children's Aid Societies have the exclusive legal responsibility to provide child protection services 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. If teachers and education professionals see or have reason to believe a child is in need of protection or is at risk of harm, they are legally required to call their [local Children's Aid Society](#). Children's Aid Societies work first and foremost to keep families together. To learn more about how a call to a Children's Aid Society leads to supports and services for children and families, see [Section 10](#) of this guide.

To learn more about how your call to a Children's Aid Society can help children and families, watch these testimonial videos:

- A [Children's Aid Society child protection worker](#) describes the steps she takes when she receives a call with a concern about the safety or well-being of a child.
- A [mother explains](#) how her family got to a better place with the help of a Children's Aid Society.
- A [teacher talks](#) about her experience working with a Children's Aid Society.

## About Ontario Dress Purple Day

Ontario Dress Purple Day, which is led by OACAS and child welfare agencies across the province, is a day of action to raise awareness about the community's responsibility to look after children and youth. This year, on October 25th, communities across Ontario will go purple and collectively speak up to share the message that children and youth have a right to safety and well-being and that help is available. As key partners in keeping kids safe, OACAS and child welfare agencies partner with boards of education, schools, and child care centres and homes to make Ontario Dress Purple Day a meaningful event.

The tag line and key message associated with Ontario Dress Purple Day is, "I dress purple to show I'm here for families." The social media hashtag for this day of action is [#IDressPurpleBecause](#).

## Why Engage Students in Ontario Dress Purple Day?

The focus of Ontario Dress Purple Day is to raise awareness about the role that adults in the community play in supporting the rights of children and youth to safety and well-being. Research shows that ensuring that children and youth are aware of helping adults in their support network is an important prevention tool. On Ontario Dress Purple Day students learn about their right to safety and well-being and the existence of networks of support to help them when they experience challenges.

All members of the community play a role in ensuring children’s safety and well-being, but teachers and other education professionals are in a unique position because they may be the only “helping” adult a child or youth encounters daily. Education professionals can be the vital link for a child or youth who is experiencing abuse or neglect at home or in the community.

## Ontario Dress Purple Day Prevention Classroom Resources: How the Lessons Work in Elementary Schools

OACAS worked with Boost Child & Youth Advocacy Centre and Windsor-Essex Children’s Aid Society to develop the Ontario Dress Purple Day Prevention Classroom Resources for elementary students. Both organizations have decades of experience teaching prevention in schools. The resources are intended to be useful and relevant for all students, regardless of whether they are experiencing abuse or neglect.

The intention of the classroom resources is to support educators with tools and information to make Ontario Dress Purple Day a meaningful learning opportunity for students. The resources, which are based on the theme, “It takes a community to care for kids,” are intended to help education professionals engage children and youth in conversations about safety and well-being, helping adults in the community, and how to ask for help. The resources also incorporate an equity perspective that includes racism, prejudice, intolerance, and systems abuse as reasons why children and youth might need to ask for help.

The Ontario Dress Purple Day Prevention Classroom Resources for elementary students are divided into four lessons. Each lesson offers material for the primary grades (JK – Grade 2) and junior grades (Grade 3 – 5). These lessons cover key messages around safety, well-being, and identifying networks of support, and are designed to be implemented leading up to Ontario Dress Purple Day on October 25, 2024. Each lesson contains: a summary describing the purpose of the lesson with background information for teachers; guided questions to introduce the concepts to students and engage discussion; and a classroom activity to reinforce each concept. Step-by-step instructions are provided to support teachers in planning and implementing the lessons. Connections to the Ontario Curriculum are also provided. It is recommended that the lessons be taught in order starting with Lesson 1, however, Lesson 4 can be used on its own to support Ontario Dress Purple Day on October 25, 2024.

## **Lesson 1: “It Takes a Community to Care for Kids”**

It is the responsibility of adults in the community to ensure children’s rights to safety and well-being, wherever they are. In this lesson, children identify adults in their community that they can turn to for help. They are also encouraged to keep telling until they get the help they need.

## **Lesson 2: “Safety in the Community”**

Healthy touch is integral to human relationships and, as a result, children need practice becoming in tune with their feelings about touch. In this lesson, children will learn about how to recognize their “uh-oh” feeling and apply it to situations involving inappropriate touch. They will also learn that there are no secrets about touch.

## **Lesson 3: “Well-being in the Community”**

The community is also responsible for ensuring the well-being of children. In this lesson, children learn that they have physical, emotional, social, and cognitive needs. They will also learn how to identify the adults in the community who can help them if these needs are unfulfilled.

## **Lesson 4: “Ontario Dress Purple Day: It Takes a Community to Care for Kids”**

On Ontario Dress Purple Day children join communities across the province and speak up for their rights to safety and well-being and how it takes a community to care for kids. This lesson engages children in fun activities to bring to life this positive message that help is available. This lesson reviews the key themes presented in previous lessons.

## **Ontario Dress Purple Day Prevention Classroom Resources: How the Lessons Work in Middle and High Schools**

To support Ontario Dress Purple Day in middle and high schools, OACAS has licensed prevention materials from Boost Child & Youth Advocacy Centre, an organization that has been teaching prevention in schools across the province for decades. The resources are intended to be useful and relevant for all students, regardless of whether they are experiencing abuse or neglect.

The classroom resources focus on self-esteem, healthy and unhealthy relationships, and the role of adults and social services in helping youth and their friends. The resources also incorporate an equity perspective that includes intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination as reasons why youth might need to ask for help. A youth’s well-being is damaged when their gender identity, race, ability, sexual orientation, culture, language, and religion is not respected, and when they encounter discrimination and prejudice at the individual level and at the institutional and systems level. At the individual level, [Children’s Aid Societies](#) are legally mandated to protect children from abuse,

including emotional abuse, from caregivers in the home and in the community. At the institutional level the [Ontario Human Rights Commission](#) investigates discrimination complaints that relate to services, workplaces, housing, and facilities.

The classroom resources for middle and high schools are based on the theme, “It takes a community to care for kids.” Research shows that older children and adolescents generally disclose to their peers, usually about maltreatment experiences involving same-age peers and not necessarily about maltreatment perpetrated by adults. Regardless of the type of abuse shared with peers, it is imperative to emphasize the necessity of adult involvement. Educating older children and adolescents around how to help their peers by asking for support from adults is an important piece in any personal safety or prevention program.

The classroom resources also include information about self-esteem. Research shows that high self-esteem, self-compassion, self-efficacy, and a perceived internal locus of control promote resilience and protect against the negative consequences of child and youth maltreatment and other life stressors.

The Ontario Dress Purple Day Classroom Resources for middle and high school students are divided into four lessons. Each lesson contains: a summary describing the purpose of the lesson with background information for teachers; guided questions to introduce the concepts to students and engage discussion; and grade-specific classroom activities that reinforce each concept. Step-by-step instructions are provided to support teachers in planning and implementing the lessons. Connections to the Ontario Curriculum are also provided. It is recommended that the lessons be taught in order, however Lesson 1 can be used on its own to support Ontario Dress Purple Day on October 25, 2024.

## **Lesson 1: “You are Not Alone – We Can Help”**

Youth have a right to safety and well-being in all the spaces they occupy. When youth are in distress or experiencing maltreatment the most important thing for them to do is to get help. In this lesson, students learn about the role of trusted adults in supporting them when they need help, the barriers that may get in the way of help, and strategies and resources for getting help for themselves and their peers.

## **Lesson 2: “Self-Esteem”**

A strong and positive sense of self-esteem can help youth cope with stress, seek out healthier relationships, and maintain boundaries. Youth with strong self-esteem are also more likely to reach out for help when their safety and well-being is at risk. This lesson looks at the different factors that can impact a youth’s self-esteem, including self-talk and relationships. This lesson also looks at how intolerance and prejudice can impact self-esteem.

### **Lesson 3: “Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships”**

Relationships can be complex and confusing to navigate, and so the ability to establish clear boundaries and recognize when relationships are becoming unhealthy is an important skill. In this lesson, youth learn about the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships, as well as strategies for maintaining healthy relationships, ending unhealthy relationships, and navigating the power dynamics within relationships. In this lesson respect for all people, regardless of their race, gender, sexual identity, culture, language, or religion, is shown to be key to healthy relationships.

### **Lesson 4: “Reasons to ask for help: Neglect, and Physical, Emotional, and Sexual Abuse”**

There are many kinds of maltreatment that can impact the safety and well-being of youth. This maltreatment can be perpetrated by adults in the home and community, and by peers. This lesson focuses on the reasons why youth may need to reach out for help, including neglect, and different kinds of abuse. The lesson includes intolerance and prejudice as forms of emotional abuse.

### **Information About Duty to Report**

“Duty to Report” describes the duty to make a report to a Children’s Aid Society if you have reasonable grounds to suspect a child or youth under the age of 16 is in need of help. This legal obligation to report concerns about the safety and well-being of a child is covered under [Section 125](#) of the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*. Under this section, every person who has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection must promptly report the suspicion and the information upon which it is based to a Children’s Aid Society. The Act recognizes that people working closely with children and youth have an enhanced responsibility to report their suspicions.

It is not necessary to be certain that a child or youth is or may be in need of protection to make a report to a Children’s Aid Society. “Reasonable grounds” refers to the information that somebody using honest judgment would need to decide to report. This standard has been recognized by courts in Ontario as establishing a low threshold for reporting. The mandate of the Children’s Aid Society is to investigate reports, using a clinical and standardized process. The person making the report should bring forward their concerns and the Children’s Aid Society will determine if there is a sufficient basis to warrant further assessment of the concerns about the child.

## Age of Protection

In 2018, the age of protection was raised to include youth up to 18 years old. Youth who are 16 and 17 years old are now eligible to receive protection services from Children's Aid Societies. While reporting for 16 and 17-year old youth is not mandatory, teachers and education professionals should contact their local Children's Aid Society if they have concerns about the safety or well-being of a youth.

## Privacy and Duty to Report

A document called "[Yes, You Can. Dispelling the Myths About Sharing Information with Children's Aid Societies](#)" jointly released by the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario and the Office of the Ombudsman and directed at professionals who work with children and youth, is a critical reminder that a call to a Children's Aid Society is not a privacy violation when it concerns the safety of a child or youth. In fact, professionals who work with children and youth have a special responsibility, as stated in the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*, to protect the safety and well-being of children and youth. Click [here](#) to read Section 125 of the Act.

## How Children's Aid Societies Respond to a Referral

Please read [Section 10](#) of this guide to learn about the process that Children's Aid Societies follow when receiving a referral from professionals and the public.

Children's Aid Societies work first and foremost to keep children safe within their families. It is very rare for children to be taken into care. Ontario's leading academic study on child abuse and neglect shows that children remained at home in 97 percent of Children's Aid Society investigations.<sup>1</sup>

## Overreporting of Indigenous and African Canadian Families in Child Welfare

The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies acknowledges that both Indigenous and African Canadian children and youth are overrepresented in child welfare due to systemic racism. Research indicates that many professionals overreport families based on stereotypes around racial identities.<sup>2</sup>

The overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth is due to the historical injustices perpetrated against First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities by the Canadian government and provincial child welfare systems. These injustices include residential schools and the Sixties Scoop. These colonial legacies have resulted in community impairment, intergenerational trauma, and the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in child welfare. The Ontario child welfare sector has unanimously agreed to prioritize Reconciliation with Indigenous communities through [nine key commitments](#), including reducing the number of Indigenous children in care. The commitments made by the Ontario child welfare sector represent an acknowledgement that it must do better, be

held accountable to results, and work in a framework that recognizes and supports Reconciliation with Indigenous communities.

The overrepresentation and inequity in outcomes for African Canadian families engaged with child welfare agencies is due to colonialism and systemic racism. African Canadian children are twice as likely to be reported to a Children's Aid Society but are actually no more likely than any other group of children to experience child maltreatment. In partnership with the Ontario African Canadian community and through the [One Vision One Voice](#) program, OACAS is taking steps to create a more equitable child welfare system by recognizing the role that systemic racism and colonialism plays in the overrepresentation of African Canadian families in the child welfare system.

Stereotypes around poverty can also lead to overreporting. While poverty is a risk factor for children and youth, it is not a cause of child maltreatment.

## How to Check Your Bias

Because they are an integral part of a child's life, it is critical that all teachers and education professionals understand overrepresentation in the child welfare system and how it occurs. Teachers and education professionals need to be aware of personal and systemic biases and stereotypes that may impact a decision to call a Children's Aid Society. To check their biases, teachers and education professionals are encouraged to "flip it." In other words, would they call if the individual was a white, affluent child?

Teachers and education professionals need to be aware of family and cultural differences. Factors such as ethnicity, religion, family structure, and history influence family practices. Child-rearing practices vary across families and cultures. There are various parenting practices that are not concerning but may differ from their own.

Behaviours of African Canadian children and youth in response to microaggressions from teachers, racial bullying by peers, or marginalization in the schools are sometimes incorrectly seen as reflecting issues within the home.

## References

<sup>1</sup> [Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect](#) (OIS), 2013

<sup>2</sup> King, B. et al, (2017), Factors associated with racial differences in child welfare investigative decision-making in Ontario, Canada, *Child Abuse and Neglect* (73)



## **Additional Duty to Report Resources:**

[The Ontario College of Teachers Professional Advisory: Duty to Report](#)

[Yes, You Can. Dispelling the Myths About Sharing Information with Children's Aid Societies](#)

In this video [a teacher talks](#) about her experience working with a Children's Aid Society.

[The Child, Youth and Family Services Act, Section 125](#)

## **Information About Neglect, and Physical, Sexual, and Emotional Abuse**

### **Consider the Facts**

- Neglect is a key factor in 89% of the children who receive services from Children's Aid Societies. Their families are struggling with chronic issues such as trauma, extreme financial stress, mental health, and addiction.<sup>1</sup>
- There were over 16,000 reports of children and youth victims who experienced violence by a family member in Canada in 2014.<sup>2</sup>
- 32% of Canadians have suffered child abuse (physical abuse, sexual abuse, exposure to intimate partner violence) in their lives.<sup>3</sup>
- 20% of Canadians were sexually abused as children.<sup>3</sup>
- Over 95% of child sexual offenders are people children know and trust, not strangers.<sup>4</sup>
- On any given night in Canada, 3,491 women and their 2,724 children sleep in shelters because it isn't safe at home.<sup>5</sup>

### **Definition**

Child abuse occurs when a caregiver, family member, or community caregiver, including teachers, child care staff, and coaches, having charge of the child commits an act of aggression against the child and the child is harmed. This harm may be physical, sexual, or emotional in nature. Child neglect can be more difficult to assess, as harm caused by the absence of something is not always readily apparent. It can be caused by the failure of parents or caregivers to meet a child's basic needs, including food, shelter, clothing, education, supervision, medical care, and safe surroundings.

Poverty is recognized as a risk factor in abuse and neglect cases, but it does not cause abuse and neglect. Children are also abused or neglected in families with higher socio-economic status. Most parents do not intend to hurt their children. And it doesn't mean that they don't love their children. It may mean that they need help and support to ensure their children are safe. The community, which includes Children's Aid Societies, has a responsibility to help.

## Types and Signs of Abuse and Neglect

To learn more about the types and signs of neglect and abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional, exposure to domestic violence, abandonment and separation, and caregiver incapacity, visit OACAS's website or click [here](#). To learn about the signs of abuse and neglect click [here](#). It is also important to remember that there are parenting practices that are not dangerous but may differ from a teacher or education professional's own parenting practices. To learn more about how referrals can lead to the overrepresentation of African Canadian families in the child welfare system, click [here](#). To learn more about the overrepresentation of Indigenous families and African Canadian families in the child welfare system, click [here](#).

## References

- <sup>1</sup> A 25 Year Perspective on Child Welfare Services in Ontario and Canada. Nico Trocmé, McGill University.
- <sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2014. Table 4-2. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2016001/article/14303/tbl/tbl4.2-eng.htm>
- <sup>3</sup> Canadian Medical Association Journal, Child Abuse and Mental Disorders In Canada. April 22, 2014.
- <sup>4</sup> Canadian Incidence Study (CIS) of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2003: Major Findings Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada. 2005. (pg.52)
- <sup>5</sup> DV: Shelters for Abused Women in Canada, 2014, Statistics Canada, Available at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2015001/article/14207-eng.htm>

## Responding to a Child or Youth Who Makes a Disclosure

The decision to report concerns to a Children's Aid Society can be based on a variety of factors, including observations of possible child abuse and neglect (see [Section 7](#) above for types and signs of abuse and neglect) or a disclosure from a child or youth.

If a child or youth discloses to a teacher or education professional that they are experiencing abuse or neglect, the teacher should:

- **Talk with the child or youth in private.** The teacher/education professional should limit distractions and provide the child or youth with full attention.
- **Explain their role.** The teacher/education professional should tell the child or youth that they will help. They should not promise to keep the disclosure secret.
- **Listen carefully.** The teacher/education professional should allow the child or youth to tell their story. They should remember that they do not have to prove the abuse or verify it.
- **Acknowledge the child or youth's situation and feelings.**

- **Commend the child or youth.** The teacher/education professional should tell the child or youth that they did the right thing and let them know the abuse is not their fault.
- **Believe the child or youth.** The type of response children or youth get upon disclosure can determine whether they will continue to disclose and get help. If a child or youth receives a positive response to their disclosure, it is more likely they will reach out again for help when needed.
- **Record the disclosure using the child or youth's words.** The teacher/education professional should take the time to make notes as accurately as possible.
- **Respect the child or youth's privacy.** Teachers/education professionals should not share disclosure details with colleagues. Respecting a child or youth's privacy does not interfere with a teacher or education professional's duty to report their concerns to a Children's Aid Society.

## Information About the Reporting Process for Educational Professionals

If teachers/education professionals see or have reason to believe a child or youth up to the age of 16 is in need of protection or is at risk of harm, they are legally required to call their [local Children's Aid Society](#). (Generally, agencies are either called a Children's Aid Society or Family and Children's Services.) A child protection worker is available to answer their call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The phone numbers for Children's Aid Societies across Ontario are available on the [OACAS website](#).

### The Reporting Process

- If the teacher/education professional believes the child or youth is in immediate danger, they should call police as well as their local Children's Aid Society.
- When the decision has been made to call a Children's Aid Society, teachers/education professionals should not consult or advise a parent or caregiver, as this may jeopardize the child or youth's safety. The Children's Aid Society will advise the teacher regarding any consultation with the parent.
- Teachers/education professionals do not have to be sure about concerns of child abuse or neglect to report concerns to the Children's Aid Society; they are asked to use their best judgement.
- Teachers/education professionals are not to undertake any investigation of the concerns. It is not their role or responsibility to determine whether abuse or neglect has occurred. Children's Aid Societies are responsible for investigating and assessing the need for protection or involvement.
- Teachers/education professionals who have a concern must call a Children's Aid Society directly themselves. They are not permitted to delegate their legal duty to report to any other person, including their supervisors.

- While confidentiality cannot be assured when making a report to a Children’s Aid Society, concerns regarding the identification of the reporter should be shared with the Children’s Aid Society.
- A teacher/education professional’s duty to report is ongoing. Even if a teacher/education professional has made a previous report, they must continue to make reports if they believe a child or youth still requires protection.
- Teachers/education professionals are required to report concerns even if the information has been shared with them in confidence.
- Teachers/education professionals should keep detailed notes about the circumstances informing their concerns.
- Teachers/education professionals should also remember that child-rearing practices vary across cultures. There are different parenting practices that are not dangerous but may differ from the teacher’s own parenting practices.
- Child protection workers will ask for information about the child or youth concerned, including their family name, address, date of birth, and other children in the household. Teachers/education professionals will also be asked to provide information about the person alleged to have caused the concern, including name, relationship to the child or youth, address, phone number, place of work, as well as that person’s current whereabouts. The child protection worker will want to know the teacher’s specific concerns and how they became aware of them.
- The child protection worker will also ask about the functioning of the child or youth and family, the child and family’s support network, the family’s ethnic origin, first language, and religion, and whether the child and family is Indigenous. The worker will also inquire about any known worker safety issues.

## How Children’s Aid Societies Support Children and Families

In Ontario, Children’s Aid Societies have the exclusive legal responsibility to provide child protection services 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The activities and purpose of a Children’s Aid Society are set out in the [Child, Youth and Family Services Act](#).

When a teacher/education professional calls a Children’s Aid Society with a concern, the call is answered by an authorized child protection worker who assesses the referral information provided using [comprehensive guidelines](#) to determine eligibility. (In this video a [Children’s Aid Society child protection worker](#) describes the steps she takes when she receives a call with a concern about the safety or well-being of a child.)

The Children’s Aid Society will review and assess all available information, using the referral information, a records review, and their clinical judgment. The Children’s Aid Society will analyze known protective factors and safety concerns and determine whether an investigation is required or whether the child or youth and family need to be linked to other supportive community services. If a

child or youth is assessed to be in imminent danger, a child protection worker will respond immediately.

If ongoing involvement with a child or youth and family is required, the Children's Aid Society's focus shifts from questioning whether the child or youth is in need of protection, to improving factors related to child and youth safety and well-being in the home. In the vast majority of cases, children and youth remain with their families while receiving help from a Children's Aid Society. A child protection worker engages the child or youth and family and develops a service plan in collaboration with the family. This plan serves as a roadmap to build strengths and reduce risk, so that the family no longer requires child protection services. To assist a family in achieving this outcome, the Children's Aid Society may connect them with community support services, such as parenting or treatment programs for issues such as addictions, mental health, and trauma. Children's Aid Societies would not be able to do its work without the network of community services and resources that provide critical services for vulnerable families.

This focus on in-home, early intervention is part of the transformation of the Ontario child welfare system that started a decade ago. This approach recognizes that early intervention can reduce the need for more intrusive services later.

In this video, [a mother explains](#) how her family got to a better place with the help of the Children's Aid Society.