



Teacher Guide

Dress Purple Day Classroom Resources

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Ontario Association of
Children's Aid Societies

The voice of child welfare in Ontario

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1. Introduction

Thank you for your interest in the Dress Purple Classroom Resources. This year Dress Purple Day will take place on October 24th, 2017. The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) has worked with Boost Child & Youth Advocacy Centre and Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society to develop the resources in response to feedback from schools and teachers looking for more detailed messaging to provide their students during Child Abuse Prevention Month (CAPM) and Dress Purple Day. The classroom resources are built around the theme "It takes a village to keep kids safe." The purpose of the classroom resources is to assist teachers to talk about child abuse and neglect in an age appropriate manner and to help raise awareness among children about how to ask for help from adults in the community.

Although it is a serious topic, our goal is to leave students, teachers, and families feeling supported and informed. By talking about difficult topics, we can get the help and support we need to ensure the safety and well-being of all children. Abuse thrives in a climate of secrecy and silence. Through education and awareness, and with courage and compassion, we can shine a light into those dark corners to keep children safe.

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 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 an offer of help, see [section ten](#) of this document.

As we embark on this journey together, we thank teachers and school staff across Ontario for the difference they make in children's lives every day. Together, we can ensure the very best outcomes for all the children in our community "village".

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 the Children's Aid Society.

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

2. About Child Abuse Prevention Month (CAPM)

The CAPM campaign, which is marking its 25th anniversary this year in Ontario, takes place annually during the month of October. The campaign is symbolized by a purple ribbon. The campaign was originally launched by the [International Order of Foresters](#), but has been led by OACAS and Children's Aid Societies since 1992. The focus of CAPM is to raise awareness in the community about the important role we all play in helping to protect children and youth from abuse and neglect. This includes raising awareness about the types and signs of abuse and neglect, and the community's legal duty to report concerns about the safety and well-being of a child.

3. About Dress Purple Day

Dress Purple Day is a day of action to support the CAPM campaign's focus on the community's responsibility to look after children and youth. This year, on October 24th, communities across Ontario will wear purple and collectively speak up to share the message that child abuse and neglect can be prevented and that help is available. As key partners in keeping kids safe, OACAS, Children's Aid Societies, boards of education, and schools are increasingly working together to make Dress Purple Day a meaningful event.

The tag line and key message associated with Dress Purple Day is "It takes a village to keep kids safe." The social media hashtag for this day of action is #IBREAKthesilence.

4. Why engage students and schools on Dress Purple Day?

The focus of CAPM and Dress Purple Day is to raise awareness about the role that adults in the community play in preventing child abuse and neglect. Ensuring that children are aware of helping adults in their support network is an important prevention tool for children and youth. On Dress Purple Day students learn about their right to safety and well-being, the importance of getting help from adults in the community, and the importance of continuing to ask for help until they get it.

Each member of the village plays a role in ensuring children's safety and well-being. A teacher may be the only "helping" adult that a child encounters on a daily basis. Teachers can be the vital link for a child who may be abused or neglected.

5. Dress Purple Day Classroom Resources: How the lessons work

OACAS has worked with Boost Child & Youth Advocacy Centre and Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society to develop the Dress Purple Day Classroom Resources. Both organizations have decades of experience teaching prevention in schools. This year, the classroom resources are directed at students in junior kindergarten to grade five classes, with the goal of expanding support to middle and high school grades next year.

The intention of these classroom resources is to support educators with tools and information to make Dress Purple Day at their schools a meaningful event that provides students, teachers, and families with the knowledge to help prevent child abuse and neglect. These resources, which are based on the theme “It takes a village to keep kids safe,” will help teachers to engage children in conversations about safety and well-being, helping adults in the community, and how to ask for help.

The Dress Purple Day Classroom Resources are divided into four lessons:

1. “It Takes a Village to Keep Kids Safe,”
2. “Safety in the Village,”
3. “Well-being in the Village,” and
4. “Dress Purple Day: #IBREAKthesilence”.

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 getting help, and are designed to be implemented during CAPM leading up to Dress Purple Day on October 24th, 2017. 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 that reinforces 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 as a single event day on October 24th, 2017.

Click [here](#) for Dress Purple Day Classroom Resources.

6. 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 is in need of help. This legal obligation to report concerns about the safety and well-being of a child is covered under [Section 72](#) of the Child 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 have an enhanced responsibility to report their suspicions.

It is not necessary to be certain that a child 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 in order to decide to report. This standard has been recognized by courts in Ontario as establishing a low threshold for reporting. The role 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.

A document called "[Yes, You Can. Dispelling the Myths About Sharing Information with Children's Aid Societies](#)" has been jointly released by the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario and the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. The document, targeted at professionals who work with children, 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. In fact, professionals who work with children have a special responsibility, as stated in the *Child and Family Services Act*, to protect the safety and well-being of children. [Click here to read Section 72 of the Act.](#)

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. ([Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect](#) (OIS), 2013)

** The Child and Family Services Act will be replaced by the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017 when it is proclaimed into law. This is expected to happen in two stages. In Fall 2017, provisions regarding services to 16 and 17-year-old youth (raising the age of protection) are expected to be proclaimed. In Spring 2018, all other parts of the Act are expected to be proclaimed.*

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 and Family Services Act, Section 72](#)

7. Information about child abuse and neglect

Consider the facts:

- ❖ Neglect is a key factor in 89 percent of the children who receive services from Children's Aid Societies. Their families are struggling with chronic issues such as trauma, mental health, and addiction.¹
- ❖ There were over 16,000 reports of children and youth victims who experienced violence by a family member in Canada in 2014.²

- ❖ 32% of Canadians have suffered child abuse (physical abuse, sexual abuse, exposure to intimate partner violence) in their lives.³
- ❖ 20% of Canadians were sexually abused as children.³
- ❖ Over 95 percent of child sexual offenders are people our children know and trust, not strangers.⁴
- ❖ On any given night in Canada, 3,491 women and their 2,724 children sleep in shelters because it isn't safe at home.⁵

Definition:

Child abuse occurs when a caregiver, family member, or community caregiver 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. Although poverty can be a risk factor, 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 "village", 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, click [here](#).

You can also download our brochure which lists the types and signs of abuse [here](#).

It is also important to remember that there are parenting practices that are not dangerous, but may differ from a teacher'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:

¹ *A 25 Year Perspective on Child Welfare Services in Ontario and Canada*. Nico Trocmé, McGill University.

² *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile. Table 4-2*. Statistics Canada. 2014. Available at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2016001/article/14303/tbl/tbl4.2-eng.htm>

³ *Canadian Medical Association Journal, Child Abuse and Mental Disorders In Canada. April 22, 2014.*

⁴ *Canadian Incidence Study (CIS) of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2003: Major Findings Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada. 2005. (pg.52)*

⁵ *DV: Shelters for Abused Women in Canada. Statistics Canada. 2014. Available at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2015001/article/14207-eng.htm>*

8. Responding to a child 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 "[Information about child abuse and neglect](#)" above for types and signs of abuse and neglect) or a disclosure from a child.

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

- **Talk with the child in private.** The teacher should limit distractions and provide the child with full attention.
- **Explain their role.** The teacher should tell the child that they will help. The teacher should not promise to keep the disclosure secret.
- **Listen carefully.** The teacher should allow the child to tell their story. The teacher should remember that they do not have to prove the abuse or verify it.
- **Acknowledge** the child's situation and feelings.
- **Commend the child.** The teacher should tell the child that they did the right thing and let them know the abuse is not their fault.
- **Believe the child.** The type of response children get upon disclosure can determine whether they will continue to disclose and get help. If a child 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's words.** The teacher should take the time to make notes as accurately as possible.
- **Respect the child's privacy.** Teachers should not share disclosure details with colleagues. Respecting a child's privacy does not interfere with a teacher's duty to report their concerns to a Children's Aid Society.

9. Information about the reporting process for teachers

If teachers 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](#) [Generally agencies are either called

The 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 at www.oacas.org.

The reporting process:

- If the teacher believes the child 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 should not consult or advise a parent or caregiver, as this may jeopardize the child's safety. The Children's Aid Society will advise the teacher regarding any consultation with the parent.
- Teachers 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 are not to undertake any investigation of the concerns. It is not the teacher's 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 who have a concern must call a Children's Aid Society directly. Teachers 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 referent should be shared with the Children's Aid Society.
- A teacher's duty to report is ongoing. Even if a teacher has made a previous report, they must continue to make reports if they believe a child still requires protection.
- Teachers are required to report concerns even if the information has been shared with them in confidence.
- Teachers should keep detailed notes about the circumstances informing their concerns.
- Teachers 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 concerned, including their family name, address, date of birth, and other children in the household. Teachers will also be asked to provide information about the person alleged to have caused the concern, including name, relationship to the child, 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 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.

10. Children's Aid Can Help: How your call helps to 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 and Family Services Act*.*

When a teacher 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 and family needs to be linked to other supportive community services. If a child is assessed to be in imminent danger, a child protection worker will respond immediately.

If ongoing involvement with a child and family is required, the Children's Aid Society's focus shifts from questioning whether the child is in need of protection, to improving factors related to child safety and well-being in the home. In the vast majority of cases children remain with their families while receiving help from a Children's Aid Society. A child protection worker engages the child and family, developing a service plan in collaboration with the family. This plan serves as a roadmap for building strengths and reducing risk, to the extent 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.

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