



Lesson 1: You Are Not Alone – Ask for Help

Lesson Introduction

Youth have a right to safety and well-being in all the spaces they occupy, including home and school. Safety includes physical as well as psychological, emotional, social, cultural, and spiritual well-being. When youth are in distress or experiencing maltreatment, and any of their basic needs are not being met, the most important thing for them to do is to get help from a trusted adult or community organization. It is the responsibility of the adults in a youth's life to intervene when youth need help. Youth need to know who they can get help from and how this process might unfold. Youth should also be encouraged to keep telling until they get the help they need. It is possible that the first person or resource they approach may not provide adequate support, and youth need to persist until they receive the type of help that is right for them.

The focus of this lesson is on raising awareness among youth about the role of trusted adults and organizations in supporting them when they need help, and identifying the barriers that can get in the way of youth reaching out for help. This module will also support youth to explore strategies and resources for getting help both for themselves and for their peers.

There are a variety of barriers that may prevent youth from disclosing their experiences of maltreatment. For example, a youth's anxiety that they will not be believed and the fear of perceived negative consequences that disclosure could have for them and their family are examples of barriers that can prevent youth from seeking help (Alaggia, 2010; Crisma, et al., 2004; Jensen, et al., 2005; Paine & Hansen, 2002; Ungar, et al., 2009). Gender, sexual orientation, and cultural factors can also impact a youth's decisions around disclosure. Youth who come from communities that experience racism, intolerance, and prejudice because of their identities may be concerned that they will not have access to a racially and culturally appropriate response to their disclosures. Adults who work with youth and are on the receiving end of requests for help need to be aware of these potential barriers to disclosure, and need to work with youth to overcome these barriers. This support can include providing a safe space for youth to discuss these barriers and helping to identify resources for getting help.

It has been found that younger children are more likely to disclose abuse to adults, whereas youth more often turn to their peers for support (Kogan, 2004; Shackel, 2009; Ungar, et al., 2009). When disclosing to peers, youth are more likely to share their experiences of maltreatment involving same-age peers, and less likely to share information about abuse perpetrated by adults. When a friend or peer discloses to them, it is important that the youth understands that they are not responsible for directly intervening and should immediately get help for their peer from a

trusted adult. Regardless of the type of experiences shared with peers, adult involvement is necessary for prevention and intervention. It is important to emphasize that youth should immediately get help from a trusted adult when they or their friends are in distress or are experiencing maltreatment.

Children's Aid Societies are legally mandated to protect children from neglect and physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, from caregivers in the home and in the community. In 2018, the age of protection for youth was raised from 16 to 18 years of age. Youth who are 16 and 17-years-old are now eligible to receive protection services from Children's Aid Societies.

Key Themes

1. Many adults want to help kids/youth
2. You may need to tell more than one adult about your situation to get the help you need because they may not understand you or may not know what to do
3. Never give up; keep telling until you get the help you need
4. Although it is great to go to friends for help, our friends don't always have the answers or access to resources that may be needed to solve the problem
5. If you don't have an adult in your life that you trust, Kids Help Phone, Naseeha Youth Helpline, Black Youth Helpline, and LGBT Youthline are examples of safe, confidential and anonymous resources where you can talk with a trusted adult about a worry or problem, or to get help for a friend. Children's Aid Societies, which are legally mandated to protect children and youth from abuse and neglect, are another resource if you need help. If you come from a community that experiences racism, intolerance, or prejudice, please see the handout Organizations and Resources that Support Youth, which includes racially and culturally sensitive organizations that can help you or a friend.

Learning Outcomes

1. Increase awareness of how and when to get help for yourself or for a friend.

Learning Objectives

1. Identify some common situations where youth need help
2. Identify barriers to getting help
3. Identify strategies that can be used to get help in a way that is safe
4. Identify who to go to for help
5. Identify ways to support friends and contribute to helping one another

Introduction Discussion Questions

(Possible answers are provided in italics. These can be used as guidance if students are having difficulty answering the questions.)

- 1) Who are the people you could go to if you had a worry or problem?
 - *Mother, father, aunt, uncle, grandmother, grandfather, sibling, cousin, etc.*
 - *Teacher, social worker, guidance counselor, principal, etc.*
 - *Community leader, religious leader, babysitter, neighbour*
 - *Agencies/resources such as Children's Aid Societies, Kids Help Phone, Black Youth Helpline, Naseeha Youth Helpline, LGBT Youth Helpline, Ontario Child Advocate*

- 2) What are some of the barriers you may encounter when trying to get help for yourself or others?
 - *People's reactions – they might get angry or might not believe what you have to say*
 - *Past experiences with getting help – you have tried to get help in the past and it did not work*
 - *Uncertainty about what will happen next – feeling anxious about the consequences of telling (e.g., reactions of adults and/or peers)*
 - *Family and cultural influences and taboos – you have been told that certain things are meant to be kept in the family and not spoken about outside the home*
 - *Safety of self and others – you might be afraid getting help could cause more harm*
 - *Power dynamics – the person who is harming you has power over you and you are afraid of their reaction if they find out you are getting help; you don't want to put the person who is hurting you in jeopardy*
 - *Loyalty – the person who told you about their problem asked you to keep it a secret*

- 3) Why is breaking these barriers important?
 - *Getting help is not snitching because it concerns your safety or the safety of another*
 - *Even if adults have told you to mind your own business when trying to help another, it is everyone's business when it comes to the safety and well-being of children and youth*
 - *Not every adult may know how to help and that is why it is important to keep telling until you get the kind of help that is right for you*
 - *Problems can get bigger without help*
 - *You might be worried about what happens after getting help; there is a chance that things may get a little complicated and won't be fixed right away, but eventually it will get better*
 - *If a person is threatening you to keep quiet, there is nothing stopping them from following through on threats, even if you don't tell. It is important to get help from trusted adults for your safety or the safety of the person you are getting help for*
 - *By not telling, you are allowing the person doing the harm to be in control of the situation. By telling, you can take away this control*

- 4) What are the various ways you can get help?
- *Talk with a trusted adult*
 - *Text/e-mail a trusted adult*
 - *Go with a friend to talk with a trusted adult*
 - *Be persistent; keep telling until you get the help you need*
 - *Access community resources such as Kids Help Phone, Naseeha Youth Helpline, Black Youth Helpline, and LGBT Youthline) e.g., speaking to a counsellor over the phone or through online chat). Children’s Aid Societies, which are legally mandated to protect children and youth from abuse and neglect, are another resource if you need help.*
- 5) What are some of the social service organizations or systems that can provide help to youth? (see Handout of Resources that Support Youth)
- *Children’s Aid Societies*
 - *Kids Help Phone*
 - *Black Youth Helpline*
 - *Naseeha Youth Helpline*
 - *LGBT Youthline*
 - *Indigenous Friendship Centres*
 - *Adolescent Mental Health and Addictions Centres*
 - *Black Queer Youth Initiative*
 - *Ontario Child Advocate*
 - *Police, for emergencies when you or a friend are in immediate danger*
- 6) What are some of the barriers that might prevent social service organizations or systems from giving youth the help they need?
- *Youth might not know about the social services available/Information is not readily available*
 - *Youth might be anxious about what involving a social services organization would entail*
 - *Age limitations (as stipulated by legislation)*
 - *Social services organization might move too slowly*
 - *Might be difficult to get to the social service organization location during their hours*
 - *Social services organization might not offer racially or culturally sensitive services*

Activity

- [Link to Activity 1: Identifying Trusted Adults for Getting Help](#)
- [Link to Activity 2: Kids Help Phone Website & Other Resources](#)

Relevant Ontario Curriculum Expectations

Grade 7:

Health and Physical Education:

Strand D Healthy Living Specific Expectations

- D1.1, D2.2

Grade 8:

Health and Physical Education:

Strand D Healthy Living Specific Expectations

- D1.4, D2.2, D3.2

Grade 9:

Health and Physical Education:

Healthy Living Strand

- C3.2

Grade 10:

Health and Physical Education:

Healthy Living Strand

- C2.3

Grade 11:

Health and Physical Education:

Healthy Living Strand

- C1.3, C2.1, C3.3

Grade 12:

Health and Physical Education:

Healthy Living Strand

- C2.2, C3.2

References

1. Alaggia, R. (2010). An ecological analysis of child sexual abuse disclosure: Considerations for child and adolescent mental health. *Journal of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 19*(1), 32-39.
2. Crisma, M., Bascelli, E., Paci, D., & Romito, P. (2004). Adolescents who experienced sexual abuse: fears, needs, and impediments to disclosure. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 28*, 1035-1048.
3. Jensen, T.K., Gulbrandsen, W., Mossige, S., Reichelt, S., & Tjersland, O.A. (2005). Reporting possible sexual abuse: A qualitative study on children's perspectives and the context for disclosure. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 29*, 1395-1413.
4. Kogan, S.M. (2004). Disclosing unwanted sexual experiences: Result from a national sample of adolescent women. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 28*, 147-165.
5. Paine, M.L., & Hanse, D.J. (2002). Factors influencing children to self-disclose sexual abuse. *Clinical Psychology Review, 22*, 271-295.
6. Shackel, R. (2009). Understanding children's medium for disclosing sexual abuse: A tool for overcoming potential misconceptions in the courtroom. *Psychiatry, Psychology, and Law, 16*, 379-393.
7. Ungar, M., Tutty, L.M., McConnell, S., Barter, K., & Fairholm, J. (2009). What Canadian youth tell us about disclosing abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 33*, 699-708.