

Ontario Dress Purple Day: Lesson 4



Lesson 4: Reasons to Ask for Help – Neglect and Physical, Emotional, and Sexual Abuse

Lesson Introduction

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 also by peers. Maltreatment can be physical and sexual, and includes gender-based violence and dating violence.

Maltreatment can include neglect, which is the failure to meet a youth's basic needs so they can thrive. Ontario child welfare research shows that the majority of protection cases involve children and youth whose caregivers are not able to meet their basic needs because they are facing chronic challenges such as mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, social isolation, and extreme financial stress. Child welfare research also shows that neglect or "endangered development and well-being" can often be more damaging than any other kind of maltreatment.¹ Finally, maltreatment can be emotional, and includes racism, intolerance, and prejudice, gender-based violence, and systemic discrimination. 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.

Many research studies have examined the negative effects of maltreatment on child and youth development. These effects range from physical, psychological, emotional, and interpersonal difficulties (Cichetti, 2016). Research shows that individuals who have experienced maltreatment during their childhood have more difficulties with relationships throughout their lives (Colman & Widom, 2004). A child's experience of racism in schools and in their community, can lead to adverse physical, social, and psychological health impacts. Gender-based violence and dating violence also have significant long-term consequences for youth, such as a higher likelihood of engaging in physical fights, sexual activity, binge drinking, drug use, and increased suicidality (Ackard, 2007). These findings point to the importance of helping youth, and the adults in their lives, to understand the various kinds of maltreatment to facilitate the intervention and prevention they need.

¹ Trocmé, N. (2017), A 25 Year Perspective on Child Welfare Services in Ontario and Canada.

The focus of this lesson is to help youth understand the different types of maltreatment so that they have the tools and language to reach out for help, which is one of the most effective ways of facilitating intervention and prevention. Building their understanding involves dispelling some of the misconceptions and stereotypes around maltreatment (e.g., only physical abuse is “real” abuse, etc.).

Key Themes

1. There are many kinds of abuse, including physical, sexual, and emotional harm.
2. Racism, intolerance, and prejudice are forms of emotional abuse.
3. Neglect of basic needs is another reason why youth may need to reach out for help.
4. Organizations and systems can also create harm. They can have patterns of behaviour, programs, and policies that don’t respect the rights of certain groups of people.
5. In physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, abusers use power to get you to do what they want (not what you want).
6. In physical, sexual, and emotional abuse abusers can gain power in the relationship in many ways (i.e., through threats, humiliation, guilt, force, pressure, minimizing, secrecy, bribes).
7. In physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, abusers are responsible for the abuse. Abuse is never the victim’s fault.
8. Many families struggle with chronic challenges such as mental health, addictions, and extreme financial stress, which can make it difficult for them to support the basic needs of their children. Children and youth in this situation also need help.

Learning Outcomes

1. Increase knowledge about the kinds of abuse that can impact a youth’s safety and well-being.
2. Increase knowledge about the kinds of relationship and situations where there might be abuse.
3. Increase knowledge about neglect and how it can impact well-being.

Learning Objectives

1. Increase knowledge of prevalent myths and stereotypes about abuse.
2. Define abuse, violence, and types of harm, including racism, intolerance, and prejudice in a variety of relationships and contexts (peer, family, community, online, institutions/systems).
3. Increase knowledge about basic needs and their connection to well-being.
4. Identify how secrecy and other tricks are used to manipulate and keep abuse hidden.
5. Increase awareness of the impact of abuse on different individuals (victims, aggressors, bystanders, etc.).

Introduction Discussion Questions

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

1. What is abuse?

- Any behaviour that is used to scare, harm, threaten, control, or intimidate another person
- Abuse can happen in all kinds of relationships (i.e., friendships, family, romantic relationships, online acquaintances, relationships where one individual has authority - e.g. teachers and coaches)
- Abuse can take on different forms (physical, sexual, emotional) and all forms have negative effects
- Neglect of basic needs also has a very negative impact on the well-being of youth
- Organizations and systems can also create harm. They can have patterns of behaviour, programs, and policies that don't respect the rights of certain groups of people. (e.g. Taking Indigenous children out of their communities and sending them to residential schools, and the Sixties Scoop are examples of systemic harm.)

2. What does an abusive relationship look like?

- Physical: hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, etc.
- Sexual: unwanted touching, forcing sexual behaviour, etc.
- Emotional: Racism, name calling, put-downs, playing mind games, using jealousy, threatening behaviours, manipulation, etc.
- Any of the above on its own qualifies as abuse and can have severe negative consequences, and these kinds of abuse can also occur simultaneously
- The victim in the relationship cannot express themselves without the other person in power trying to control them
- Abuse can happen to anyone and can happen in all types of relationships

3. What are the kinds of tactics that abusers use to sustain an abusive relationship?

- Abuse and violence often happens under a veil of secrecy and the abuser will often tell the victim to keep the relationship and the abuse a secret
- Abusers may use threats, bribes, guilt, shame, bullying, humiliation, grooming, manipulation to continue an abusive relationship

4. How might neglect be different from some of the other kinds of abuse described above?

- Doesn't necessarily happen intentionally.
- In many cases, caregivers are facing challenges that make it difficult for them to have access to resources or to make the right decisions for their children such as mental health, addictions, and extreme financial stress
- In many situations it is a societal problem, such as lack of housing or employment, that is contributing to the neglect

5. Why is it still important to help somebody who is dealing with neglect?
 - *The impact of neglect can be just as severe as physical, sexual, and emotional abuse*
 - *Our well-being completely depends on our basic needs for food, shelter, education, culture, and spirituality*
6. How is racism, intolerance, and prejudice a form of abuse?
 - *Creates emotional harm*
 - *Damages basic need to have identity and culture respected*
7. What does systemic discrimination mean?
 - *Refers to patterns of behaviour, programs, and policies at organizations and institutions that negatively impact or harm certain groups of people*
 - *These programs and policies are supposed to work well for everyone, but instead work better for some people than others, often unintentionally or inadvertently*
8. What are some examples of systemic discrimination that cause harm?
 - *Taking Indigenous children from their communities and sending them to residential schools*
 - *Overrepresentation of Indigenous and African-Canadian children and youth in child welfare*
 - *The Sixties Scoop, where Indigenous children were taken from their families and adopted by non-Indigenous families around the world*
 - *The streaming of racialized students to vocational rather than academic programs in schools*
 - *Males getting paid more than females for doing the same job*
 - *Women and Indigenous people not getting to vote until this century*
 - *A school event that doesn't consider the barriers that a physically disabled student may face to attend*
9. Why does systemic discrimination occur?
 - *Institutional and societal values are developed according to the beliefs, perspectives, and way of doing things of the dominant group (e.g. white, male, heterosexual, Christian, able-bodied) at the expense of marginalized groups⁴*
 - *Marginalized groups, such as those who are racialized, female, disabled, or LGBT2SQ, have been blocked from gaining access to power to shape the norms and values of both society and institutions*
10. How can you get help if you encounter a situation of systemic discrimination?
 - *Contact the [Ontario Human Rights Commission](#) to see if you have the grounds to file a human rights complaint*

⁴ | It takes a community to care for kids *Il faut toute une communauté pour prendre soin des enfants*

Activity
• Link to Myth or Fact? Activity, Organizations and Resources that Support Youth Activity
Relevant Ontario Curriculum Expectations
Grade 7: Health and Physical Education Strand D Healthy Living Specific Expectations ➤ D1.1, D1.3, D2.2, D3.2,
Grade 8: Health and Physical Education: Strand D Healthy Living Specific Expectations ➤ D1.2, D1.3, D2.2, D2.3, D3.2, D3.3
Grade 9: Health and Physical Education: Healthy Living Strand ➤ C1.2, C2.2, C2.3, C3.3, C3.4
Grade 10: Health and Physical Education: Healthy Living Strand ➤ C1.2, C2.3, C2.4, C2.5, C3.2, C3.5
Grade 11: Health and Physical Education: Healthy Living Strand ➤ C1.2, C2.1, C3.2, C3.3, C3.4
Grade 12: Health and Physical Education: Healthy Living Strand: ➤ C1.1, C1.3, C2.2, C2.3, C3.2, C3.4

References

1. Ackard, D.M. (2007). Long-term impact of adolescent dating violence on the behavioural and psychological health of male and female youth. *Journal of Pediatrics*, 151(5), 476-481.
 2. Cicchetti, D. (2016). Socioemotional, personality, and biological development: Illustrations from a multilevel developmental psychopathology on child maltreatment. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 67, 187-211.
 3. Colman, R.A., & Widom, C.S. (2004). Childhood abuse and neglect and adult intimate relationships: a prospective study. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 28, 1122-1151.
 4. Ontario Human Right Commission website, <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en>
 5. Trocmé N. (2017) A 25 Year Perspective on Child Welfare Services in Ontario and Canada.
 6. Wong H., Yee J. (2010) An Anti-Oppression Framework for Child Welfare in Ontario
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ⁱ Wong H., Yee J. (2010) An Anti-Oppression Framework for Child Welfare in Ontario