

# **Glossary of Social Work Terms**

**Prepared for the Canadian Human Rights Commission<sup>1</sup>**

**By: Michelle Sturtridge**

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## 1. Reason for Intervention:

**Duty to Report:** everyone has a duty to report child abuse and neglect under Canadian child welfare laws if he/she knows or suspects that child abuse is occurring. Professionals who work with children and youth have an added responsibility to report child abuse and neglect. Known or suspected abuse or neglect of a child must be reported to local child welfare services (e.g., children's aid society or child and family services agency), provincial/territorial social service ministries or departments, or local police.<sup>2</sup>

**Referral Source:** refers to the person who contacts child welfare authorities with concern for a child's safety and/or well-being. Examples of referral sources include: a parent, child, relative, neighbour/friend, community agencies, health professionals, school, mental health professionals, other child welfare services, or police.<sup>3</sup>

**Risk of Harm:** placing a child at risk of harm means that a specific action (or inaction) occurred, or may occur, that seriously endangered the safety of that child.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Investigation/Assessment:

**Age of Majority:** in Canada, each province and territory decides the age of majority. Anyone under the age of majority is considered to be a "minor child." The age of majority varies from one province to another. Age of majority is 18 in Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, and Saskatchewan. Age of majority is 19 in British Columbia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon.<sup>5</sup>

**Age of Protection:** refers to the age of the identified "child" engaged in the child welfare process. Each province and territory has its own legislation in regards to mandated age of

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<sup>1</sup> This glossary has been prepared for the purposes of the *First Nations Child and Family Caring Society et al. v. Attorney General of Canada (representing the Minister of Indian and Northern Development Canada)*, Tribunal File No. T1340/7008 only. The glossary should only be used for general guidance purposes. Specific definitions may vary according to provincial or territorial child welfare statutes and standards.

<sup>2</sup> *Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal*. Retrieved from <http://cwrp.ca/faqs>.

<sup>3</sup> *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2008*. Pp. 25.

<sup>4</sup> *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2008* (Appendix E).

<sup>5</sup> *Government of Canada*. Retrieved from: [http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/united\\_kingdom-royaume\\_uni/visas/minors-mineurs.aspx?view=d](http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/united_kingdom-royaume_uni/visas/minors-mineurs.aspx?view=d).

service. Consequently, the identified age depending on legislation is the maximum age that may be serviced by child welfare organizations. Ages range from anywhere between 16 to 19 years as the top age that may be serviced.<sup>6</sup>

**Assessment:** the process of collecting information on children and families in order to make informed decisions. Different supports, programs and services may be chosen depending on the outcome of the assessment.<sup>7</sup>

**Caseload/Workload:** all individuals (usually counted as children or family units) for whom a social worker is responsible, as expressed in a ratio of clients to staff members.<sup>8</sup>

**Case Openings:** include cases that appear on site records as openings. Cases may be opened on a family basis or a child basis. Openings do not include referrals that have been screened-out.<sup>9</sup>

**Categories of Maltreatment:** the five key classification categories of maltreatment are: physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, emotional maltreatment, and exposure to intimate partner violence.<sup>10</sup>

**Child Abuse:** the physical or psychological maltreatment of a child or risk of physical or psychological maltreatment by an adult (biological or adoptive parents, step-parents, guardians, other adults). This includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional maltreatment, and exposure to domestic violence.<sup>11</sup>

**Children's Rights:** a child belonging to a minority or who is Indigenous has the right to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion and to use his or her own language. Every child has the right to education, that shall be directed to the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin. Children also have a right to a life free of discrimination.<sup>12</sup>

**Child Protection Worker:** refers to a worker who is mandated under government policy or legislation to provide service to families where a child has been identified either at risk of maltreatment or as being maltreated.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Retrieved from: <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/childrensaid/childprotectionstandards.aspx>.

<sup>7</sup> *Child and Family Development Service Standards*. Ministry of Children and Family Development. British Columbia, 2004. Retrieved from: [http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/child\\_protection/pdf/cfd\\_ss\\_may08.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/child_protection/pdf/cfd_ss_may08.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> *Child Welfare League of America*. Retrieved from <http://www.cwla.org/newsevents/terms.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2008* (Appendix E).

<sup>10</sup> *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2008* (Appendix E).

<sup>11</sup> *Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal*. Retrieved from <http://cwrp.ca/faqs>.

<sup>12</sup> *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Comment on Indigenous children, 2009*.

<sup>13</sup> *Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal*. Retrieved from <http://cwrp.ca/faqs>.

**Child Neglect:** refers to situations in which a child’s caregiver fails to provide or is unable to provide adequate clothing, food or shelter, deliberately or otherwise. The term “neglect” can also apply to the abandonment of a child or the omission of basic care such as medical or dental care.<sup>14</sup>

**Child Welfare:** is a term used to describe a set of government and private services designed to protect children and encourage family stability. The main aim of these services is to safeguard children from abuse and neglect. Child welfare agencies will typically investigate allegations of abuse and neglect, supervise foster care and arrange adoptions. They also offer services aimed to support families so that they can stay intact and raise children successfully and to remedy risks in families where the child has been removed so reunification can occur.<sup>15</sup>

**Child Decision-Making Rights:** the child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. The child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.<sup>16</sup>

**Exposure to Violence:** refers to children who live/have lived in an environment of domestic violence, whether the child actually witnesses the violence or not (i.e., hearing, observing, or intervening in the violence or its aftermath).<sup>17</sup>

**Family-Centered Practice:** a way of working with families, both formally and informally, across service systems to enhance the capacity of families to care for and protect their children. Family-centered practice recognizes the strengths of family relationships and builds on these strengths to achieve optimal outcomes for children and families. Family-centered services exist to employ the family-centered practice approach and meet a variety of family needs.<sup>18</sup>

**Failure to Meet Developmental Milestones:** children who are not meeting their development milestones for a non-organic reason.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal*. Retrieved from <http://cwrp.ca/faqs>.

<sup>15</sup> *Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal*. Retrieved from <http://cwrp.ca/faqs>.

<sup>16</sup> *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12*.

<sup>17</sup> *Child Welfare Information Gateway*. Retrieved from <https://www.childwelfare.gov/admin/glossary/index.cfm>.

<sup>18</sup> *Child Welfare League of America*. Retrieved from <http://www.cwla.org/newsevents/terms.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2008*. Pp. 38.

**Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD):** is a medical diagnosis for a specific pattern of birth defects caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Effect are terms that are in common usage. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) includes particular sets of facial features, growth deficiency and central nervous system deficits. Fetal Alcohol Effect (FAE) is similar but without the physical features.<sup>20</sup>

**Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour:** refers to a child who displays inappropriate sexual behaviour, including age-inappropriate play with toys, self or others; displaying explicit sexual acts; age-inappropriate sexually explicit drawing and/or descriptions; sophisticated or unusual sexual knowledge; prostitution or seductive behaviour.<sup>21</sup>

**Level of Identification and Substantiation:** there are four key steps in the case identification process: detection, reporting, investigation, and substantiation.<sup>22</sup>

**Maltreatment Investigation:** investigations of situations where there are concerns that a child may have already been abused or neglected.<sup>23</sup>

**Non-Maltreatment Cases:** cases open for child welfare services for reasons other than suspected maltreatment (e.g., prevention services, parent-child conflict, services for young pregnant women).<sup>24</sup>

**Protective Factors:** strengths and resources that appear to mediate or serve as a "buffer" against risk factors that contribute to vulnerability to maltreatment or against the negative effects of maltreatment experiences.<sup>25</sup>

**Resource Worker:** refers to the worker assigned to foster families to provide resource support. Resource social workers assist foster parents with administrative and funding concerns, help resolve disputes or misunderstandings, give feedback on fostering methods and skills, help identify and secure needed training, answer questions about ministry policy and philosophy, and provide any additional support needed surrounding the foster care process.<sup>26</sup>

**Risk Assessment:** an assessment and measurement of the likelihood that a child will be maltreated in the future, frequently through the use of checklists, matrices, scales, or other methods of measurement.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Alberta Human Services: Programs and Services*. Retrieved from: <http://humanservices.alberta.ca/adoption/15545.html>

<sup>21</sup> *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2008*. Pp. 38

<sup>22</sup> *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2008*. (Appendix E)

<sup>23</sup> *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2008*. (Appendix E)

<sup>24</sup> *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2008*. (Appendix E)

<sup>25</sup> *Child Welfare Information Gateway*. Retrieved from <https://www.childwelfare.gov/admin/glossary/index.cfm>

<sup>26</sup> *Foster Family Handbook, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*. British Columbia Ministry for Children and Families. Retrieved from : <http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/foster/pdf/handbook.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> *Child Welfare Information Gateway*. Retrieved from <https://www.childwelfare.gov/admin/glossary/index.cfm>

**Risk of Future Maltreatment:** a situation where a child is considered to be at risk for maltreatment in the future due to the child's or the family's circumstances. For example, a child living with a caregiver who abuses substances may be deemed at risk of future maltreatment even if no form of maltreatment has been alleged. The three *response categories of a maltreatment investigation* include:

- Risk of future maltreatment;
- No risk of future maltreatment; and
- Unknown risk of future maltreatment.<sup>28</sup>

**Screened-out:** referrals that are not opened for an investigation. The procedures for screening out cases vary considerably across Canada.<sup>29</sup>

**Social Assistance:** caregiver is currently receiving social assistance benefits.<sup>30</sup>

**Substantiation:** distinguishes cases where maltreatment is confirmed following an investigation. The three levels of substantiation include:

- **Substantiated:** the balance of evidence indicates that abuse or neglect has occurred;
- **Suspected:** insufficient evidence to substantiate abuse or neglect, but maltreatment cannot be ruled out; and
- **Unfounded:** the balance of evidence indicates that abuse or neglect has not occurred. Unfounded does not mean that a referral was inappropriate or malicious; it simply indicates that the worker determined that the child had not been maltreated.<sup>31</sup>

### 3. Placement:

**Adoption:** provides a legal means for another family to permanently take on the responsibility of caring for and raising a child.<sup>32</sup>

**Custom Care Placement:** refers to an out-of-home placement option on the continuum for Aboriginal children. Customary care is an Aboriginal child welfare service that incorporates tradition and customs of each First Nation. The model is premised on the view that each child is the collective responsibility of the community and is defined by each First Nation community and involves extended family, neighbours, and community members, whose ultimate goal is the safety of the child.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2008* (Appendix E).

<sup>29</sup> *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2008* (Appendix E).

<sup>30</sup> *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2008*. Pp. 41.

<sup>31</sup> *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2008*. Pp. 24.

<sup>32</sup> Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Retrieved from: <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/adoption/index.aspx>.

<sup>33</sup> Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. Retrieved from: <http://www.oacas.org/childwelfare/changes/permbackground.htm>.

**Extended Family:** refers to persons who have a significant and/or meaningful relationship with a child or adult but are not related by blood or marriage and are typically from the same community. Family or extended family in Aboriginal cultures includes relations and community members involved in raising a child and the people with whom the child was raised. It is a connection to the elders and ancestors.<sup>34</sup>

**Formal Kinship Care:** living arrangements where children in care (by court order or agreement) are placed with relatives approved as caregivers.<sup>35</sup>

**Foster Care:** is one option for providing homes for children (ranging from infants to 18 year olds) who cannot live safely with their own parents or caregivers. Children can be placed in foster care by a child welfare organization such as CAS, voluntarily by their parents or caregivers or by court order. A child is placed in the foster care system when there is a family situation where the child is at risk, a parent is ill or not available or able to make other arrangements for the child's care, or the child has been neglected, abused or abandoned. The length of time a child spends in foster care varies.<sup>36</sup>

**Foster Parent:** the individual or couple who care for the child while in foster care. They can be a part of the child's extended family, community, or a stranger. Foster parents provide a stable and caring home that encourages a child's growth and development while the child is in the foster care system.<sup>37</sup>

**Group Home Placement:** an out-of-home placement required in a structured group living setting.<sup>38</sup>

**Informal Kinship Care:** refers to arrangements made by the parents and other family members without any involvement from either the child welfare system or the juvenile court system. In this type of arrangement, the legal custody of the children remains with the parents, and the parents can legally take back the children at any time.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Child and Family Development Service Standards*. Ministry of Children and Family Development. British Columbia, 2004. Retrieved from: [http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/child\\_protection/pdf/cfd\\_ss\\_may08.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/child_protection/pdf/cfd_ss_may08.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> *Child and Family Development Service Standards*. Ministry of Children and Family Development. British Columbia, 2004. Retrieved from: [http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/child\\_protection/pdf/cfd\\_ss\\_may08.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/child_protection/pdf/cfd_ss_may08.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> *Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services*. Retrieved from: <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/childrenciaid/fostercare/index.aspx>.

<sup>37</sup> *Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services*. Retrieved from: <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/childrenciaid/fostercare/index.aspx>.

<sup>38</sup> *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2008*. Pp. 27.

<sup>39</sup> *Child Welfare Information Gateway*. Retrieved from <https://www.childwelfare.gov/admin/glossary/index.cfm>.

**Openness Agreement:** pertains to any arrangement made between biological and adoptive parents concerning the exchange of information or the possibility of meeting each other following placement.<sup>40</sup>

**Out-of-Home Care:** refers to a child's living arrangements when they can no longer live safely with their own parents or caregivers. The most common types of out-of-home care are family foster care, kinship care, therapeutic (or treatment) foster care, and residential group care. The most serious problem affecting youth in care today is unmet health and mental health needs and access to adequate health services.<sup>41</sup>

**Plan of Care:** an action-based planning tool for children in care, used to identify specific developmental objectives based on continuous assessments of the child's evolving needs and the outcomes of previous decisions and actions. Care plans are completed by the child's worker with the involvement of the child, the family, the extended family and Aboriginal community if the child is Aboriginal, the caregiver, service providers and significant people in the child's life.<sup>42</sup>

**Residential/Secure Treatment:** placement required in a therapeutic residential treatment centre to address the needs of the child.<sup>43</sup>

**Reunification:** the process of a child being discharged from child welfare out-of-home care and being reunited with their family of origin or an alternate caregiver (e.g., informal kin, formal kin, Customary Care, extended family members).<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Adoption practice in Canada: Emerging trends and challenges. Sobol, M. P., & Daly, K. (1995). *Child Welfare*, 74(3), 655-655. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/213812658?accountid=14771>.

<sup>41</sup> *Child Welfare League of America*. Retrieved from <http://www.cwla.org/newsevents/terms.htm>.

<sup>42</sup> *Child and Family Development Service Standards*. Ministry of Children and Family Development. British Columbia, 2004. Retrieved from: [http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/child\\_protection/pdf/cfd\\_ss\\_may08.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/child_protection/pdf/cfd_ss_may08.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2008*. Pp. 27.

<sup>44</sup> *Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services*. Retrieved from: <http://www.children.gov.on.ca>.

Miscellaneous:

**CIS – *The Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect*:** a national initiative to collect data on children who come to the attention of a child welfare authority due to alleged or suspected abuse and/or neglect. The CIS examines the incidence of reported child maltreatment and the characteristics of the children and families investigated by child welfare authorities in the year the study is conducted. The first reported child abuse and neglect incidence study conducted in Canada was the 1993 Ontario Incidence Study. The first national cycle of the CIS was completed in 1998 and subsequent studies were conducted in 2003 and 2008.<sup>45</sup>

**FNCIS – *The First Nations Component of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect*:** a study of child welfare investigations involving First Nations children which is embedded within a larger, cyclical national study of the reported incidence of child maltreatment: the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS). The FNCIS is a collaborative effort, by CIS research team members and First Nations child welfare organizations to support participation of First Nations and urban Aboriginal agencies in the CIS, analyze CIS data on investigations involving First Nations children, ensure appropriate contextualization of research findings, disseminate research results, and increase the capacity for First Nations child welfare research.<sup>46</sup>

**OIS – *The Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect*:** the first Canadian study to provide detailed data on the incidence of reported child maltreatment and the characteristics of the children and families investigated by Canadian child welfare agencies. Although the diversity of social service systems across Canada limits the extent to which the OIS findings can be generalized to other provinces, the OIS study does provide a first glance at some of the unique characteristics of the Canadian child welfare system.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal*. Retrieved from: <http://cwrp.ca/overview>.

<sup>46</sup> *Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal*. Retrieved from: <http://cwrp.ca/fn-cis-2008>.

<sup>47</sup> Child abuse and neglect in Ontario: Incidence and characteristics. Trocme, N., et. Al. (1995). *Child Welfare*, 74(3), 563-86. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/213811182?accountid=14771>.