

## Loving Our Children: Finding What Works for First Nations Families

Canada Research Chair in First Nations Child and Family Services  
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### Information Sheet #2

# What are Child Welfare Prevention Services?

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Child welfare prevention services are intended to address the risks associated with child maltreatment and strengthen the factors that protect families and communities from maltreatment.<sup>1</sup> Interventions are tailored to different forms and severities of maltreatment and to the child's needs and developmental stage and the parental and community context. Prevention and child protection should be viewed as a holistic range of services versus two separate entities, as the risk factors for many children can oscillate over time and context.

Child maltreatment includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse, as well physical and emotional neglect. (See [What is Child Physical Abuse?](#)<sup>2</sup> and [What is Child Neglect?](#)<sup>3</sup>)

Up to 15% of substantiated cases of child maltreatment involve children who have been seriously harmed or are at imminent risk of serious harm.<sup>4</sup> This includes children who:

- have been sexually abused,
- have sustained a serious injury from physical abuse, or
- are at risk of serious harm from neglect because of their young age.

In these cases, prevention services have two purposes:

1. preventing more serious abuse or neglect, and
2. treating any harm that has already occurred.

In 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ordered Canada to cease its discriminatory practices and to reform the First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) program. Indigenous Services Canada will fund “prevention/least disruptive measures” at the rate of \$2,500 (adjusted for inflation) per person living on reserve and in the Yukon until the FNCFS program reform is completed. Concerns have been raised about the adequacy and implementation of this per capita funding approach.

This information sheet is [one in a series](#)<sup>10</sup> about child welfare prevention services.

In over 85% of substantiated cases of maltreatment, no visible harm is detected but this does not rule out the possibility of injury which is not observable. Children are considered at risk of developing serious problems if their home environment does not improve. These situations don't usually require an urgent response, but chronic exposure to stressful environments undermines a child's development and well-being.

Prevention programs for these children and families are designed to ensure children live in an environment that maximizes their healthy development and well-being.

## Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Prevention Services<sup>5</sup>

Level of Service	Goals	Examples
<b>Primary</b> Community-centered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promote family well-being</li> <li>• prevent harm and maltreatment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• outreach and classes to strengthen family connections</li> <li>• well-being, cultural and recreational activities</li> <li>• help line services</li> </ul>
<b>Secondary</b> Family-centered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prevent separating a child from their family and community</li> <li>• promote family reunification</li> <li>• ensure supports are in place that enable the family to thrive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• home visiting for parents</li> <li>• mentoring parents</li> <li>• parenting skills programs</li> <li>• group interventions and supports</li> <li>• counselling, guidance and assessment</li> <li>• addictions treatment for parents</li> </ul>
<b>Tertiary</b> Individual-centered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• interventions based on the child's best interests</li> <li>• promote reunification and repatriation</li> <li>• prevent separating a child from their family and community</li> <li>• supports that enable the family to thrive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• immediate crisis interventions</li> <li>• self-esteem and healing activities</li> <li>• intimate partner violence interventions</li> <li>• intensive family preservation</li> <li>• addictions treatment for parents and youth</li> </ul>

## Child Abuse Risk Factors<sup>6</sup>

- Poverty
- Poor housing
- Mental health issues, including depression
- Addictions (alcohol, drugs)
- Domestic violence
- Intergenerational abuse or neglect
- Lack of connection with or support from extended family, friends, neighbours

## Protective Factors

- Enough money to cover basic needs (food, housing)
- Education and employment opportunities
- Strong social supports
- Good adult role models
- Nurturing parenting skills
- Capacity to provide emotional support
- Access to addictions interventions
- Access to affordable, high quality child care

## Who Needs Child Welfare Prevention Services?

It takes a community to raise a child and all parents need help and support. One of the challenges in developing child welfare prevention services is making sure prevention services are offered to and accepted by those who need them the most.

Some families can't get the help they need when they need it. Barriers include long waiting lists, an inability to get to where the services are offered at the times they are available, missing appointments because of family crises, or not trusting the services offered because of previous negative experiences, such as racism or intrusive, punitive services in the past.

Some other families will not agree to participate in prevention services and legal interventions will become more likely if the child is at significant risk.

Prevention services should address the most pressing issues faced by the families most in need in a way that is culturally appropriate, collaborative

and persistent. Relatives, elders and professionals working together can collaborate in reaching out to families in need of support. Prevention services can also be used to reduce risks, so that children in care can return home.

### What are Least Disruptive Measures?

All families run into difficulties: a young parent who cannot soothe a crying baby; a parent trying to manage a mental health or substance misuse problem; an exhausted parent who needs a break from helping their child with special needs; a rebellious teenager who needs space from their family; a family running out of money to feed, clothe or house their children. Often, partners, grandparents, aunts and uncles, neighbours and elders can offer help.

But sometimes professional help is needed. Child welfare agencies try to help in the least disruptive way by supporting the family's natural helping networks. This can include financial support, parent education or counselling services.

In some instances, things have got to a point where a child is not safe at home, or parents need a break from their parenting responsibilities to attend to their personal issues. Arranging for the child to stay with relatives or neighbours may be necessary while parents get the help they need.

If kin are not available, temporary placement in a family foster home may be the next best option. Some youth may need a more structured setting



staffed by professionals, such as a group home or a treatment centre. (See [What is Out-of-Home Care?](#))<sup>7</sup>

Interventions are most effective if they are developed in a collaborative way. The more the responses disrupt the child's natural care network, the greater the risk to the family bonds. Court orders should only be used as a last resort, when extensive outreach has not been successful.

*If you would like to share information about a First Nations child and family support initiative in your community, the Loving Our Children project researchers would like to hear from you. [LOCwhatworks@gmail.com](mailto:LOCwhatworks@gmail.com)*

### Useful Resources

[Getting Started with Prevention Services](#)<sup>8</sup>

[Going "0-60" with Prevention Services](#)<sup>9</sup>

## Endnotes

- 1 Higgins, D. J., Lonne, B., Herrenkohl, T. I., Klika, J. B., Scott, D. (2022). Core components of public health approaches to preventing child abuse and neglect. In R. D. Krugman, J. E. Korbin (Eds.), *Handbook of child maltreatment* (pp. 445–458). Child Maltreatment, vol 14. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-82479-2\\_22](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-82479-2_22)
- 2 <https://cwrp.ca/publications/what-is-child-physical-abuse>
- 3 <https://cwrp.ca/publications/what-is-child-neglect>
- 4 Fallon, B., Joh-Carnella, N., Houston, E., Livingston, E., & Trocmé, N. (2023). The more we change the more we stay the same: Canadian child welfare systems' response to child well-being. *Child Abuse & Neglect*. 137, 1060431. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106031>
- 5 Indigenous Services Canada (March 2024). *Prevention services for First Nations, authorized service providers, and delegated First Nation agencies*, <https://sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1710354957413/1710354990384>
- 6 Widom, C. S. (2022). Longterm consequences of childhood maltreatment. In R. D. Krugman, J. E. Korbin (Eds.) *Handbook of child maltreatment* (pp. 371–395). Child Maltreatment, vol 14. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-82479-2\\_18](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-82479-2_18)
- 7 <https://cwrp.ca/indigenous-child-welfare/publications/what-is-out-of-home-care>
- 8 [https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/getting\\_started\\_with\\_prevention\\_services\\_infographic.pdf](https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/getting_started_with_prevention_services_infographic.pdf)
- 9 [https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/2024-01/AAE\\_Going%200-60%20in%20prevention%20services%20%28EN%29%20.pdf](https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/2024-01/AAE_Going%200-60%20in%20prevention%20services%20%28EN%29%20.pdf)
- 10 <https://cwrp.ca/indigenous-child-welfare>

