



Reflection Guide on Duty to Report

The College of Early Childhood Educators (College) published the [*Professional Advisory: Duty to Report*](#) to explain the requirement to report child abuse and neglect, the suspicions of harm or the risk of harm to children, under section 125 of the ***Child, Youth and Family Services Act***, 2017 (CYFSA) and as outlined in the ***Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*** (Code and Standards).

The purpose of this *Reflection Guide on Duty to Report* is to help Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) deepen their understanding of their duty to report through critical reflection on the topic, scenarios and associated complexities.

This guide is designed to support you by:

- offering an opportunity to reflect on your knowledge and concerns related to the duty to report;
- presenting an ethical decision-making framework to help you navigate various scenarios, guided by reflection questions; and
- providing you with a space to engage in critical reflection either independently or with colleagues.

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Introduction and How to Use This Resource

RECEs are accountable for their practice and to the public and are required to abide by the College's [Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice](#), as well as applicable legislation such as the [Child, Youth and Family Services Act](#).

RECEs know and understand that under section 125 of the CYFSA, they have a particular duty to report to a Children's Aid Society (CAS) if they have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child has been harmed or is at risk of harm or injury. RECEs also understand that failure to do so is contrary to the law and may constitute professional misconduct.

The legislation is clear around the responsibilities of RECEs related to their duty to report. However, situations and factors related to this duty, as well as child abuse and neglect, can be complex. RECEs don't need to prove abuse or neglect, but they have a responsibility to consider what may have led them to suspect a child or family is at risk.

The intent of this reflection guide is not to provide specific answers or a course of action for each scenario or reflection question. Because of the contextual factors associated with the duty to report, there may not be only one "right" answer. Rather, this resource provides a framework to help you navigate possible scenarios related to child abuse and neglect, and supports you in your decision-making process by prompting you with reflection questions.

You can also use the framework presented below if you have a concern about the safety, health or well-being of a child and/or family.

We recommend that you read the [Professional Advisory: Duty to Report](#) before reading this reflection guide, and use the professional advisory and the [Code and Standards](#) as tools, when working through this resource.

Responsibility to Children

Ethic A of the Code of Ethics speaks directly to your responsibility to children as an REECE. It states that "RECEs make the well-being, learning and care of children their foremost responsibility. They value the rights of children and create learning environments where all children can experience a sense of belonging and inclusion... They respect each child's uniqueness, dignity and potential."

Responsibility to Children cont'd

The Code and Standards also highlights your responsibilities to families and colleagues. The College recognizes the great amount of time, care and effort you put into building and maintaining caring and responsive relationships with families and colleagues. As such, it can be intimidating and uncomfortable to make a report to a CAS if that report may involve implicating a colleague or a child's family or caregiver. The [Professional Advisory: Duty to Report](#) provides ways that you can maintain and encourage communication with families to help keep children's safety and well-being top priority.

However, it's important to remember that in carrying out the duty to report under the CYFSA, you must place the needs and best interests of the child/ren above any other concerns. If you have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child may be or is in need of protection, you must immediately report to a CAS, even if this is not what you *want* to do.

Lastly, know that if you have any questions about your concerns, you can contact a CAS for a consult at any time, not just to report.

Consider the following reflection questions with colleagues or independently to assess your knowledge and concerns about the duty to report:

- What do you know about the process of reporting a concern to a CAS?
 - What else do you need to know and how can you find out?
 - What are your concerns about the process of reporting to a CAS? Who can you speak with about your concerns?
- Read Standard VI: Confidentiality, Release of Information and Duty to Report.
 - What questions do you have about this standard? Discuss your questions with others.
- What do you know about the term *reasonable grounds*? How is professional judgment related?
- Do you know what the reportable harms are?
- It can be intimidating and uncomfortable to make a report to a CAS if that report implicates a colleague or a child's family member or caregiver, but what are the consequences of *not* doing so?
- How might beliefs, biases or harmful stereotypes affect reporting to a CAS? What steps can you take to avoid this?

Scenarios for Critical Reflection

The purpose of the scenarios in this reflection guide is to help you understand that:

- factors related to child abuse and neglect can be complex and context-specific;
- educators' concerns can be influenced by many things such as their relationship with and knowledge of the child and family, as well as their own beliefs, biases and experiences; and
- your duty is to contact a CAS if you have a concern that a child has been harmed or is at risk of harm or injury – you do not need to prove anything.

Take the following steps for each scenario:

- Read the scenario and imagine yourself in that situation.
- Using the ethical decision-making framework on page 9, work through the reflection questions in each step. Note that there are many questions, and they are meant to be prompts for discussion or critical reflection. Not all questions will apply to each scenario.
- Consider [facilitating a discussion](#) with colleagues to share knowledge, experiences and reflections.

1. Reasonable Grounds

An RECE has been working in an after-school program for several years and knows a child in the program and his family well because they live on the same street. Over the last six months, this RECE has had disagreements with the child's father about parking on the street and other issues unrelated to the child or the after-school program. On one occasion, the father comes to pick up his child from the program and starts yelling at the child because he had ripped his brand-new coat at school that day. The RECE overhears the yelling and decides that they have *reasonable grounds* to report to CAS and the RECE makes the call to report the father.

2. Photos of Children

A supply RECE is on a shift in the preschool room. After the last child is picked up, the RECE grabs the room iPad to finish up some documentation before going home. They unlock the iPad and see that their colleague, who has already left for the day, left their personal email open and the RECE can see that their colleague has sent themselves photos of the children in the program during rest time and personal care routines.

3. A Colleague's Behaviour

A new RECE is ready for their first day in practice. The RECE is working in the toddler room with another RECE who has been there for a couple of years. The new RECE is getting settled in when the RECE notices their room partner aggressively grab one of the children by their arm because they did not want to leave an activity. The RECE's room partner drags the child to the table for snack and says abruptly "I told you it's not playing time, it's eating time!" The child is crying and screaming but eventually settles down and eats their snack. Later on that same day, the new RECE witnesses their room partner scream in a different child's face, because they wouldn't get down from standing on the couch. The child sat down immediately and started to cry, and the room partner walked away and went over to interact with other children.

The new RECE is shocked by what they have witnessed on their first day and confides in a friend who is also an RECE at this centre but works in a different room. The friend says that the room partner must have just had a really stressful day because they would never do anything to intentionally hurt a child. The new RECE does not feel comfortable with what they have witnessed but is confused about what to do.

4. Change in Behaviour

A child in kindergarten who has never had bathroom accidents at school suddenly begins to wet themselves. The accidents are happening almost every day for an entire week. The RECE notices this change in behaviour and discusses it with their teaching partner. Both educators decide that it's worth having a conversation with the child's parents. When speaking with the parents, they dismiss the change in behaviour, saying that the child's schedule has changed slightly since the start of after-school activities. The educators believe the parents but decide amongst themselves that they will continue to observe the child to watch for other changes in behaviour.

Over the next several weeks, the RECE documents that the child is still having regular accidents but does not seem to notice any other changes in the child's behaviour. One day after school, the RECE is packing up to leave for the day and overhears some loud voices outside. The kindergarten classroom is located close to the front of the school by the parking lot. The RECE looks out the window to see where the voices are coming from and sees the child's parents having a verbal argument, which turns physical when one parent slaps the other across the face. The RECE can see the child sitting in their car seat with their head hung down.

5. “I can’t remember”

An RECE operates their own home child care program. The RECE has great relationships with most of the families in the program, as many of them live in the neighborhood. The RECE is close friends with one mother in particular – they have been friends for over 10 years.

One day, the child of the RECE’s friend comes to program with a small burn on his arm. His mother shows it to the RECE as soon as they arrive and explains that he was playing near her last night while she was curling her hair, and accidentally burned himself. The RECE didn’t think twice about it – after all, this was a close friend and it seemed like a harmless accident.

Everything was fine for the next three weeks and then one morning, the same child showed up with a broken finger that was bandaged up in a splint. Like the last time, the mother was fully transparent with the RECE, explaining that he was playing at the park yesterday and tripped up the steps to the slide and fell and broke his finger. While the mother was sharing this with the RECE, the RECE was looking at the little boy, who was quiet and wasn’t really making any eye contact with her. The RECE didn’t know why, but the RECE left that conversation feeling like something was wrong. The child didn’t seem like his typical self – normally he’d want to show his RECE his bandaged finger.

Later that day, the RECE asked the child how his finger was feeling and casually asked the child how he hurt it. The child responded by saying: “I can’t remember.” The RECE said: “Oh, that’s okay, I don’t remember things sometimes too.” Then the child said, “Want to see my other booboo?” The child pulled up his sleeve to show two new burn marks. The RECE stayed calm and asked, “How did those happen?” The child responded again with: “I don’t remember.” The RECE could not believe what they were seeing. This was the child of their close friend for over 10 years. The RECE began questioning what they should do next.

6. Forgetting Formula

An RECE practising in the infant program has noticed that the family of one of the new infants in the program has forgotten diapers for the fifth day in a row. The RECE has been supportive in using the extra supplies at the centre and doing their best to remind the parents about bringing diapers for the next day. The parents are apologetic and say that they are typically rushing to get all the kids out the door in the morning and that they will try their best to remember.

Over the next week the parents continue to periodically forget diapers and have now started to forget a special type of formula their baby drinks. Their child is on a special formula because the parents said their child is believed to have a milk allergy. After another day goes by where both diapers and the special formula are forgotten, the RECE begins to wonder if poverty may be a factor, but is conflicted because both parents have listed their occupations as executives at large banks. They're always dressed very professionally and they both drive high-end vehicles.

Even though the RECE has had numerous conversations with the parents, the forgetfulness continues. In addition, the RECE has overheard – and documented – certain comments from the parents. On one occasion at pick-up, as the RECE was reminding the mother about the formula because the centre was not going to have enough of this specific kind for the rest of the week, the mother sighed and said, “Oh who cares, just give whatever formula you have here.” The RECE was surprised and responded by saying, “Oh, but I thought she couldn't have the kind we have here because of her allergy.” The mother chuckled and said, “Oh it's not that bad, she'll be fine with whatever formula.” The RECE feels they ought to be concerned for this infant, but is unsure of how to proceed given that they have only known the family for a few weeks.

Ethical Decision-Making Framework and Reflection Questions

Steps	Questions
<p>1. Identify and focus on the facts of the situation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there concerning behaviours in other areas of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. the child’s play / daily routines? b. the RECE’s practice? • What’s your relationship or communication like with the child and the family? Do you know of any medical issues, recent stress, trauma or hardship the child has experienced, or if there are other explanations for your concern(s)?
<p>2. Examine your values, beliefs, perceptions and biases.</p> <p>College resources to support this step:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Practice Note on Beliefs and Biases</u> • <u>Reflection Guide on Beliefs and Biases</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could your conscious or unconscious biases or beliefs be influencing your thinking? Is it possible that you have stereotypical views that may be harmful? • Are your personal biases interfering with your professional judgment? • What is your understanding of child development or appropriate sexuality knowledge or behaviours for children? What beliefs do you hold around these topics? <p>Take a moment to check your beliefs and biases: review each scenario and imagine the child or adult with one or more of the following considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ race, ethnicity and culture ◦ class ◦ gender and sexual identity ◦ ability ◦ newcomer or refugee status ◦ parenting approach ◦ family structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there differences in how you approached each scenario based on diverse identities? If so, acknowledge and challenge these beliefs, perceptions and biases that could influence your decision-making.

Ethical Decision-Making Framework and Reflection Questions cont'd

Steps	Questions
<p>3. Consult the <i>Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice</i>, relevant legislation, your workplace policies, CAS or other resources that could support you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which ethical and professional standards apply to this scenario? • Is there legislation that provides direction on your course of action? • Are there relevant workplace policies that could support your decision-making? For example, does your workplace have a policy on duty to report, sexuality education, prohibited practices etc.? • What if your supervisor advises you not to call or tries to elicit a disclosure from you and says they will take care of making the report themselves? What could the consequences be? • Could you benefit from a consultation call with a CAS to support your decision-making?
<p>4. Make your decision and act in the best interest of the child(ren) in your care.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If your decision-making process is leading you to report to CAS, do you know what to expect? Do you know what information you need? What questions should you ask?
<p>5. Reflect on the ethical decision-making process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were the child’s best interests prioritized throughout? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Were you able to distinguish between the best interest of the child, the best interest of the family and the best interest of your workplace? • Did the ethical decision-making process support your professional judgment? • What worked well for you? Consider if you would do anything differently next time.
<p>Caring for yourself after you’ve placed a call to CAS is an important step to take.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can you care for yourself after you’ve placed the call and over the following days? • Do you have someone you can connect with, if needed? <p>If you’re feeling stressed or anxious about having to interact with the family or person(s) you’ve reported, what are steps you can take to maintain a positive professional relationship with them? Who can you reach out to for support with this?</p>	

Additional Resources to Support Your Learning

- [Child Youth and Family Services Act, section 125](#), Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
- [One Vision One Voice: Changing the Ontario Welfare System to Better Serve African Canadians](#), Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies
- [BOOST Child and Youth Advocacy Centre](#)

For opportunities to further reflect on the duty to report, read the following College resources:

- [Caring for Self and Others](#)
- [CPL Resource: Leading Professional Practice Discussions](#)
- [Practice Note on Beliefs and Biases](#)
- [Practice Note on Ethical Decision-Making](#)
- [Practice Note on Professional Judgment](#)
- [Racism and Bias in Reporting to Child Welfare](#)
- [Reflection Guide on Beliefs and Bias](#)
- [Scenario: A Duty to Report](#)
- [Sexual Abuse Prevention Program Scenarios](#)



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Cette publication est également disponible en français sous le titre : *Guide de réflexion sur le devoir de faire rapport.*

If you require an accessible format or communications support, please contact us at 1 888 961-8558 / communications@college-ece.ca