

**A Plan To Protect
Children, Youth, Seniors, Persons with Special Needs and Workers**

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Heartland Forest Nature Experience

A Plan To Protect Children, Youth, Seniors, Persons with Special Needs and Workers

Introduction

Our Commitment

Vision ... to inspire and enrich the lives of people of all abilities through inclusive program offerings and hands on exploration. We are committed to community engagement and environmental stewardship for future generations.

Mission ... to provide an interactive nature experience for all ages and abilities to build lifelong connections with nature through dynamic and inspiring programs. With a goal of preservation and sustainability we engage the hearts and minds of our staff, volunteers and visitors.

Core Values ... Accessibility * Community Engagement * Environmental Stewardship
Financial Sustainability * Respect

Purpose of the Policy

We whole-heartedly recognize the need for a place where people of all ages and abilities can have fun and be safe. At the same time, we are concerned about the safety and reputation of the adults and teens who work and/or volunteer with Heartland Forest to make our programming possible. In order to serve this commitment, Heartland Forest has formulated the following policies and guidelines.

Accessibility Standards

Heartland Forest is committed to increasing the accessibility for persons with disabilities who visit our nature experience. We can increase accessibility by proactively identifying and removing barriers so persons with disabilities can receive service in a respectful way.

Those who interact with, or provide service to others at Heartland Forest are asked to communicate with persons with disabilities in a manner that takes the persons disability into account, and to align their practices with four principles of accessible service as much as possible:

- *Dignity (person is able to maintain his self-respect and respect of others)*
- *Independence (person is able to do things on their own without unnecessary help)*
- *Integration (person is able to benefit from the same services, in the same place and in the same or similar way)*
- *Equal Opportunity (person is able to have the same opportunity as others to benefit from the way you provide goods or services)*

The information above was prepared in accordance with the Accessibility Standards for Customers Service, developed by the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (<http://www.aoda.ca/the-act/>).

Maintenance

The Executive Director is responsible for the annual review of this plan and any resulting updates.

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Screening and Training

Policy

Permanent and Contract Staff

All paid contract staff will submit to a screening process as approved by the Board of Directors. This process will include a reference check and criminal records check for both their own and the charity's protection.

Annually, staff will sign a 'Declaration of Offences' form stipulating that they have not plead or been found guilty of a criminal offense for which a pardon has not been granted under the Criminal Records Act (Canada).

Known Abuse or Questionable References

Individuals with a known history of having committed abuse as defined in this document or anyone with questionable references will not be permitted to work directly with Heartland Forest visitors or program participants.

Volunteers

All volunteers working directly with children, youth or persons with special needs will sign a Volunteer Agreement and will submit to a screening process as approved by the Board of Directors. This process could include a reference check and criminal records check (over the age of 16) for their own and the charity's protection.

Known Abuse or Questionable References

Individuals with a known history of having committed abuse as defined in this document or anyone with questionable references will not be permitted to volunteer with Heartland Forest programs.

Other Criminal Records

In situations where Heartland Forest feels that sufficient time has passed from the date of criminal activity and there is legitimate and validated remorse on the part of the individual – a recommendation for accepting this individual as a volunteer in areas outside of the Forest Discovery Program, Day Program or Work Experience Program can be made to the Board of Directors for review (i.e. finance or fundraising).

Responsibility

The Executive Director is responsible for screening and records management for all volunteers and staff.

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Screening and Training, continued

Procedures & Guidelines

Screening and Records Management

The Executive Director in coordination with the staff team is responsible for:

1. screening all volunteers recruited to work with children, youth and persons with special needs
2. assisting with annual policy awareness and training sessions
3. conducting reference checks and completing the associated paperwork
4. soliciting criminal record searches
5. maintaining a master list of individuals accepted for volunteer work
6. ensuring completed contracts, application forms, records of training undertaken by those working with minors, and related documents are stored securely in perpetuity in a central registry file, and
7. maintaining the confidentiality of personnel records

Volunteers

All volunteers working directly with children/youth will be required to:

1. complete and sign a Volunteer Agreement acknowledging Heartland Forest's privacy policy and behaviour management policy and agreeing to comply with the policies and guidelines.
2. sign a 'Declaration of Offences' form stipulating that the volunteer has not plead or been found guilty of a criminal offense for which a pardon has not been granted under the Criminal Records Act (Canada).
3. as required, request and submit a criminal record check from the local Police department (minors 16 years and under are exempt from CRC)

All volunteers working directly with children/youth will be encouraged to:

1. participate in seminars or workshops and read resource material as prescribed by Heartland Forest directed at issues such as:
 - o discipline & behaviour management,
 - o special needs,
 - o child abuse and identification & reporting obligations
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Privacy Policy

Policy

Staff and volunteers of Heartland Forest Nature Experience are entrusted with personal information as it relates directly to the individuals we support. Personal information is effective to provide:

1. Perspective
2. Context for correct and safe support

We acknowledge that this personal information is shared in full confidence and that it will be managed respectfully.

Thus, we will not use any personal information in part or in whole without the confirmed or written permission of the individual, parent or guardian in authority.

Procedures & Guidelines

For our program participants, visitors and professional partners protecting their privacy means that we will not sell or rent their personal information to any third party. We collect personal information only with their consent and by fair and lawful means and for the purpose(s) for which they have given consent. We keep their personal information confidential and we employ appropriate security safeguards.

In accordance with the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA), Heartland Forest is committed to protecting the privacy and security of all individuals who:

- *Register for a program*
- *Register for our mailing list*
- *Request materials*
- *Enter into a rental agreement*
- *Make charitable investments*
- *Make a donation*

Heartland Forest is committed to ensuring the security of collected information. To prevent unauthorized access, maintain data accuracy, and ensure the appropriate use of information, we have put in place appropriate physical, electronic and managerial procedures to safeguard and secure the information we collect.

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Staffing and Supervision

Policy

Programs that involve children and youth must always include adequate supervisory personnel.

Supervision should also be maintained before and after the event until all children are in the custody of their parents or legal guardians.

Workers are to avoid one-on-one situations with children/youth, except in parentally pre-approved situations where the adult has a legitimate reason to be alone with a child.

Procedures & Guidelines

Staffing Expectations

As a general rule there is to be a minimum of two workers in any room or environment with children under the age of 10. The rooms should be staffed with at least one female adult worker to better facilitate observance of the washroom guidelines.

For our youth aged 10+ one worker plus a volunteer (14+) are to be present.

Ratios

Due to the special needs of some of our clientele it is difficult to establish set ratios. Each program will be individually assessed according to the needs.

The following will be included in the assessment process:

- toileting,
 - lifting,
 - feeding/self-help,
 - behavioural concerns.
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Toileting and Self Care

Policy

Volunteers should never be alone with a child in an unsupervised washroom and never go into a washroom cubicle with a child and shut the door. Toileting and diapering guidelines are provided and should be followed for all children, youth and persons with special needs.

Procedures & Guidelines

Children/Youth/Persons Requiring Assistance

- When children/youth need assistance in the washroom, an adult may enter the washroom cubicle to assist only when a second adult is within visual contact. If this is not possible, inform another adult when taking a child to the washroom and when returning.
- In light of the fact that most reported abusers are male, and for the protection of our male workers, it would be wise for men to avoid assisting boys or girls of any age in the washrooms. We suggest that only women assist children in the washrooms.

Independent Toileting

- If washrooms are isolated from the area(s) of activity, children/youth should not be sent to the washroom alone.
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Security and Identification

Policy

General

All staff and volunteers should be easily identified.

Program Areas

Security precautions are to be taken for all children/youth admitted to programs. Children must be signed-in and released only to those authorized by the parent/caregiver.

Names of parents and children and the names of any alternate approved by the parent will be carefully maintained.

Classrooms and offices

All classrooms must have windows or doors with windows, allowing for easy viewing by parents and supervisors. Sight lines through these windows are to remain unobstructed at all times.

Storage and Utility Areas

All storage and utility areas are to be kept locked and made accessible only to those who have a need for access.

Procedures & Guidelines

Identification

All those working/volunteering in children's programs must wear name tags provided by Heartland Forest or approved clothing, which identifies them with the program.

Security

Children are never to be dropped off without a worker present.

Parents/caregivers are not to enter the classroom or learning area when picking up their child unless requested to do so. This better enables the child-care staff to maintain order and provide the level of security that parents would expect.

Doors are to be supervised to ensure children are not able to exit alone and/or cannot be taken from the room without the adult worker's awareness

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Health and Safety

Policy

Heartland Forest recognizes its moral and legal responsibility to provide a safe and healthy work environment for staff, volunteer workers and visitors and will endeavour to ensure they do nothing to place themselves or the local community at risk of injury or illness.

Heartland Forest will endeavour to:

- Provide safe buildings, plant and systems of work.
- Ensure compliance with legislative requirements and standards.
- Provide staff and volunteer workers with information, instruction, training and supervision for their safety.

Joint Health & Safety Committee

Heartland Forest is required to have one Health and Safety Representative who is selected by the workers they represent.

Please see the bulletin board in the Office for the name and contact information of Heartland's Health and Safety Representative along with current safety information.

Procedures & Guidelines

Sickness

A child/youth/person who is ill and could therefore expose others to illness should not be received into a program. Some signs of illness are unusual fatigue or irritability, coughing, sneezing, runny nose and eyes, fever, vomiting, diarrhea, inflamed mouth and throat. Any person with a known communicable disease should not be received into a program.

Medication

- Heartland Forest staff or volunteers are not to give or apply any medication without instruction **and** a signed release from the parent/guardian.
- No medication will be left unsecured in a room or with a worker or child.

Emergencies

- In the event of a life-threatening or medical emergency:
 - Call 911
 - Assure the patient that help is on the way
 - Keep the phone line clear after the 911 call is made
 - Direct someone to wait out front to meet the ambulance and lead the way.
 - Start first aid
- Procedures for fire/evacuation are posted in the classroom.
- Procedures will be reviewed semi-annually for emergencies.

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Health and Safety, continued

Procedures & Guidelines, continued

First Aid

- First aid boxes are located:
 - in the portable classroom
 - at the Reception Desk in the Nature Centre
 - at the entrance to the Woodworking Shop
- Contents are checked monthly by Front Desk Receptionist.
- The Office Manager is notified to restock supplies.

- The Automated External Defibrillator (AED Machine) is located in the Discovery Atrium to the right of reception.

Procedures for Dealing with Cuts or Injuries Involving Blood

- Separate the injured person from the other campers/visitors. Isolate the area where any blood may have dropped on carpet, toys, etc. Apply first aid measures and send someone to locate the parents.
- If other children/person has had contact with any of the blood from the cut or injury, their parents/guardian should be informed.
- Put on latex gloves (available in the first-aid kit) and bandage the injury, avoiding contact with mouth, ears and eyes.
- Carefully wipe up all blood and bloody bandages and remove to a secure, inaccessible waste removal receptacle.
- Any blood on the floor or toys must be washed away using a solution of one part bleach to ten parts water.
- Remove and properly dispose of latex gloves.
- Wash carefully with sterilizing soap (in first-aid kit).

Cleanliness

- Hand wash stations are located outside of the park-side washrooms adjacent to the portable classroom (available during spring – summer – fall).
 - Sanitizer stations are located in both washroom hallways in the Nature Centre.
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Allergy Awareness and Avoidance

Policy

Definition

Allergic reaction: The hypersensitive response of the immune system of an allergic individual to a substance.

Anaphylactic shock: A widespread and very serious allergic reaction. Symptoms include dizziness, loss of consciousness, labored breathing, swelling of the tongue and breathing tubes, blueness of the skin, low blood pressure, heart failure, and death. Immediate emergency treatment is required,

Heartland Forest Policy

Children/Youth/Persons with a known allergy that may require the administering of medication or immediate emergency treatment must complete a profile with treatment directions and authorization for treatment by staff and volunteers. This profile will be kept at the front of the program binder.

At all times, diligence needs to be on the part of the parent whose child has the allergy.

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Allergy Awareness and Avoidance

Procedures & Guidelines

Insect Sting Allergic Reactions

The majority of allergic reactions from stinging insects are from Bees, Yellow Jackets, Hornets and Wasps. Severity of reactions to stings varies greatly. For children/persons with a known bee sting allergy avoidance and prompt treatment is essential.

Food Allergic Reactions

Because so much food is brought into the forest it is unrealistic and unsafe for us to guarantee an allergen-free and especially a nut-free environment.

We ask everyone to avoid the use of nuts and nut products in baking or purchasing snacks for our programs and events. For other identified allergens we ask volunteers to work with the parents/caregivers and avoid the use of the allergen in their specific program.

As well it is important to provide parents/caregivers/leaders with the means to make an informed decision – this requires bringing in the label on purchased food items so ingredients can be checked and eliminates bulk bin purchases.

General Procedures

Children and Youth Programs

- all snacks purchased for children's programs must have a label (so a parent can check ingredients – we are ensuring they have the means to make a decision)
- “no sharing” policy with snacks

Events

- when purchasing food please bring the label so a parent/individual can check the ingredients

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Allergy Awareness and Avoidance

Procedures & Guidelines

*Sample Nut Allergy Letter –
For distribution at each program start as required.*

Dear Parents, Caregivers and Friends,

Several children attending programs at Heartland Forest have a potentially life threatening allergy to peanuts, nuts and nut products. This allergy is known as anaphylaxis. Even a tiny amount of any of these products can be potentially fatal.

Your support and sensitivity would be appreciated in order that all of our children can remain safe and healthy.

Here are some suggestions on how you can help:

- **AVOID** sending snacks that contain nuts and nut products.
- **DO NOT** purchase snacks from bulk bins.
- **BRING THE INGREDIENT LISTING** when providing a purchased snack so that parents can check the ingredients and make an informed decision.
- **STRESS** that trading and offering snacks could potentially put a child at risk.
- **FEEL FREE TO DISCUSS** this situation with your family and reinforce the severity of this allergy.

We do not expect families to necessarily avoid products that may contain trace elements of nuts. If you already read labels you know that such avoidance can be overwhelming not to mention frustrating. All we ask is that you avoid sending lunches, snacks and food items that clearly contain nuts.

Thank you for your support and understanding.

Sincerely,

Heartland Forest Programming Staff

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Field Trips, Special Events & Transportation

Policy

Activities conducted away from Heartland Forest are to be pre-approved by the Manager (or designate) to ensure that potential risks have been addressed.

Consent forms must be completed for each participant.

Attendance must be taken before leaving and prior to the return to ensure the safety of all participants.

Procedures & Guidelines

Supervision

- All trips and outings must be supervised by a minimum of two approved adult workers.

Transportation by Car

- Transportation of children or youth in a staff vehicle or parent vehicle is not permitted. Parents or guardians may choose to drive their child to an off-site event at their own discretion.

Transportation by Bus

- Every person being transported (including youth and adult supervisors) must have a place to sit down on the bus. The number of people being transported must never exceed the bus company guidelines.
- To ensure an accurate headcount, written attendance must be taken when entering the bus both at the starting point and when leaving the destination.

PLEASE NOTE: WHICHEVER MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION A CHILD/YOUTH TAKES ON A TRIP THEY MUST RETURN THE SAME WAY UNLESS WRITTEN CONSENT IS PROVIDED FROM A PARENT/CAREGIVER.

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Behaviour Management

Policy

Every child has the right to feel safe in our program environment. The staff we employ are well trained, and the program we deliver is inclusive and non-threatening. As challenges present themselves, a problem solving format will be utilized to support all those involved. In the case of a child/youth who is behaving in an unsafe and excessively disruptive demeanor, the Leaders have the authority to request that the camper not return to camp.

Ongoing problems in discipline are to be brought to the attention of the Manager. The Manager (or designate) will work with the program's team and parent/caregiver to resolve the discipline issue.

Procedures & Guidelines

It is our expectation that children attending Heartland Forest programs and camps experience a safe, exciting and positive environment of outdoor learning and fun. With this in mind, it is important to set behavior guidelines for all participants that we ask all attendees to adhere to.

Leaders will follow a three strike system:

Strike one: The child/youth is given an official verbal warning, the Leader talks privately to the child about their behavior and what is expected of them. The child is asked to correct the behavior and provided with problem solving solutions. The Leader informs parents of the challenge upon pick-up at the end of the day/program.

Strike two: The child/youth is given a second official verbal warning. They may be asked to sit out of an activity for a period of time and is informed that one more incident may result in them no longer being able to attend the program. The Leader then follows the same procedures as in strike one. Parents are advised of the incident and informed that another incident will result in their child no longer being allowed to attend the remainder of the program. A phone call or email is provided to the Program Supervisor or designate with an incident report.

Strike three: Same procedures as above. The child/youth is asked to sit out of the group, while remaining under supervision until the parent or guardian arrives to pick up their child. An incident report is provided to the Summer Camps Supervisor or designate.

* Please note: This discipline procedure is not appropriate for all children, especially those with developmental or communication delays.

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Behaviour Management, continued

Procedures & Guidelines, continued

Preventative Discipline

- Create a loving, caring atmosphere.
- Arrange your environment for children and for learning.
- To gain respect you must grant respect.
- Establish and communicate realistic expectations for the children.
- Be sure the activities that you provide are meaningful and age-appropriate.
- Be fair and consistent with all children.
- Be sure your focus is on positive actions.
- Be aware of needs of children with special needs.

Remedial Discipline

- Try to deal with the problems individually.
- Explain to the child why the behavior is unacceptable.
- Redirect the child to positive action.
- Explain the consequences of unacceptable behavior by defining the correct way to behave as well as the result of the wrong behavior.
- Offer choices that are acceptable to both you and the child.

Some examples of appropriate discipline are:

- Praising the specific behaviors you want to see in your group (i.e. “good listening”, “thank you for waiting”)
- A firm gentle voice addressing and redirecting the behavior (i.e. “you are running; walk please”)
- Confidential parental discussion when necessary.
- Age appropriate “time outs” or withdrawal from activity.

Some examples of inappropriate discipline are:

- Corporal punishment of any kind, including jerking, shaking, spanking, slapping, hitting, squeezing, striking or kicking a child or other means of inflicting physical pain or bodily harm.
 - Any words or tone that would cause a child to think he or she is the “problem” rather than a specific behavior being addressed (e.g., screaming at a child)
 - Any words that could cause feelings of condemnation or shame in a child about any aspect of their person—including derisive references to anything physical, emotional, mental, or position (or station) in life, such as saying, “Are you a strong boy? Strong boys don’t cry” or “Shame on you.”
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Proper Displays of Affection

Policy

Touch is an essential responsibility in nurturing lives. Workers and volunteers need to be aware of, and sensitive to, differences in sexual development, cultural differences, family backgrounds, individual personalities, and special needs. Physical contact with children should be age and developmentally appropriate.

Procedures & Guidelines

The following guidelines are recommended as genuine and positive displays of care:

Appropriate Touch

Love and caring can be expressed in the following age appropriate ways, by:

- Bending down to the child's eye level and speaking kindly; listening to him or her carefully
- Taking a child's hand and leading him or her to an activity
- Putting an arm around the shoulder of a child who needs quieting or comforting.
- Taking both of the child's hands as you say, "You did such a good job!" (or "I'm so glad to see you. We've missed you!" etc.)
- Patting a child on the head, hand, and shoulder or back to affirm him or her.
- Gently holding a child by the shoulders or hand to keep his or her attention while you redirect the child's behavior.
- Holding a preschool child who is crying
- High fives and props

Inappropriate Touch

At all times you must avoid:

- Kissing a child, coaxing a child to kiss you, extended hugging and tickling.
 - Touching a child in any area that would be covered by a bathing suit (except when assisting a child with toileting as outlined previously).
 - Carrying older children or having them sit on your lap.
 - Being alone with a child.
 - Prolonged physical contact.
 - Opposite sex piggyback rides.
 - Seductiveness or suggestive contact.
 - Any physical contact of any kind that is done for the pleasure or satisfaction of care providers.
 - Any touching used to express power or control over a child.
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Allegations of Abuse and Reporting

Policy

Child/Person abuse is a violation of moral law within the context of trusted relationships. It is criminal behaviour that causes emotional, physical and spiritual trauma to victims and has destructive consequences for abusers.

Concerns for a child or person's safety are to be reported in accordance with procedures prescribed in this document.

Heartland Forest will not engage in denial, minimization, or blame. Our response strategy will be based on the following underlying principles:

- All allegations will be taken seriously.
 - Situations must be handled forthrightly with due respect for people's privacy and confidentiality.
 - Full cooperation must be given to civil authorities under the guidance of legal counsel.
 - Adequate care must be shown for the well being of victims. The victim should not be held responsible in any way.
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Procedures & Guidelines

How to File an Occurrence Report – Within Heartland Forest

Any individual (volunteer, parent or member of the community) who witnesses inappropriate touch or verbal abuse should contact a member of the Heartland Forest Team:

- Staff names and contact information can be found in our Volunteer Handbook and are posted on the charity's website.

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Allegations of Abuse and Reporting, continued

Procedures & Guidelines, continued

Abuse Definitions & Behaviours

“Child abuse” is defined as follows:

Physical Abuse is using physical force or action that results, or could result, in injury to a child or youth. It is more than reasonable discipline. Sometimes injury is caused by over-discipline. Injuring a child or youth is not acceptable, regardless of differing cultural standards on discipline. Note: it is not permissible to strike a child.

Emotional Abuse is a pattern of hurting a child’s feelings to the point of damaging their self-respect. It includes verbal attacks on the child, insults, humiliation or rejection. A child or youth who is emotionally harmed may demonstrate severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal, self-destructive or aggressive behaviour.

Sexual Abuse occurs when a child or youth is used by somebody else for sexual stimulation or gratification. Sexual activity between children or youth may also be sexual abuse if older or more powerful children or youth take sexual advantage of those who are younger or less powerful.

Neglect means the failure of those responsible for the care of the child to meet the physical, emotional or medical needs of a child to an extent that the child’s health, development or safety is endangered.

Symptoms of Abuse and Molestation

Volunteers and staff should be alert to the physical signs of abuse and molestation, as well as to behavioural and verbal signs that a victim may exhibit. A one-time event would not necessarily constitute a potential abuse case; sudden unexplained changes, however, would warrant investigation. Some of the more common signs are:

Physical signs may include:

- lacerations and bruises
- irritation, pain or bleeding in the genital area or difficulty with urination

Behavioural signs may include:

- nervous or hostile behaviour toward adults
- sexual self-consciousness or “acting out” sexual behaviour
- withdrawal from church activities and friends

Verbal signs may include the following statements:

- (Particular person) does things to me when we’re alone
- I don’t like to be alone with (particular person)
- (Particular person) fooled around with me

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Allegations of Abuse and Reporting, continued

Procedures & Guidelines, continued

Your Legal Responsibility

It is everybody's personal duty to report suspected abuse.

- If an individual suspects abuse, they should call Family and Children's Services Niagara (FACS). They should not try to investigate on their own. FACS may have had other calls of concern that don't give them enough of a case to investigate, but another call could complete the picture and allow them to intervene and assist a child.
- If an individual suspects abuse, they should not tell the child or the parents/guardians that they are going to call FACS. If parents/guardians are aware of a report to FACS they may leave/move, prepare the child for questioning or the child could be put at increased risk.
- An individual suspecting child abuse must report directly to FACS or the police if they fear the child is in immediate danger. They must not rely on someone else to report for them. Please contact the Manager to assist you – you are not alone.
- Anonymous reporting – An individual can call the FACS intake number to "run a concern by" an intake worker to see if it is a reportable concern. An individual can consult anonymously with an intake worker in this way, but if the worker feels that the concern is reportable, the caller may be asked to leave their name and contact information.
- The FACS worker that intervenes with the family and investigates the concern would never identify the origin of the complaint to the family of the child. For example, she would just explain to the family that some concerns had been raised, but would never say by who.
- If the case was serious enough to go to criminal court, (which isn't common), anonymity could not be guaranteed.

The above issues are outlined clearly in the Family and Children's Services Niagara website www.facsniagara.on.ca.
