

our VISION

A city where
children are safe,
families are strong
and communities
are supported.



CHILDREN'S
AID SOCIETY
of TORONTO

LA SOCIÉTÉ
DE L'AIDE à
L'ENFANCE
DE TORONTO

our mission & values



Leading with excellence and working in partnership to:

- Prevent situations that lead to child abuse and neglect by embracing, strengthening and supporting families and communities;
- Protect children and youth from abuse and neglect;
- Provide safe and nurturing care for children and youth;
- Advocate to meet the needs of children, youth, families and communities.

We believe in:

- Placing the needs of children and youth first;
- Creating an environment that promotes trust, equality, respect, diversity, openness and honesty;
- Affirming and valuing our staff, care providers, clients and volunteers;
- Promoting enduring relationships for children and youth;
- Being accountable and transparent;
- Demonstrating excellence, leadership, teamwork and innovation.



about us

The Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CAS of Toronto) recognizes the importance of actively working to engage the different communities that we serve. Toronto is a very diverse city. That diversity demands that organizations working to serve the public, must not only reflect the communities that they serve, but also actively reach out to them to foster a better relationship.

For over three years, our Services to Muslim Families Advisory Committee, comprised of both CAS of Toronto staff and members of Toronto's Muslim community, has worked in partnership to explore, design, and develop a collaborative approach to responding appropriately to Muslim families served by our agency. We believe that this partnership will help facilitate the development of culturally appropriate service plans for Muslim children, youth and families. As well, working with members of the Muslim community affords us better insight when planning our mutual education and community development initiatives.

An important part of our service includes community work. Our staff has conducted workshops, presentations and seminars at Islamic schools and Muslim social service agencies and has been invited to participate in community events at several Toronto mosques.

Our experience over the years has shown us that families are stronger and children are safer when people feel confident that they will receive the help they need. Keeping children safe is our ultimate goal. However we cannot do it alone. We need the entire community to be our partner in this important responsibility.

keeping children safe



Children's Aid Societies have a mandate from the provincial government to intervene in any situation where a child, under 16 years of age, has been or is threatened with physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or neglect. All professionals, including teachers and healthcare workers are obligated by law to report their suspicions of child abuse or neglect to their local Children's Aid Society. As well every member of the public has a duty to report suspected child abuse. *The Child & Family Services Act states:* If a person has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection, the person must promptly report the suspicion and the information upon which it is based to a Children's Aid Society.

Often, families fear that being reported to a Children's Aid Society automatically leads to the removal of a child from the home. This is not the case. In fact 9 out of 10 children we work with are not removed from their homes. Instead we provide services to help their families solve the problems they are facing so they can keep their children safe at home. The removal of a child from a home is among the last options that we consider and only when the child is deemed to be in imminent danger. Since children are almost always better off remaining in their own homes, we strive to keep families together. Most of the families with whom we work, receive help through a practice called Family Centered Conferencing, which tries to find solutions to support families, reduce risks to children and come up with a plan that best meets a child's needs.

prevention is key

We believe that the best way to deal with child abuse and neglect is to prevent it. That is why we encourage people to contact us before their family problems escalate. We can help families through these challenging times, and support and strengthen them so that they are better prepared for parenting.

programs and services

We have over 800 staff and 600 volunteers at CAS of Toronto working in many different program areas. The following overview briefly outlines some of these services.

community development & prevention

Often, what is required for children to be healthy and thrive is a strong community that supports families and reduces risks. For over 40 years, our community development and prevention program has worked alongside parent and community groups and social agencies from diverse communities to achieve common goals.

Once such example is, *New Horizons Healing and Hope Coalition*. This is a partnership with 12 ethno-specific agencies, the Children's Aid Foundation and the Arab Community Centre which provides support and outreach to children, youth and families who have faced trauma immigrating from countries torn by civil war and other challenging conditions. As well, we have worked closely with the *Centre for Mentorship Education and Tutoring* to secure Trillium Foundation funding to support youth to succeed academically by providing access to free mentoring, tutoring and recreation programs for at risk racialized youth. Both these initiatives aim to instill hope, build confidence and a sense of pride among the participants.

kinship

Kinship care is the full-time nurturing and protection of children by extended family and significant people in their life or their community. This is important because it allows the child to remain within their community and stay connected to their culture. We support placing children with kin wherever possible, as this may allow us to avoid bringing children into our legal care. As has occurred in the past, sometimes 'kin' become foster parents of the society.

foster care

Foster care is the temporary placement of a child in care in an approved CAS of Toronto foster home. The Foster Care program is responsible for

the recruitment and support of foster parents and for matching children with an appropriate foster home. Every effort is made to recruit a diverse range of foster homes for all our children in care in order to meet not just their developmental needs, but also match their racial, ethnic, cultural, religious backgrounds. Whenever possible, we try to place children with foster families of a similar cultural or religious background.

adoption services

When a child cannot grow up with their biological family, adoption becomes one of the options. Adoption is a structured, permanent and legally binding process which establishes a lifelong parent-child-family relationship.

Our ultimate goal is to provide a permanent family and security for each of our crown wards. Since adoption has changed over the years to reflect changing patterns in our society, all applicants for adoptive parenthood are required to attend an in-depth adoption education program, which includes the legal requirements to finalize adoption. We also offer post adoption support services.

protection services

Children's Aid Societies across Ontario have a legal mandate to intervene, where necessary, to protect children under the age of 16 from abuse and neglect. CAS of Toronto makes every effort to protect children without removing them from their homes. We strive to achieve this using our professional expertise in relationship building, crisis intervention, family counseling and where appropriate by referrals to other community support resources.

Families come to our attention in several ways. Some families contact us themselves because they realize they require parenting support or guidance. In other cases, families are referred to us by relatives, friends, teachers, police or medical professionals who suspect that a child may be at risk of abuse or neglect.

When we receive a referral, our Intake department conducts an assessment to gather as much information as possible about the nature of the concern, the child and the family. This helps determine the most appropriate or immediate course of action. If we cannot ensure the immediate safety of a child, it is only then that the child would be brought into our care on a temporary basis. This will allow us the opportunity to further assess the situation and make plans to ensure the child's safety and long term best interests.

For every child we bring into our care, we work with nine more who remain in their own family and in their community.

dedication and support

Significant changes have been made to how we provide our services over the past several years. These changes have not only resulted from a thorough review of Ontario's child welfare system by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, but have also been initiated by ourselves in reviewing many of our own practices. We readily engage extended families and community supports in much of our service to children and youth. We believe that all families have strengths — but they may need help to use those strengths to solve their problems. Our family centered approach engages the family's support system, so together we can work towards how best to keep children safe and the family supported.

family support services

We are committed to maintaining the family unit because we know that once a child is safe, the best place for that child is with his or her family.

Our workers teach child management skills, lead parenting programs and provide many other practical supports as they address the issues that brought the family to our attention.

volunteer services

The Society began as a volunteer organization and the services of volunteers continue to be a vital resource. We are fortunate to have approximately 600 volunteers who come from various cultures and ethnicities who provide over 150,000 hours of service each year. They enrich our service to the community with their skills, energy and commitment to children. There are many roles available for volunteers including tutors, drivers, parent aides, recreation group workers, special friends, clinic assistants, public speakers and such specialized functions as research and post-adoption services. We are always grateful to receive inquiries from interested volunteers.

anti-oppression, anti-racism

At CAS of Toronto we value the advancement of equality, diversity and human rights for all clients, staff, care providers and volunteers. In 2006, our Board of Directors approved an Anti-oppression, Anti-racism policy that guides every facet of our work. We recognize and are committed to upholding the dignity, worth, and rights of each individual and to the pursuit of equality, freedom from adverse discrimination and harassment and the removal of all barriers to equal opportunity. We recognize and uphold the principle of equality of access to appropriate services which are sensitive to the needs of clients whatever their race, religion, ethnic origin, ancestry, citizenship, age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status or ability.

frequently asked questions

q: what is child abuse?

There are different kinds of child abuse:

- Physical abuse is maltreatment (by a parent or caregiver) that results in injury to a child.
- Neglect is the failure to meet a child's basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, medical attention, education, and protection from harm.
- Emotional abuse is a pattern of behavior that attacks a child's emotional development and sense of self worth. It includes excessive, aggressive or unreasonable demands that place expectations on a child beyond his or her capacity.
- Sexual abuse is when a child is used for the sexual gratification of an adult or an older child.

q: what happens when I call to report a suspected case of child abuse?

You will be asked about the details of what caused you to call and we will check our records to see if we have any other information on the family concerned. If we believe that we have to do an investigation, a children's aid worker will visit the family in question to determine if abuse is occurring. If the worker believes the child is at risk, he or she must decide how to protect the child and help the family.

The worker may offer to connect the family with a community support service or offer support provided by our agency. Removing a child from their home is always among the last options we consider and only when the child is considered to be in imminent danger. In the vast majority of cases, children remain in their home with their families, while the family receives help to parent the child safely. This is the best scenario, as we believe in the strength of the family, and that most families are able to work through their difficulties with support from relatives, friends, community services or ourselves.



how you can help

q: how old does my child have to be before I can leave them home alone?

There is no law in Ontario that dictates a specific age at which a child can be left alone. The law is purposefully vague on this because there are many variables to take into consideration; the child's age, the length of time they may be alone, their maturity level and the availability of adult support close by. Parents know their children best. If you feel that your child is unprepared at any age, to be left alone - do not leave them alone.

q: what is positive parenting?

Positive parenting reinforces the values you want your child to learn, without using physical punishment.

q: what is positive discipline?

Positive discipline is a loving way to teach your child. Using positive discipline involves defining acceptable behaviour and reasonable consequences for children who break the rules. It is a necessary part of your relationship with your child and teaches children self-control and socially acceptable behaviour. Physical punishment is not discipline. It uses control and force to get children to behave differently and is an ineffective way of teaching.

q: what is reasonable discipline in Canada?

Attitudes toward discipline and punishment are changing in Canada. In the past the way parents treated their children was considered to be a private matter. Today, children's basic rights are guaranteed by law. Canadian society also recognizes that parents have their own distinctive values and beliefs. Parents have a lot of discretion to set their own rules and parenting practices. Presently, the Criminal Code of Canada allows parents to use "reasonable force" to discipline children. What is "reasonable" depends on the situation, but judges have indicated that forms of physical punishment that were acceptable in the past may no longer be permitted. Clearly, any injury that requires medical attention, results in bruising, welts, broken skin or is brought about by the use of any object (belt, cord, or stick) might be considered abuse.

- Become a volunteer. Offer to drive a Muslim child in care to prayer service.
- Consider becoming a foster parent. We welcome foster parents from all cultural/religious backgrounds as we understand that providing culturally relevant and competent care is critical to the overall wellbeing of children.
- Invite us to participate in community events at your Mosque.
- Consider adoption.
- Report any suspicions you have of child abuse to your local Children's Aid Society.

we are here to help

If you or someone you know has difficulties caring for children, help is available through the CAS of Toronto and other community agencies. We can help to provide a safe and loving environment for the children and help the family deal with problems they may be experiencing. We can also help teach a family develop skills for handling crises. It is always better to get help early, before problems get worse. Regardless of your cultural or religious background, and no matter what language you speak, help is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



contact:
information

all locations

416.924.4646

www.torontocas.ca

Central Branch
30 Isabella Street

North Branch, Etobicoke Branch,
Foster Care and
Adoption Services
20 De Boers Drive

Scarborough Branch
843 Kennedy Road



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