

We are your Children's Aid Society

Family and Children's Services of St. Thomas and Elgin

Information for Parents,
Caregivers and
Community Members



Our VISION

All children and youth are safe
and have increased well-being.

Our MISSION

We protect children and youth from abuse and neglect by ensuring their safety in a permanent and nurturing environment in partnership with families and the community.

What is the Mandate of Family and Children's Services?

Family and Children's Services (FACS) is a child protection agency mandated by Ontario's *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*.

Our responsibility is to protect children and youth from harm such as physical, emotional, sexual abuse, neglect or risk of harm, within St. Thomas and Elgin County. We are required by law to investigate concerns from the community with respect to children under the age of 16 and can, with their consent, provide services to youth 16 and 17 years old.

If a youth 16 or 17 year old is in need of protection, FACS can provide support and assist them to make decisions that help to minimize the risk to their safety and promote their best interests, protection and well-being.



What is the Authority for FACS to investigate child protection concerns?

We understand that receiving a call or visit from FACS can be a stressful experience, and that you may have many questions and concerns.

Ontario's Child, Youth and Family Services Act mandates that FACS must undertake prompt investigation of any referral alleging that a child may be in need of protection.

Community members have a duty to report to FACS when there are reasonable grounds to believe a child is in need of protection.

Child protection investigations are conducted by Child Protection Workers authorized under the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*.

What happens after FACS receives a phone call or referral?

Every day, FACS receives many calls from the community.

When a reported concern is serious enough to warrant an investigation, a child protection worker will meet with the family to assess the child's safety and the situation.

If the matter is a case of sexual abuse, serious physical abuse or neglect, police will be consulted prior to the investigation. In such cases, the worker and a police officer will jointly investigate the situation. The police will investigate the situation to determine if a criminal act occurred, while our agency's primary focus and responsibility is the safety and well-being of the child and/or other children in the home.

In the course of the assessment, the worker may also speak to other family members, doctors, teachers, other children in the family, etc.

If the assessment shows that the problem is serious and the family needs help, the agency will support them through a variety of programs, tools and services. The goal is to help parents become more effective caregivers and, therefore, realize positive outcomes for their children or youth.

Not all referrals to FACS will result in a child protection investigation. Some issues are better addressed through other community resources. We can help you find the services that may help.

Please visit our website for links to services and supports

www.caselgin.on.ca

Will FACS take my child away?

Children and youth should remain with their families in their own homes whenever possible. Most of our work involves engaging with families while their children remain at home.

Removing children from their caregivers only occurs as a last resort when there are no known family or community members to care for the child.

FACS will make every effort to resolve concerns through the Signs of Safety Approach, Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR), Mediation, Family Group Conferencing and/or First Nations ADR / Original Dispute Resolution (ODR).

www.lfcc.on.ca/adr-link

Do I need a Lawyer?

Most of our work with families is done on a voluntary basis, but where there is court involvement you have the right to participate in the legal process in Family Court.

You also have the right to consult a lawyer at any point during the provision of services to you by FACS. You may also receive support through **Legal Aid, Duty Counsel or the Office of the Children's Lawyer 1-800-668-8258.**

Confidentiality and Privacy

FACS is committed to protecting your privacy. The law requires that we keep any report, record or investigation confidential from the public, including employers.

PART X of the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* requires that we safeguard your information in a secure manner and provides you the right to request your personal information.

You have the right to report to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Ontario about our information practices:

<https://www.ipc.on.ca/>

First Nations, Inuit and Métis, (FNIM) and FACS

Where FACS is involved with a child or family that identifies as First Nations, Inuit and Métis (FNIM), FACS will work with the FNIM Community or Band Representative to provide the best care in accordance with the child's heritage, lineage and membership to the FNIM community.

Where there is a substantial reason to remove a child from their caregiver, the child shall be placed with a member of extended family, a member of the child's band or community; or another FNIM family. FACS respects the child's right to preserve their cultural identity.

Services to FNIM families would be provided in a manner that recognizes their culture, heritage and traditions and the concept of the extended family and community.



How does FACS work with families and the community?

We use the Signs of Safety (SofS) approach anchored in diversity, equity and inclusion when addressing child protection concerns.

Signs of Safety is a structured approach to child protection that guides our work with families. It addresses the seriousness of alleged or confirmed harm by taking a balanced approach to risk assessment.

It looks at both the strengths and the worries related to the identified risk.

SofS brings together the knowledge of workers and community partners and the family's strength, wisdom and experience to create sustainable, everyday child safety in the home, until case closure.

Do you want to tell us what you think?

FACS welcomes any opportunity to discuss ways to improve services and supports to children and their families.

If you have feedback about the services you have received, or are receiving, we want to know. The following are ways in which you can share your feedback:

- If you have received service from us, you would have been afforded the opportunity to complete an online survey. If you did not receive a link to the survey and would like one, or to give your feedback on the phone, please phone our main number and ask to speak to our Quality Assurance Manager.

If you have concerns about the services you have received, or are receiving:

- You can speak directly with the child protection worker involved or their supervisor.
- You can make a written complaint to FACS. This is part of the regulated Complaints Review Process and it includes your right to access the Internal Complaints Review Panel. A written response will be provided to you within 7 days.
- You may also bring complaints in matters that are not before the court, directly to the Child and Family Services Review Board. <http://www.cfsrb.ca/> 1-888-777-3616
- The Family Court System can also play an important role in ensuring individual rights are respected. You can attend a Family Court Information clinic to learn more.
- The Ontario Ombudsman Office takes complaints from children, youth and adults. Anyone experiencing a problem with a foster home, group home youth justice facility or secure treatment centre should contact the Ombudsman's office. www.ombudsman.on.ca 1-800-263-2841

FACS is committed to providing consistently high service to all service users regardless of place of origin, race, creed, age, family diversity, gender identity, gender expression, sex, sexual orientation, sexual identity or ability. Disrespect will not be tolerated within our workplace.

FACS will make every reasonable effort to ensure services are provided in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities.

If you require special assistance, please make your request known to your child protection worker.

To Contact us

Family & Children's Services of
St. Thomas and Elgin
99 Edward Street, St. Thomas, ON N5P 1Y8
519-631-1492 / 1-800-260-6960

Worker / Contact Information

Name _____ Extension _____