

The CYFS Connection Third Edition

A way to connect on what's happening on the Child,
Youth and Family Supports (CYFS) Transformation Project

A Message from the Minister of Community Services



To Friends and Partners
of Children, Youth and
Family Supports:

This March marks a
new beginning for how
we provide supports for
children, youth and their
families. The changes to
the Children and Family
Services Act will help
protect Nova Scotians
from 16-18 years of age,

improve child safety, streamline court processes
and ensure children have a safe and lifelong family
relationship that provides consistency, stability,
love and guidance.

We've heard from communities that our existing
legislation needed to change to better reflect the
realities facing many of the children and families that
need our support. For my many years working with
families in crisis in communities, it was clear to me
the Act didn't always fulfill its purpose of protecting
children and supporting families. The will to improve
the act was personal for me. The policies and
regulations put in place to support the changes to
the Act will evolve over time to respond to changing
circumstances. We will continue to listen to
communities and get their feedback on ways
to improve services to vulnerable children,
youth and families.

Before the amendments to the Children and Family
Services Act were passed in 2015, Government invested
\$2 million to create the Families Plus program and
increase the number of Parenting Journey programs
from 12 to 27. Other programs were modified to better
respond to cultural needs of African Nova Scotian,
Mi'kmaq and Acadian and francophone children and
families. Earlier intervention will help prevent child abuse
and neglect. By broadening the definition of a child in
need of protective services, the department can get
involved with families earlier, when the difficulties they
face are more likely to be remedied with community-
based services.

Also starting in March, Community Services will adopt
new policies regarding access, family visitation and
transportation for the children in our care. The changes
to Access and Family Visitation planning are intended to
be more child-centered, meaning that they prioritize what
is in the child's best interests. Government's priority is to
enable continuity of relationships, reunification, healthy
growth and development and a sense of normalcy and
routine for the children in our care.

I want to thank all of our partners for your tremendous
support in helping Nova Scotian children and youth.
If you have any questions about the changes to the
Act, please don't hesitate to get in touch with staff
at Community Services.

Joanne Bernard
Minister of Community Services

Amendments to the Children and Family Services Act

Key changes to the CFSA include:

- Broadening the definition of a child in need of protective services
- Streamlining court processes and defined time frames for hearings
- Addressing the gap in the protection of youth by providing services for 16–18 year-olds
- Amending the duty of people to report abuse or risk of abuse
- Requiring cultural connection plans for children in care to honour and preserve children's culture

For more information about the changes to the Children and Family Services Act and Nova Scotians' duty to report child abuse, or risk of child abuse, go to <https://novascotia.ca/coms>.

New Access, Family Visitation and Transportation Policies Focus on the Needs of Children in Care

As of March 1st, 2017, and onward, when a child enters temporary care and custody, the new access, family visitation and transportation policies will apply. The new policies provide a framework to effectively and comprehensively plan for children where contact with parents, siblings and other significant relationships are in the child's best interests. Transition to the new access and family visitation planning process for children who entered care prior to March 1st, will occur naturally over the next 30-90 days, consistent with scheduled case planning activities for these children.

The key shifts in access, family visitation and transportation policies include:

- Scheduling access and family visitation events at times that are best for the child
- Considering the impact of travel times and distances for the child
- Having parents, where possible, travel to their children
- Regularly reviewing and updating access plans as family circumstances change
- Scheduling access and family visitation events closer to a child's temporary home and in child-friendly locations such as a parent's or relative's home, park, community locations, etc.
- Emphasizing continuity of individuals supporting access and family visitation including engaging family members and foster parents, when possible - to limit the number of persons involved with each child
- Shifting away from detailed, narrative summaries to focused, relevant documentation specific to incidents
- Increasing permanent staffing to enhance flexibility of service provision
- Staggering staff shifts, recognizing peak access hours i.e. after school, evenings and weekends

A fact sheet on access, family visitation, and transportation is available at <https://novascotia.ca/coms/>