

# Child, Youth, and Family Discussion Guide

Nova Scotia Children and Family Services  
Act (CFSA) – Engagement

Department of Community Services

## What is the Children and Family Services Act?

The Children and Family Services Act (CFSA) is a law in Nova Scotia. The purpose of the CFSA is to protect children and youth from harm, and strengthen the wellbeing of families and communities.

The law applies to everyone who is responsible for the safety and wellbeing of children and youth in Nova Scotia. It also applies to all communities across Nova Scotia, including Indigenous communities.

The Department of Community Services manages the different programs and services for the CFSA. The CFSA sets the rules that these programs and services must follow.

Here are some examples of these services:

- services that help prevent harm from happening in the first place;
- services for parents or caregivers and families who may need extra support to cope with challenges;
- services for children and youth who may need protection from their parents or caregivers;
- services that support children and youth when they are unable to remain with their parents or caregivers;
- services to support other family members or approved individuals (such as foster parents) to be caregivers for children or youth;
- services to support children, youth, and adoptive parents related to an adoption.

The Department of Community Services recognizes that children and youth need to be surrounded by a community of supportive people and have access to services to meet their unique needs.

All Nova Scotians share the goal of supporting the safety and wellbeing of children and youth in our province. It requires government, service providers, families, and communities to work together. The CFSA can and should support this shared goal.

## Why do we want your feedback?

The law requires a review of the CFSA every four years. The next review must be completed, and the report made public, by March 1, 2025.

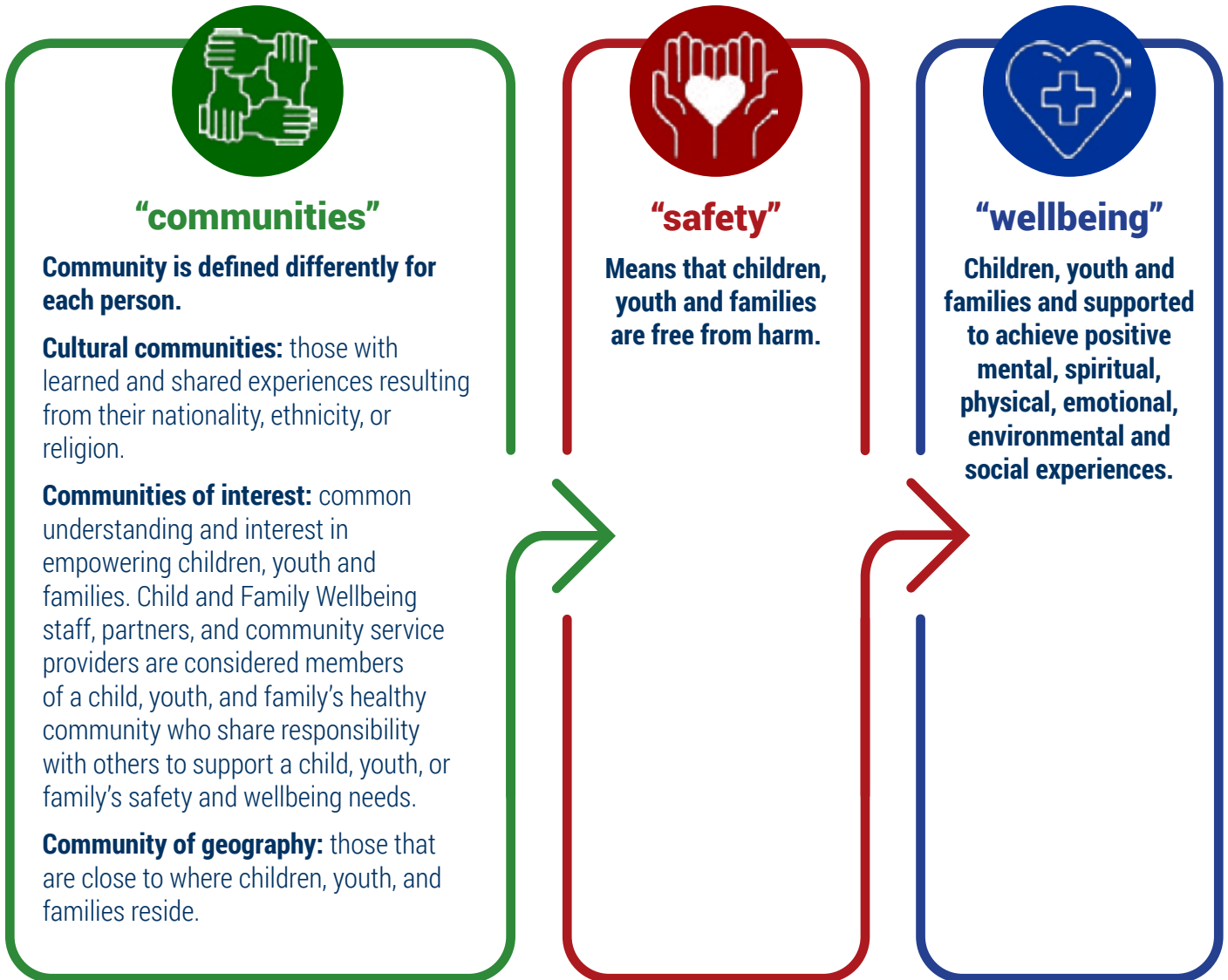
To prepare for the review, it is important to hear from youth, families, and communities about what changes could improve programs and services. Your voice can help make important changes to the CFSA so that families can be better supported when they need it. This means hearing from people across Nova Scotia including:

- children, youth, and families;
- 2SLGBTQIA+ communities;
- African Nova Scotian/African descent children, youth, families, communities, and organizations;
- Indigenous children, youth, families, communities, and organizations;

- newcomers to Canada;
- other community organizations and members of the general public.

Right now, the Department of Community Services (the Department) is looking to change the way it supports children, youth, families, and communities. The Department has a vision that:

**Communities support the safety and wellbeing of children, youth, and families.**



This graphic above describes each element of that vision. We want to make changes to the CFSA to make sure we are bringing this vision to life.

All feedback will be reviewed by the Department and summarized in a ‘What We Heard’ report. While the Department will consider all feedback received, it may not be possible to address all feedback in the report.

All feedback received will be shared with the committee appointed by the Minister to complete the review of the CFSA.

## How to share your feedback

We know that children, youth, and families have unique experiences and can provide valuable input to help improve policies, programs, and services. This Discussion Guide was created so that all youth and families have a chance to provide feedback. We want to hear your ideas on how to improve the CFSA.

You can give us your feedback in a few ways:

1. Fill out an online survey
  - Visit the CFSA Engagement website <https://novascotia.ca/children-and-family-services-act-engagement> and follow the directions to complete the survey
2. Attend an in-person or virtual engagement session
  - Visit the CFSA Engagement website <https://novascotia.ca/children-and-family-services-act-engagement> to find a list of engagement sessions along with information about when and where they are happening, and how you can join.
3. Email or mail us your feedback. Your feedback can be in any form that works for you, such as a letter, a drawing, or a voice recording.
  - Send emails to: [CFSA@novascotia.ca](mailto:CFSA@novascotia.ca)
  - Send physical mail to:

CFSA Engagement  
Department of Community Services  
1894 Barrington Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Halifax, NS B3J 2A8

### Dos and Don'ts for sending feedback:

**Do** send us your feedback by **November 30, 2023**.

**Do** tell us what your connection is to children, youth, and family services. Are you:

- someone who is currently seeking or receiving services or supports;
- someone who has sought or received services or supports in the past;
- a family member of someone who is receiving or has received services or supports;
- a friend of someone who is receiving or has received services or supports;
- a parent, guardian or caregiver, foster/kinship caregiver, or customary caregiver;
- other (please explain)?

**Don't** feel you have to answer all the questions. You can choose to answer those that are important to you.

**Don't** share personal information. We are not asking for any information that will identify who you are or who someone else is (also known as personal information<sup>1</sup>). If you do choose to share personal information with us, we will protect your privacy by following the rules set out in Nova Scotia's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPOP).

If you have questions about how your personal information will be collected and used, contact:

**Manager, Information Services and Privacy**

902-424-4127  
[CS\\_Privacy@novascotia.ca](mailto:CS_Privacy@novascotia.ca)  
Community Services  
Barrington Tower, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
1894 Barrington Street  
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 2A8

**Get support if you need it**

We understand that some topics can be hard to talk about. If you need to talk to someone, please reach out to the Kids Help Phone.

**Call:** 1-800-668-6868  
**Text:** CONNECT to 686868  
**Website:** <https://kidshelpphone.ca>

<sup>1</sup> Personal Information as defined under Section 3(1)(i) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 1993, c.5, s.1.

## Topic #1: Prevention, Early Intervention, and Family Preservation

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Prevention, early intervention and family preservation services are meant to build on a family's ability to face challenges before an issue happens, or before an issue worsens. The goal is to keep the family together by giving them the support and tools they need to thrive.

These programs and services are delivered by government-funded community-based service providers and include:

- youth outreach programs;
- parenting supports;
- community peer support.

We want to hear from you about how these prevention, early intervention, and family preservation services are working or could be improved.

### Questions

1. How do you think your community should be involved in supporting children, youth, and families when they are facing challenges?
2. What current community-based programs and supports work well? Which ones do not work well? Are there any new programs and supports that are needed but either do not currently exist or are not available?

The Department has been making changes to improve the prevention and early intervention system by:

- building new program types and supports across the province;
- expanding existing programs and opening additional program sites across the province;
- supporting service providers to tailor programming to meet the needs of their unique communities.

## Topic #2: Child and Youth Rights and Wellbeing

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Children and youth have the right to feel safe, heard, and cared for. This means they have the right to voice their opinions about, or ask for changes to, their care or the programs and services that support their development and wellbeing.

They also have rights about how their personal information is collected, used, and shared. This includes any information that can identify the child or youth, such as race, age, or gender.

The Department and the community-based service providers who provide services to children and youth are responsible for respecting these rights.

We want to make sure the rights of children and youth are clear and are being followed. We also want you to tell us if there are any changes that will help us do a better job of protecting the rights of children and youth who access services.

### Questions

1. How can we help children and youth better understand their rights under the CFSA?
2. How can we encourage them to participate in decisions that affect them?
3. What can we do to help children and youth if their rights are not being respected?
4. Please tell us how we can change or improve the way we collect and use personal information based on your experience.

## Topic #3: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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We recognize that children, youth, and families have diverse backgrounds, and that connections to family, culture, and community are important for their wellbeing.

We work to ensure all services and programs under the CFSA are inclusive and respectful and consider all parts of the child, youth, and family's identity, such as race, culture, (dis)ability, and gender identity.

Services are also intended to be equitable, meaning they are tailored to meet the individual needs of each child and youth.

We want to know your ideas for ways we can strengthen diversity, equity, and inclusion in the programs and services delivered to children, youth, families, and communities. We also want to know what we can do to strengthen and preserve cultural identity.

### Questions

1. Have you ever felt a child, youth, or family was discriminated against because of their race, culture, gender identity, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, or other parts of their identity when receiving services? What changes could make services more inclusive?
2. How can services take a child, youth, or family's unique needs and identity into account to better support them?

To support diversity, equity and inclusion, the Department has:

- developed an anti-Black racism strategy;
- developed anti-Black racism policy and principles that guide policy development;
- launched an Africentric Child and Family Wellbeing program to support all social workers when working with children, youth, and families of African descent



## Topic #4: Indigenous Peoples

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The CFSA includes provisions, such as those concerning customary care and preserving cultural identity, to support the delivery of services to children, youth, and families. However, all services provided to Indigenous children and youth must recognize and protect their heritage, traditions, cultural connections, communities, and concept of family.

We want to know how we can all do a better job of meeting the needs of Indigenous children, youth, families, and communities who receive services.

### Questions

1. How do you feel the identities, cultures, and traditions of Indigenous children, youth, or families are respected, valued, and considered when accessing child and family services?
2. Please tell us how we can change the way that services are delivered so they are more culturally attentive to the needs of Indigenous children, youth, families, and communities.

The Mi'kmaq, through the Kwilmu'kw Maw-klusuaqn Negotiation Office (KMKNO), are developing a child and family services law and working with Canada and Nova Scotia to take on responsibility for the delivery of child and family services for Mi'kmaw children, youth, and families living in Nova Scotia.

## Topic #5: Quality Programs and Services

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High-quality programs and services help children, youth, and families thrive. Programs and services should be consistent, easy to access, and attentive to culture, identity, circumstances, needs, and wishes.

This includes programs and services such as alternative family care, talking circles, support for youth who are leaving care or transitioning into adulthood, support for those experiencing sexual exploitation, and support for parties to an adoption.

We want to hear from you about how we can improve the quality of programs and services for children, youth, and families.

### Questions

1. What has been your experience with child, youth, and family services or supports?
2. What do you feel would help to improve the quality of the services?

The Department has been improving the delivery of services by:

- implementing the Alternative Family Care program to keep children and youth within their communities/families;
- redesigning the foster care system to provide children and youth with stable, family-like environments that are delivered by diverse and caring foster caregivers, and to reduce the administrative burden on caregivers;
- ending birth alerts and identifying prevention-based supports for expectant and new parents;
- changing the law to open adoption records and allow increased access to information for adopted persons, birth parents, and their families.

## Topic #6: Accountability

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Accountability means making sure the programs and services delivered under the CFSA are meeting the needs of children, youth, and families, and are achieving their outcomes.

We achieve accountability by:

- reviewing the services being provided;
- giving children, youth, and families a way to tell us when they have a concern, and addressing that concern when we receive it;
- collecting information about who is accessing services and what their experience was like.

We want you to tell us how we can improve the accountability of services so we can help all children, youth, and families get the supports they need.

### Questions

1. What was your experience if you ever tried to provide feedback or make a complaint about a child, youth, or family program or service?
2. How can we ensure we hear and act on feedback, complaints, or concerns we receive from the children, youth, families, and community members?
3. How do you think the Department should evaluate child, youth, and family service providers so we will know they are doing a good job providing services to children, youth, and families?

The Department is working to increase transparency and support accountability to children, youth, families, and communities by developing:

- an accountability framework to better understand how government-funded community-based service providers are achieving outcomes;
- a Practice Framework for Child and Family Wellbeing that will tell children, youth, families, and communities what they should expect when receiving programs and/or services;
- a policy manual that will be available to the public that will guide the work of all Child and Family Wellbeing employees (currently under development).

## Anything else?

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We want to know if there is anything else related to child, youth, and family services that you think is important.

1. What other possible changes would help to improve experiences and outcomes for children, youth, and families?