

# A Trauma-Informed Analysis of Child & Youth Policies in Ontario

This policy information sheet is part of a series created by the Practice and Policy Analysis committee within the [Canadian Consortium on Child and Youth Trauma \(CCCYT\)](#). Practice and Policy Analysis is **one of seven** projects led by the CCCYT.

We explore how trauma-informed care is reflected in policies and practices across Canada.

## About the CCCYT

The CCCYT is a partnership that brings together more than 100 members, including researchers, professionals, and organizations from various sectors of child, youth, and family services. Together, we work to improve social responses to child and youth trauma, given 34.4% of Canadian adults have reported experiencing child abuse.<sup>1</sup>

Towards this goal, we have created this policy information sheet, with the aim to:

- 1) **Map the policies** that have been made to protect children and youth and support their well-being in the province of Ontario, Canada
- 2) **Analyze whether these policies** reflect trauma-informed care principles

Through these aims, we hope this resource can help policy-makers build on strengths in current legislation and identify opportunities to strengthen trauma-informed approaches, as well as help practitioners, advocates, and researchers better understand the legislative landscape and track progress over time.

## So, why is a trauma-informed approach important in policy?

A trauma-informed approach means creating policies that reflect an understanding of trauma and its impacts. Exposure to trauma (e.g., abuse, neglect, family dysfunction, and/or violence) is linked to challenges in emotional regulation, brain development, and social-relational capacities.<sup>2,3,4</sup> These impacts are often cumulative, with risk increasing with each experience. The impact of trauma is not only personal, but economic. The most recent estimate of the annual cost of child abuse in Canada is around \$23 billion.<sup>5</sup>

This approach is important because the **children and youth most impacted by trauma are often the ones these policies are meant to protect**. Looking at policy through a trauma-informed lens helps us to limit the potential for more harm, and instead build safety and long-term well-being. It is both a compassionate and cost-effective approach to policy making.



**Trauma-Informed Care (TIC)** is an approach used in services, policies, and workplaces at all levels of government and organizations since the early 2000s, with growing adoption across sectors in the past decade. It helps make sure that children, youth, and the professionals supporting them who have experienced trauma feel safe, supported and are not re-traumatized.



As of 2021, there are **2,750,014** children (0-17 years) living in Ontario<sup>6</sup>

### Type of Maltreatment Investigation In Ontario (2018)



For every **1,000** children in Ontario, there are:

**2.72**

living in out-of-home care, as of 2022 (e.g., foster care, kinship, group homes)<sup>6</sup>

# What are policies and why do they matter?

Policies are rules or plans that guide how things are done. They exist at different levels of government or within organizations. Provincial and territorial policies are especially important because they help shape how services like health care, education, and child protection are delivered, funded and how important issues are handled.

In Ontario, many policies begin as Bills and follow the process shown to the right.

For more information on how policies become enforced into law in Ontario, [click here](#).

## Methodology

- 1 We hand-searched Ontario's laws catalogue and read the preamble of each Act.
- 2 Acts were included if their purpose was relevant to children or youth's well-being or protection as outlined in the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).<sup>8</sup>
  - This convention states that children (ages 0-18) have fundamental human rights, like the right to health, education and protection from harm. These rights are equally important, and Canada has a responsibility to uphold them at all times. These rights are often interconnected and therefore the policies here may touch on multiple rights (e.g., best interest of the child is explicitly mentioned in many Acts).
- 3 We searched each included Act for mention of trauma and trauma-informed care as well as any terms related to the key principles of TIC, as described by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.<sup>9</sup> For a list of all exact terms used, click [here](#).
  - The TIC principles are:
    - Safety
    - Empowerment, Voice & Choice
    - Collaboration & Mutuality
    - Cultural, Historical or Gender Issues
    - Trust and Transparency
    - Peer Support

There are **limitations** that should be kept in mind as you read through this information sheet.

- We offer a point-in-time look at the Acts current up until **May 27, 2026**. As Acts evolve over time, caution should be used when interpreting this sheet at a later date.
- While Acts may not specifically use the term searched, they may endorse the principles that reflect trauma-informed care.



### Bills

A Bill is like a draft of a new law or a proposed change to an existing one. It's introduced to lawmakers for discussion and debate.



### Acts

When a bill is approved, it becomes an Act. Acts are bills that have been accepted and passed by the government, turning them into official laws.



### Practice Guidelines

Although practice guidelines are not laws, they are important tools because they guide how laws are put into practice.



# Mapping the Existing Acts in Ontario



UN Rights	Act Name (Year)	Act Description
Best Interest of the Child	<u>Supporting Children's Futures Act</u> (2024)	This Act adds protections for children in care by improving investigations, strengthening rules for service providers, and protecting personal information. It gives the government stronger powers to inspect services and help keep children safe. <sup>10</sup>
Children who are Adopted	<u>Intercountry Adoption Act</u> (1998)	This Act says that children (< 18 years) can only be adopted from other countries if the adoption follows strict rules and is approved, while protecting the child's best interests. <sup>11</sup>
Children with Disabilities	<u>Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act</u> (2005)	This Act is about protecting the rights of all people with disabilities by promoting their full participation in society. For children, this Act requires governments to talk with schools regarding accessibility. <sup>12</sup>
	<u>Ontario Disability Support Program Act</u> (1997)	This Act helps people with disabilities, including children and youth, by providing money and job support for them and their families. <sup>13</sup>
Health, Water, Food, Environment	<u>Mental Health Act</u> (1990)	This Act says that children with mental health challenges have the right to get treatment when they need it. It also says that patients aged 12-16 can ask a review board to check if they still need to stay in a psychiatric facility. <sup>14</sup>
	<u>Patient Restraints Minimization Act</u> (2001)	This Act says hospitals cannot restrain, confine, or monitor patients, including minors, unless it is legally allowed and necessary for safety or care. <sup>15</sup>
No Discrimination	<u>Anti-Racism Act</u> (2017)	This Act says that public services must identify and eliminate systemic racism that can affect both minors and adults. <sup>16</sup> It also establishes the need to develop an anti-racism impact assessment framework (ARIA). <sup>17</sup>
	<u>Human Rights Code</u> (1990)	This Act says that everyone must be protected from discrimination in places like school, housing, services, and jobs. Parents or guardians can make a human rights complaint on behalf of a child (<18 years). <sup>18</sup>


# Mapping the Existing Acts in Ontario

UN Rights	Act Name (Year) 	Act Description
Prevention of Sale and Trafficking	<u>Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy Act</u> (2021)	This Act says the government must put a plan in place to stop human trafficking and help people who have been through it. This plan must protect children, who are at higher risk of being trafficked, and address the root causes that lead to trafficking. <sup>19</sup>
	<u>Prevention of and Remedies for Human Trafficking Act</u> (2017)	This Act says adults and children (<18 years) who are victims of human trafficking can receive protections like restraining orders, civil remedies, and relief from coerced debts. <sup>20</sup>
Protection from Harmful Drugs	<u>Cannabis Control Act</u> (2017)	This Act protects youth (<19 years) from cannabis use. It also allows police to refer youth to education or culturally safe prevention programs instead of charging them in court. <sup>21</sup>
Protection from Harmful Work	<u>Protecting Child Performers Act</u> (2015)	This Act says that children (< 18 years) working in entertainment must be kept safe and their education and money must be protected. It also sets rules for their working conditions and supervision. <sup>22</sup>
Protection from Sexual Abuse	<u>Christopher's Law (Sex Offender Registry)</u> (2000)	This Act applies to the protection of the public, including minors, by establishing a sex offender registry that allows police to monitor offenders' movements online and in-person and enhance community safety. <sup>23</sup>
	<u>Erin's Law (Sexual Abuse Prevention and Reporting)</u> (2024)	This Act makes changes to the Education Act, requiring schools to teach children how to recognize and report sexual abuse. Schools must also provide parents, teachers, and staff with information and supports to help protect children. <sup>24</sup>
	<u>Film Content Information Act</u> (2020)	This Act says adult sex films cannot be shown, sold, or rented to children (< 18 years). <sup>25</sup>
Protection from Violence	<u>Child, Youth and Family Services Act</u> (2017)	This Act applies specifically to children (< 18 years) and covers child protection, youth justice, adoption and family services. The main goal of this Act is to promote children's safety, well-being, and best interests. <sup>26</sup> The Public Health Agency of Canada highlights key information about this Act <a href="#">here</a> . <sup>27</sup>



# Mapping the Existing Acts in Ontario



UN Rights	Act Name (Year) 	Act Description
Responsibility of Parents	<u>Children's Law Reform Act</u> (1990)	This Act says that children have the right to care and protection that is in their best interests. It helps decide parentage and custody arrangements. <sup>28</sup>
	<u>Family Law Act</u> (1990)	This Act says that children and youth have the right to financial support from their parents or guardians. It also helps protect their well-being when families separate or have legal disputes. <sup>29</sup>
	<u>International Recovery of Child Support and Family Maintenance Convention Act</u> (2023)	This Act says that countries must work together to help children (<21 years) receive child support and family payments from parents, even when the parents live in different countries. <sup>30</sup>
Social and Economic Help	<u>Indian Welfare Services Act</u> (1990)	This Act says Indigenous children and families have equal access to social assistance and welfare-related services. <sup>31</sup>
	<u>Ontario Child Benefit Equivalent Act</u> (2009)	This Act says that children (<18 years) in government care (e.g., Children's Aid Society) can receive financial support to help meet their needs. <sup>32</sup>
	<u>Poverty Reduction Act</u> (2009)	This Act says that the government must set goals, track progress, and report on reducing poverty for children and families. It focuses on giving children and youth better opportunities through education and support programs. <sup>33</sup>
Recovery and Reintegration	<u>Victims' Bill of Rights</u> (1995)	This Act says that victims of crime, including children, must be treated with kindness, fairness, and respect by the justice system. It also says that children have the right to information about their case, court dates, safety protections, and updates about the person accused of harming them. <sup>34</sup>

# Trauma-Informed Analysis

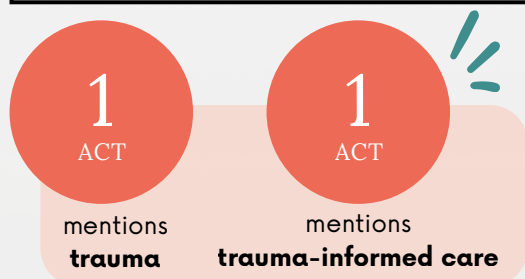
The table below highlights how Acts in Ontario endorse the **six** key principles of trauma-informed care, such as safety, empowerment, and trust.

## How to interpret:

- ✓ means the Act includes at least one key term related to the principle
- X means no key terms related to the principle appear
- The colours show how often those key terms pop up across the Act

■ More than 10x
 ■ Less than 10x
 ■ None

Act	Trauma-Informed Care Principle					
	Safety	Empowerment, Voice, Choice	Collaboration & Mutuality	Cultural, Historical or Gender Issues	Trust & Transparency	Peer Support
Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X
Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy Act	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X
Anti-Racism Act	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X
Cannabis Control Act	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X
Children's Law Reform Act	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X
Child, Youth and Family Services Act	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Christopher's Law (Sex Offender Registry)	✓	X	✓	X	X	X
Erin's Law (Sexual Abuse Prevention and Reporting)	✓	X	X	X	✓	X
Family Law Act	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X
Film Content Information Act	✓	X	X	✓	X	X
Human Rights Code	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X
Indian Welfare Services Act	X	✓	X	X	X	X
Intercountry Adoption Act	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	X
International Recovery of Child Support and Family Maintenance Convention Act	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X
Mental Health Act	✓	✓	X	X	✓	X
Ontario Child Benefit Equivalent Act	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ontario Disability Support Program Act	✓	X	X	X	✓	X
Patient Restraints Minimization Act	✓	X	X	X	X	X
Poverty Reduction Act	X	✓	X	✓	X	X
Prevention of and Remedies for Human Trafficking Act	✓	✓	X	X	✓	X
Protecting Child Performers Act	✓	✓	X	X	X	X
Supporting Children's Futures Act	✓	✓	X	X	X	X
Victims' Bill of Rights	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	X



While many of the Acts have been created to support children and youth who are most impacted by trauma, only **one** Act explicitly mentions trauma and trauma-informed care, namely the Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy Act (2021).<sup>19</sup>

# What **influences** the content and implementation of policies?


## **Provincial Bills**


Bills, when assented into law, can trigger changes to existing Acts. As a result, Acts are continuously evolving with amendments for the removal or addition of new definitions, clauses and sections. For example, as of June 2024, the *Supporting Children's Futures Act*<sup>10</sup> enhances protections and support for children and youth in care, including new offences and expanded rights and oversight for children under the law. This, in turn, caused amendments in the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*.<sup>26</sup>

## **Provincial Practice Guidelines**

Unlike Bills, practice guidelines, such as frameworks or action plans, do not change existing Acts. Instead, they act as a bridge between policy and practice, showing workers how to apply an Act in their daily work. Although this series does not examine these types of documents, it is possible that trauma and TIC are referenced more explicitly in here than in legislation. There may also be variation in the ways workers use Acts in practice.

### Examples of practice guidelines in Ontario:

 **The Ontario Child Protection Standards Framework** supports workers in carrying out the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*.<sup>26</sup>

 **The Practical Guide to Mental Health and the Law** supports workers in carrying out the *Mental Health Act*.<sup>14</sup>

## **Federal Policies**

There may be policies enacted by the Canadian government that impact provincial legislation. For example, *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families*, came into effect in January 2020.<sup>35</sup>


This Act impacts Ontario's child welfare policies by shifting the legal authority from the province to Indigenous communities.



Under this Act, if an Indigenous governing body develops its own child welfare laws, those laws will prevail over provincial laws.

As of April 28, 2026, the Minister of Indigenous Services has received **twenty two notices of intention** from Indigenous governing bodies in Ontario to exercise their legislative authority over Child and Family Services. Of these twenty two notices:



Examples of Indigenous child and family services laws that have been enforced in Ontario include:

 Click [here](#) to follow the progress being made towards the implementation of this federal Act

-  • *Zaag'idiwin*<sup>36</sup>
-  • *Nigig Nibi Ki-win*<sup>37</sup>

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Our team also wishes to thank Gabrielle Chapdelaine for her contributions to this policy information sheet

# Want to get involved? Reach out to us **here!**



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