

POLICY: 2.2 Child Protection

Procedure: 2.6 Identifying and Responding to Abuse

This procedure represents a key part of the Service's commitment to protecting children from harm. Understanding the indicators of abuse and factors which influence a child being abused is an important part of our capacity to respond to suspicion of harm to children in our setting. This procedure covers indicators to assist those in implementing the procedure with some concrete foundation for identifying when abuse may be occurring.

2.6.1 Linking to Policy

This procedural guidance should be read in conjunction with the Service's **2.2 Child Protection Policy** and will assist the Approved Provider, management, staff (Nominated Supervisors, Coordinators and administrative staff members), Educators, Educator Assistants and parents to implement and engage with the Child Protection Policy. The procedure covers:

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2.6.2 What is Abuse

Child abuse is any action towards a child or young person that harms or puts at risk their physical, psychological and/or emotional health or development. Child abuse can be a single incident or can be several different incidents that take place over time.

There are four types of child abuse:

1. Physical Abuse
2. Sexual Abuse
3. Emotional Abuse
4. Neglect

A child in need of protection: is a child who has suffered significant harm, is suffering significant harm, or is at unacceptable risk of suffering significant harm and doesn't have a parent able or willing to protect the child (*refer to 2.2 Child Protection for the definition of able or willing*).

Significant Harm: harm to a child is any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing. Harm can be caused by:

- A single act, omission or circumstance or
- A series or combination of acts, omissions, or circumstances.

Reasonable grounds – the threshold for reporting: your reasonable suspicion that a child has suffered, is suffering or is at an unacceptable risk of suffering significant harm caused by physical or sexual abuse and may not have a parent able and willing to protect them.

Mandatory Reporting: the *Child Protection Act 1999* (PDF) requires certain professionals (in Queensland) including all Family Day Care staff or Educators, referred to as 'mandatory reporters', to make a report to Child Safety, if they form a reasonable suspicion that a child has suffered, is suffering or is at an unacceptable risk of suffering significant harm caused by **physical or sexual abuse** and may not have a parent able and willing to protect them.

Mandatory Reporters: Nominated Supervisors, Coordinators and Educators will report to Child Safety a reasonable suspicion that a child needs protection caused by any form of abuse or neglect.

2.6.3 Indicators of Abuse

There are common physical and behavioural signs that may indicate abuse or neglect. The presence of one of these signs does not necessarily mean abuse or neglect. Behavioural or physical signs which assist in recognising harm to children are known as indicators.

The following is a guide only. One indicator on its own may not imply abuse or neglect. However, a single indicator can be as important as the presence of several indicators. Each indicator needs to be deliberated in the perspective of other indicators and the child's circumstances. A child's behaviour is likely to be affected if he/she is under stress. There can be many causes of stress and it is important to find out specifically what is causing the stress. Abuse and neglect can be single incidents or ongoing and may be intentional or unintentional.

GENERAL INDICATORS OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT MAY INCLUDE:

- The marked delay between injury and seeking medical assistance
- History of injury
- The child gives some indication that the injury did not occur as stated
- The child tells you someone has hurt him/her
- The child tells you about someone he/she knows who has been hurt; someone (relative, friend, acquaintance, and sibling) tells you that the child may have been abused.

NEGLECT

Child neglect is the continuous failure by a parent or caregiver to provide a child with the basic things needed for their growth and development, such as food, clothing, shelter, medical and dental care and adequate supervision. Some examples are:

- Inability to respond emotionally to the child
- Child abandonment
- Depriving or withholding physical contact
- Failure to provide psychological nurturing
- Treating one child differently to the others.

Indicators of Neglect in children:

- Poor standard of hygiene leading to social isolation
- Scavenging or stealing food
- Extreme longing for adult affection
- Lacking a sense of genuine interaction with others
- Acute separation anxiety
- Self-comforting behaviours, e.g., rocking, sucking
- Delay in development milestones
- Untreated physical problems

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical abuse includes, but is not limited to:

- Non-accidental injury to a child that you suspect is caused by a parent or other household member
- Actions towards a child by a parent or other adult household member that may have caused, or is likely to cause, a significant injury
- The child was injured, or nearly injured, during a domestic violence incident involving adults

This may also include:

- Direct admissions from parents about the fear of hurting their children
- Have a family history of violence
- Have a history of their own maltreatment as a child
- Make repeated visits for medical assistance.

Indicators of Physical Abuse in children:

- Facial, head and neck bruising
- Lacerations and welts
- Explanations that are not consistent with injury
- Bruising or marks that may show the shape of an object
- Bite marks or scratches
- Multiple injuries or bruises
- Ingestion of poisonous substances, alcohol or drugs
- Sprains, twists, dislocations and bone fractures
- Burns and scalds.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Emotional abuse occurs when an adult harms a child's development by repetitively treating and speaking to a child in ways that damage the child's ability to feel and express their feelings. This may include:

- Constant criticism, condescending, teasing of a child or ignoring or withholding admiration and affection
- Excessive or unreasonable demands
- Persistent hostility, severe verbal abuse and rejection
- The belief that a specific child is bad or "evil"
- Using inappropriate physical or social isolation as punishment
- Exposure to domestic violence.

Indicators of Emotional Abuse in children:

- The feeling of worthlessness about them
- Inability to value others
- Lack of trust in people and expectations
- Extreme attention-seeking behaviours
- Other behavioural disorders (disruptiveness, aggressiveness, bullying).

SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse is any sexual activity or behaviour that is imposed on a child and results in physical or emotional harm. Sexual abuse is when someone involves a child in a sexual activity by using their authority over them or taking advantage of their trust. Children are often bribed or threatened physically and psychologically to make them partake in the activity. Educators will be predominantly conscious of looking for potential sexual abuse if parents or caregivers are suspected of or charged with child sexual abuse or display inappropriate jealousy regarding age-appropriate development of independence from the family.

Sexual Abuse may include:

- Exposing the child to sexual behaviours of others
- Coercing the child to engage in sexual behaviour with other children
- Verbal threats of sexual abuse
- Exposing the child to pornography.

Indicators of Sexual Abuse in children:

- A child describes sexual acts
- Direct or indirect disclosures
- Age inappropriate behaviour and/or persistent sexual behaviour
- Self-destructive behaviour
- Regression in development achievements
- A child being in contact with a suspected or known perpetrator of sexual assault
- Bleeding from the vagina or anus
- Injuries such as lacerations to the genitalia.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

Psychological harm occurs where the behaviour of the parent or caregiver damages the confidence and self-esteem of the child, resulting in serious emotional deficiency or trauma. In general, it is the frequency and duration of this behaviour that causes harm. Some examples are:

- Excessive criticism
- Withholding affection
- Exposure to domestic violence
- Intimidation or threatening behaviour.

Indicators of Psychological Abuse in children:

- Constant feelings of worthlessness
- Unable to value others
- Lack of trust in people
- Lack of people skills necessary for daily functioning
- Extreme attention-seeking behaviour
- Extremely eager to please or obey adults
- Takes extreme risks, is markedly disruptive, bullying or aggressive
- Suicide threats
- Running away from home.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence, or intimate partner violence, is a violation of human rights. It involves violent, abusive, or intimidating behaviour carried out by an adult against a partner or former partner to control and dominate that person.

Domestic violence causes fear, physical and/or psychological harm. It is the most common violent, abusive or intimidating behaviour by a person towards another person. Living with domestic violence has a profound effect on children and young people and may constitute a form of child abuse.

Indicators of Domestic Violence:

- Show aggressive behaviour
- Develop phobias & insomnia
- Experience anxiety
- Show symptoms of depression
- Have diminished self-esteem
- Demonstrate poor academic performance and problem-solving skills
- Have reduced social competence skills including low levels of empathy
- Show emotional distress
- Withdrawn
- Have physical complaints

RECOGNISED GROOMING

Grooming refers to the way some offenders form relationships and build trust with parents, carers, teachers and other children to get close to a child and create the opportunity for sexual abuse. Grooming can be difficult to identify as the behaviour itself may not be abusive or sexual. It is also important to note that not all offenders use grooming techniques.

Examples of grooming include:

- Regularly offering to babysit a child for free or take a child on overnight outings alone
- Actively excluding a child from other adults or children
- Insisting on physical affection such as kissing, hugging, wrestling or tickling even when the child doesn't want it
- Being overly interested in a child's sexual development
- Insisting on being alone with a child without interruption
- Taking a lot of pictures of children
- Using sexually explicit language with a child
- Sharing alcohol or drugs with a child.

Educator responsibilities in relation to protecting children from abuse while being provided with education and care:

The Educator will:

- Understand and recognise indicators of abuse by undertaking training regularly on child protection and their reporting obligations as a mandatory reporter
- Ensure all people over 18 residing at their home hold a Working with Children (Blue Card) positive notice (*see 8.3 Assessment of Fitness and Suitability of Adult's residing at the Educators Residence*)
- Ensure all visitors sign the Record of Visitors Form – name, date and times in and out – signature; and
- No visitor is ever left alone with a child at any time (*see 2.4 Visitors to the Educators Home and Service Office Procedure and 2.5 Supervision of Children Procedure*)
- Ensure their family members and others residing at the residence **are not** left supervising a child who is being provided with education and care (*2.5 Supervision of Children Procedure*)

- Ensure all people residing or visitors understand their obligations to ensure they in no way impact on the health, safety and wellbeing of children through their behaviour or actions (*8.11 Role of Educators Family*). This will include:
 - o discussing supervision, bathing, toileting and changing of nappies of children in care. These activities must only be undertaken by the Educator
 - o discussing appropriate behaviour while children are at the residence.
- **where the child is required to stay overnight** - a Risk Management Plan will be developed in collaboration with the family and Service staff and approved by the Coordinator/Nominated Supervisor before this occurs. (*refer to 2.5 Supervision of Children Procedures*) for guidance.

2.6.4 Responding to Suspected Harm or Abuse

When working with families, it is important to consider their diversity, culture and child-rearing practices. This means being mindful that family's cultural practices and how they raise their child may be different from that of the Educator. By understanding the indicators of abuse, Educators can differentiate the difference between abuse and cultural/child-rearing practices. Educators will always put children's best interests as the key focus and act if they believe a child is at risk of harm.

If an Educator becomes concerned about a child being at risk of harm due to a change in parental circumstance, they will:

- o immediately contact the Coordinator/Nominated Supervisor to discuss their concerns as soon as practicable but no later than 24 hours from the time of concern
- o document what is concerning them, including the circumstances for concern.

If a staff member or Educator suspects that a child has been significantly harmed, or is at risk of being significantly harmed, here are some important things to remember:

- Be alert to any warning signs that a child is exhibiting any indicators of abuse
- Observe the child and make written notes as soon as you begin to have concerns - pay attention to changes in their behaviour, ideas, feelings and the words they use
- Having gentle, non-judgemental discussions with the child - expressing your concern that a child looks sad or unwell can result in disclosures
- Do not pressure the child to respond and do not ask questions that put words into a child's mouth
- Assure the child that they can come and talk to you when they need to, and listen to them when they do
- When a child is being abused it does not go away and usually becomes more serious over time
- Seek expert advice by contacting the Child Safety Services (**1300 682 254**) or Family and Child Connect (**13 32 64**).

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2.6.5 Disclosure by a Child or Young Person

A disclosure of harm emerges when someone, including a child, tells you about the harm that has happened or is likely to happen.

When a child or young person discloses that he or she has been abused and is aware of others being abused, it is an indicator for an adult to provide immediate support and comfort and to assist in protecting the child from the abuse. It is also a chance to help the child connect to professional services that can keep them safe, provide support and facilitate their recovery from trauma.

Educators will, in the event of a disclosure:

1. Give the child or the young person your full attention
2. Maintain a calm appearance
3. Not be afraid of saying the "wrong" thing
4. Reassure the child or young person it is right to tell
5. Accept the child or young person will **only** disclose what is comfortable and recognise the bravery/strength of the child for talking about something difficult
6. Let the child or young person take his or her time
7. Let the child or young person use his or her own words
8. Do not make promises you cannot keep
9. Tell the child or young person what you plan to do next. Record and report this
10. Do not confront the perpetrator
11. Document the information using the Incident, Injury, Illness and Trauma Form
12. As soon as practicable (and within 24 hours) notify the Nominated Supervisor or a Coordinator at the Service.

Documenting a suspicion of harm

If Educators or staff members have concerns about the safety of a child, they will:

- Record their concerns in a non-judgmental manner using the Incident, Injury, illness and Trauma Form and in an accurate manner as soon as possible
- Record their observations as well as precise details of any discussion with a parent (who may, e.g., explain a noticeable mark on a child. Do not conduct any investigation)
- Document as soon as possible, so the details are accurately recorded including:
 - o time, date and place of the suspicion
 - o full details of the suspected abuse
 - o date of report and signature

- as soon as practicable (and within 24 hours) notify the Nominated Supervisor or Coordinator.

Documenting a Disclosure

Disclosure is about seeking support and your response can have a great impact on the child or young person's ability to seek further help and recover from the trauma.

When receiving a disclosure of harm, the Educator will:

- Remain calm and find a private place to talk
- Not promise to keep a secret
- Tell the child/young person they have done the right thing in revealing the information but that you will need to tell someone who can help keep the child safe
- Only ask enough questions to confirm the need to report the matter because probing questions could cause distress, confusion and interfere with any later inquiries
- Not attempt to conduct their own investigation or mediate an outcome between the parties involved
- Document as soon as possible (*using the Incident, Injury, Illness, and Trauma Form*) so the details are accurately captured including:
 - o time, date and place of the disclosure
 - o 'word for word' what happened and what was said, including anything they said and any actions that have been taken
 - o Date of report and signature
- As soon as practicable (and within 24 hours) notify the Nominated Supervisor or a Coordinator.

2.6.6 Support, Training and Professional Knowledge

The Service strongly opposes any type of abuse against a child or young person and endorses high quality practices concerning the protection of children. (*Refer to 8.15 Educator and Educator Assistant Professional Development and training 8.16 Staff Professional Development and Training, 8.19 Information and Training for adults residing at the Educators Residence Procedure*).

2.6.7 Family Support

The Service will support families by:

- Contacting the Family and Child Connect Services to build relationships and discuss how they can work together to support families who are experiencing heightened challenges which may lead to a child being at risk of harm
- Providing families with information about the Family and Child Connect Services and work with any family who may benefit from the services offered

- Supporting families, where required, to connect with the local [Family and Child Connect](#) (Note ECEC professionals are not prescribed entities but with permission, can refer the family to this agency)
- Providing the link to '[One place](#)', the directory of Queensland Community Services, aimed to help families find the right service at the right time
- Encouraging families to remain engaged in the Service. Building trust with the family is an important part of the Service's role
- Talking to families about concerns:
 - o be open and honest in your communication with families eg. "I have some concerns about your child that I want to talk to you about"
 - o explain your role as a mandatory reporter.

2.6.8 Confidentiality (*refer to 10.2 Grievance and Complaints Management Policy for further guidance*)

Any notification must remain confidential, as it is vitally important to remember that no confirmation of any allegation can be made until the matter is investigated. The individual who makes the complaint should not inform the person they have made the complaint about. This ensures the matter can be investigated without prior knowledge and contamination of evidence.

- Educators and Coordinators will discuss the disclosure, notification or what they have observed **only** with the Nominated Supervisor or Child Safety Personnel
- All records of the allegation will be kept on the child's secure records.

2.6.9 Educating Children about Protective Behaviour

Educators will educate children using a range of tools such as discussions, demonstrating dignity (always asking if it is ok to assist them) and reading stories which provide an opportunity to highlight:

- Acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and what is appropriate and inappropriate contact at an age-appropriate level and understanding
- Their right to feel safe at all times
- That it's OK, to say 'no' to anyone about anything that makes them feel unsafe or uncomfortable
- How to use their knowledge and understanding to feel safe
- Assisting children to identify the signs that they do not feel safe and need to be attentive and think clearly to get away from the situation or seek help
- That there is no secret or story that is too horrible that they cannot share with someone they trust
- That Educators are available for them if they have any concerns

- To tell Educators of any suspicious activities or people
- To recognise and express their feelings verbally and non-verbally
- That they can choose to change the way they are feeling
- Help children to be safe without frightening them. You could tell them:
 - o that the parts of their bodies covered by underwear are private
 - o what the right names for these body parts are
 - o that they should let you know if anyone tries to touch or photograph their private parts
 - o who they can talk to if you are not available
- For children not yet in school, you can:
 - o teach them about personal safety in simple language
 - o repeat the same rules often
 - o play 'what if' games to repeat the message about being safe e.g. what if a someone asks you to go inside their house to look for their lost cat?

The Service will:

- Promote annual National Child Protection Week to raise awareness and shift attitudes about abuse in the community
- Provide educational information and resources to ensure Educators and families have the knowledge and skills needed to act in small or large ways to support children and families in the Service, with the view of reducing the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.
- Promoting protective behaviour strategies with Educators by:
 - o talking about how the Educator would discuss children's right to feel safe with children – including asking children's permission to change nappies
 - o adding to their curriculum opportunities to identify body parts by naming correct body parts, and
 - o discussing protective behaviour strategies with families at enrolment.

2.6.10 Children's Sexuality

To understand and learn about their world, children need to explore and experiment. In learning about their bodies, children will explore and discover all the things the different parts of their bodies can do, not only their arms and legs, but also their genitals and bodily functions.

Educators will:

- Always use correct terms for body parts and encourage children to do the same
- Be sensitive when reacting to children's exploration, as it is natural and positive for children to be curious about their bodies and the bodies of other children
- Be aware that self-exploration of genital areas is natural and common in young children
- Discourage children from touching other children's genitals and talk to children about the privacy of their own bodies and of their peers.

Review

	Date	Details
Revision 00	07/2015	Original Policy Issued
Revision 01	12/2016	Reviewed
Revision 02	08/2017	Reviewed
Revision 03	11/2020	Reviewed and separated from Policy

Related Documents

Policies

2.2 Child Protection Policy

Procedures

2.4 Visitors to the Educators Residence Procedure

2.5 Supervision of Children Procedure

Forms

Record of Visitors Form

Incident, Injury, Illness, and Trauma Form Report

References

Refer to Child Protection Policy