

Policy Statement

This policy acts to ensure that:

- Our service is committed to providing an environment that fosters health, development, spirituality, self-respect and dignity, that is free from violence and exploitation
- Our service is committed to being a Child Safe Organisation that implements and embeds the Child Safe Standards into all of our service policies, procedures and practices

Explanation

Under the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998, Children and Young people must receive the care and protection necessary to ensure their safety, welfare and wellbeing.

All Educators and volunteers of our service are Mandatory Reporters and are required to report to the Child Protection Helpline (Phone: 132 111) if they have reasonable grounds to suspect a child or young person is at risk of significant harm and have current concerns about the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a child or young person where the concerns arise during or from their work.

We are committed to ensuring all Educators and staff have a full understanding of their responsibilities as a Mandatory Reporter and are supported in fulfilling these.

Definitions

Mandatory Reporters

A Mandatory Reporter means people who deliver the following services, wholly or partly, to children as part of their paid or professional work:

- Health Care (e.g. registered medical practitioners, specialists, general practice nurses, midwives, occupational therapists, speech therapists, psychologists, dentists and other allied health professionals working in sole practice or in public or private health practices)
- Welfare (e.g. psychologists, social workers, caseworkers and youth workers)
- Education (e.g. teachers, counsellors, principals)
- Children's Services (e.g. child care workers, family day carers and home-based carers)
- Law Enforcement (e.g. police)
- Residential Services (e.g. refugee workers and out-of-home care workers)
- Religious Bodies (e.g. a person in religious ministry)

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At Risk of Significant Harm

In relation to a child or young person means that there are current concerns for their safety, welfare or wellbeing because of the presence to a significant extent of any one or more of the following circumstances:

- The child's or young person's basic physical or psychological needs are not being met or at risk of not being met
- The parents or other caregivers have not arranged and are unable or unwilling to arrange for the child or young person to receive medical care
- In the case of a child or young person who is required to attend school in accordance with the Education Act 1990 - the parents or other caregivers have not arranged and are unable or unwilling to arrange for the child or young person to receive an education in accordance with that Act
- The child or young person has been, or is at risk of being, physically or sexually abused or ill-treated
- The child or young person is living in a household where there have been incidents of domestic violence and, as a consequence, the child or young person is at risk of serious physical or psychological harm
- A parent or other caregiver has behaved in such a way towards the child or young person that the child or young person has suffered or is at risk of suffering serious psychological harm
- The child was the subject of a pre-natal report under section 25 of the *Children and Young Persons Care and Protection Act 1998* and the birth mother of the child did not engage successfully with the support services to eliminate, or minimise to the lowest level reasonably practical, the risk factors that gave rise to the report

Reasonable Grounds

Means that you suspect a child may be at risk of significant harm based on:

- Your observations of the child, young person or family or
- What the child, young person, parent or another person has told you

You are NOT required to confirm your suspicions or have clear proof before making a report. To do so may interfere with evidence or compromise the work of statutory agencies, for example the Police or Department of Communities and Justice.

Strategies / How will it be done?

The Approved Provider/Nominated Supervisor will:

- Ensure that Service Coordinators have completed a current and approved Child Protection qualification
- Ensure that persons placed in day-to-day charge of the service have a current and approved qualification in Child Protection

- Ensure that any adult working or volunteering for Country Children's Early Learning completes a Working with Children Check, and does not will commence employment without their Working with Children Check being verified
- Any employees, volunteers or students working at the service are advised of current Child Protection Laws and how they are applied within the service context
- Any person whose Working with Children Check has been disqualified as a result of failing to qualify for a Working with Children Check renewal, will not be continued to be employed by the service
- Ensure every adult working with children is made aware of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998
- The Approved Provider must notify the regulatory authority through the NQA-ITS **within 7 days** of the following:
 - Any incident where the any employee reasonably believes that physical abuse or sexual abuse of a child or children has occurred or is occurring while the child is or the children are being educated and cared for by the education and care service
 - Allegations that physical or sexual abuse of a child or children has occurred or is occurring while the child is or the children are being educated and cared for by the education and care service (other than an allegation that has been notified under section 174(2)(b) of the Law)
- The Head of Relevant Entity (HRE)-Approved Provider, must give written notice to the Office of the Children's Guardian within 7 days of becoming aware of a reportable allegation
- A final report must be submitted within 30 days of becoming aware of reportable conduct, upon conducting further investigation
- If a final report cannot be provided within 30 calendar days of becoming aware of reportable conduct, the HRE - Approved Provider, must contact the Office of the Children's Guardian and submit an Interim Report
- Orientate every working and volunteering adult to this Child Protection Policy, The Child Safe Standards, Child Story Protocols and Mandatory Reporter responsibilities and ensuring their regular review of these
- Ensure any allegations of child abuse are handled in a confidential manner

Educators and Staff will:

- Raise concerns with the Approved Provider if any circumstances arise that may pose a risk to a child's health, safety and wellbeing are identified, including cultural, environmental and operational risks
- Develop trusting and secure relationships with all children at the service

- Make reports of current concerns for any child at risk of significant harm to the Child Protection Helpline for Mandatory Reporters
- Make appropriate responses to all disclosures of abuse and any allegation of abuse against staff members of the service

Family Day Care Educators will:

Notify the Approved Provider of the following:

- Any new person aged 18 years and over who resides, or intends to reside at the Educators Family day Care residence
- Any circumstances relating to a person who resides, or intends to reside at the Educators Family Day Care residence that may affect whether the person is a fit and proper person to be in the company of children
 - Including if the person is charged with or convicted of a sexual offence, an offence of a violent nature, an offence involving drugs, an offence involving a weapon
 - If a person's application for a working with children check is revoked, suspended or rejected
 - If the person is prohibited from working with children

Documentation of Current Concerns

The Approved Provider/Nominated Supervisor will:

- Support staff through the process of documenting and reporting current concerns of children at risk of significant harm
- Provide all staff and Educators with clear guidelines around documentation and a template to support this

Educators and Staff will:

- Make a record of the indicators observed that have led to the belief that there is a current risk of harm to a child or young person. Information on indicators of risk of harm are outlined in the NSW Mandatory Reporter Guide which is accessible at <https://reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/mrg>
- Discuss any concerns with the Nominated Supervisor of the service
- Advise the Nominated Supervisor of their intention to make a report to the Child Protection Helpline (132 111)
- Advise the Nominated Supervisor when a report has been made to the Child Protection Helpline

Mandatory Reporting

The Approved Provider/Nominated Supervisor will:

- Provide all staff and Educators working directly with children with a copy of this Child Protection Policy, and a copy of the Mandatory Reporter Guide to assist them in their reporting
- Provide all staff and Educators working directly with children with access to the Child Wellbeing and Child Protection NSW Interagency Guidelines
- Display the Child Protection Helpline number (132 111) on all phone and lists of emergency contact number in the interests of timely reporting

Educators and Staff will:

- In an emergency, where there are urgent concerns for a child's health or life, it is important to contact the police, using the emergency line '000'
- Using the Mandatory Reporter Guide, answer the questions relating to concerns about a child or young person. At the end of the process, a decision report will guide as to what action to take. The Nominated Supervisor is available if staff require assistance to use this online tool
- If the Mandatory Reporter Guide determines that there are grounds to suspect a risk of significant harm to a child or young person, the staff member or educator will either generate an e-Report or phone the Child Protection Helpline number (132 111)
- Mandatory Reporters should note that the legislation requires that they continue to respond to the needs of the child or young person (within the terms of their work role) even after a report to the Child Protection Helpline has been made
- If the Mandatory Reporter Guide determines that an Educator or staff member's concerns do not meet the risk of significant harm threshold they do not need to make a report to the Child Protection Helpline, however, they should discuss the matter with the Nominated Supervisor to determine whether the child or family would benefit from the assistance of another agency
- The staff member or Educator should monitor the situation and if they believe there is additional information that could be taken into account, please repeat steps above as required

Disclosures of Abuse

Educators and Staff will:

- React calmly to the child making the disclosure
- Listen attentively and later write down the child's exact words
- Provide comfort and care to the child

- Follow the steps for reporting as per the Mandatory Reporter Guide
- Reassure the child or young person that:
 - It is not their fault
 - It was right to tell
 - It is not OK for adults to harm children - no matter what
 - Explain what will happen now - that it is part of your job to tell people who can help the child or young person

Educators and Staff will NOT:

Prompt the child for further details or ask leading questions which would make the child feel uncomfortable or has the potential to jeopardise any future legal proceedings that may arise as a result of any investigation.

It is important to understand that our role is solely to support the wellbeing of the child at all times, not to investigate further any disclosure made by the child.

Allegations of Abuse Against Staff, Educators, Volunteers or Students

The Approved Provider/Nominated Supervisor will:

- Develop and maintain a system of appropriate record keeping for all allegations to ensure detailed documentation is made and stored as required
 - Records identified as relevant to child safety and wellbeing (Including sexual abuse), where an allegation of abuse has occurred at the service to be kept for at least 45 years
- Take all allegations of abuse seriously and clarify what is being alleged with the person who is making the allegation
- Contact the Reportable Conduct Scheme on 02 8219 3800 or at reportableconduct@ocg.nsw.gov.au to clarify information that is unclear before taking any action
- Assess whether or not a child or young person is 'at risk of significant harm' and, if so, make a report to the Child Protection Helpline
- Determine whether the allegation is a reportable allegation or reportable conviction
- 7-day notification form will be completed by the HRE - Approved Provider and submitted to the Office of the Children's Guardian within 7 days of becoming aware of reportable allegation, as required under the Children's Guardian Act 2019
- Consider whether or not the police need to be informed of the allegation and if so, make a report
- Ensure confidentiality is maintained at all times and that systems are in place to deal with any breaches of confidentiality

- Undertake a risk management approach following an allegation to ensure the protection and safety of children, staff and visitors to the service
- Based on this risk assessment, decisions will be made in order to manage the risks that have been identified
- Develop an investigation plan of the matter
- Obtain relevant information from a range of sources. This may include a statement from the person who made the allegation; statements from witnesses and a statement from the person against whom the allegation has been made and any other relevant documentation
- If the investigation is carried out by the service, the information that has been gathered will be assessed and a finding made as to whether the allegation is false, vexatious, misconceived, not reportable conduct, not sustained or sustained. The reasons for the finding will be clearly recorded to ensure that the decision-making has been transparent
- The Educator, volunteer or student will be advised of the outcome of the investigation in writing
- Advice will be provided about the investigation finding and any follow up action that may be required
- Advice will also be provided about any rights of appeal and the person will be advised that the Office of the Children's Guardian has been notified and the Joint Child Protection Response (JCPR) Program also notified of the relevant employment proceeding (if relevant)
- 30-day Interim Report Form or Entity Report Form (to be provided after the investigation or determination is completed) will be completed by the HRE - Approved Provider and submitted to the Office of the Children's Guardian with 30 calendar days of becoming aware of a reportable allegation, as required under the Children's Guardian Act 2019
- Department of Communities and Justice will also be informed of the outcome of the investigation

Informing the Educator, Volunteer/Student

The Approved Provider/Nominated Supervisor will:

- Treat the staff member/educator/volunteer/student with fairness at all times and uphold their employee rights at all times
- Depending on the nature of the allegation, arrange to inform the person immediately (though be guided by the advice of DCJ or the police)
- Arrange for the person against whom an allegation has been made, to have a support person attend the meeting. This support person must not participate in the discussions throughout the meeting
- Make accurate documentation of all conversations, and ensure all records are kept confidentially

- Offer counselling or support to the person subject to the allegation
- Depending on the nature of the allegation made, the person subject to the allegation may be suspended pending further investigation
- After all investigations are completed, provide the educator/carer/volunteer with verbal and written notification of the outcome of the investigation

Rights of All Parties

- The decision making process throughout the investigation will be based on the safety and wellbeing of the child/ren and the staff/carers/carer's household members
- Consideration will be taken in relation to actual or potential 'conflicts of interest' that may be held by the investigator
- All reportable allegations will be notified to the Office of the Children's Guardian
- The person, against whom the allegation has been made, will be notified of this and will also be notified of the investigation find and follow up action, including the notification to the Joint Child Protection Response Program
- The person, against whom the allegation has been made, will be notified of any appeal mechanisms if they are not satisfied with the investigation process or the outcome of the investigation

- The Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, or other nominated person who conducts the investigation, will ensure that they act without bias, without delay and without conflict of interest
- All parties can complain to the Office of the Children's Guardian if they are not satisfied with the conduct of the investigation

LINKS TO:

- **Education & Care Services National Law**
Section 166, 167, 174
- **Education & Care Services National Regulations**
84 , 149, 168, 169, 175
- **National Quality Standards/Elements:**
2.1, 2.2, 7.1, 7.1.2, 7.1.3
- **Child Safe Standards**
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6,7, 8, 9, 10

Continual Monitoring and Improvement

Continual improvement and monitoring will occur in the following ways:

- Incidental and planned consultation with families
- Approved Provider and Coordinators accessing current relevant information
- Approved Provider, Coordinators and Educators accessing current and relevant training
- Internal evaluation of incidences and the improvement of systems

SOURCES

- Education and Care Services National Regulations - December 2021
- Education and care Services National Law - January 2022
- Guide to the Education and Care Services National Law and the Education and Care Services National Regulations - October 2017
- Guide to the National Quality Standard - January 2020
- Implementing the Child Safe Standards: A Guide for Early Education and Outside School Hours Care Services, NSW Department of Education, 2021
- A Guide to the Child Safe Standards, NSW Office of the Children's Guardian, 2020
- ACECQA – FDC Approved Provider compliance responsibilities – October 2017
- Be You
- My Time Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia
- ECA Code of Ethics
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- NSW Government, Department of Family and Community Services, Resources for Mandatory Reporters
- NSW Department of Communities and Justice, Protecting our Kids
- Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998
- ChildStory Reporter
- NSW Office of the Children's Guardian

LINKS TO OTHER POLICIES:

- Child-Safe Environment
- Governance & Management
- Privacy & Confidentiality