

HANDOUT

REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE (making a notification)

THE LAW

Under the New South Wales Children's Care and Protection Act, any person who has reasonable ground to suspect that a child may be in need of care and protection, including physical abuse, sexual abuse or neglect, may report (notify) their concerns to the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS). Medical practitioners are mandated by this law to report cases, where they have reasonable grounds to suspect a child has been abused or neglected.

The law provides certain protection for people who in good faith report their concerns for a child's safety to the Department of Family and Community Services. You will be immune from civil and criminal prosecution for reporting.

WHY REPORT?

The aims of reporting suspected abuse and neglect to the Department of Family and Community Services are:

- 1 to provide immediate protection for the child
- 2 for the Department to begin an investigation
- 3 to begin a process that will provide long term protection and help for the child and assist parents to provide adequate care and nurturance for their children
- 4 to stop the abuse and neglect and prevent further harm to children

The major principles behind reporting are that (1) children have the right to safety and adequate standards of care and nurturance and (2) adults are responsible for the protection of children in our society.

HOW TO REPORT SUSPECTED ABUSE OR NEGLECT

- * Contact the nearest District Centre of the Department of Family and Community Services and ask to speak to the duty officer.

A list of District Centres is found at the beginning of the telephone book under New South Wales Government, Department of Family and Community Services.

- * If it is after hours or on the weekend, contact the Department's 24-hour Child Protection and Family Crisis Service on (02) 818 5555 or (008) 43 5288 if you are in the country.
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- * You will be asked to give details on the child's name, age, address and whereabouts, reasons for your concerns and information about the child's parents/caregivers. Even if you do not have all this information you may still make a report.
- * Your name and address will also be requested as the Department may need to recontact you for further information. You may also wish, at this time to discuss what you should do next.

The Department makes every effort to protect the identity of the informant. There are occasions, however, where families assume or guess the identity of the informant. It is often helpful if the worker making the report informs the family themselves that a report has been made.

- * When the information provided gives the delegated officer (FACS) reasonable grounds to believe that harm or substantial risk of harm to the child is present, the details are recorded as a child protection notification. An urgency rating is assigned to the case, and decisions regarding action to be taken are made (Delegated officers include District Manager and Senior Community Welfare Officer).
 - * It is not up to you, as the notifier to prove conclusively that abuse has occurred to a child, you only require reasonable grounds to suspect abuse or neglect.
 - * Every child protection notification must be investigated by FACS to determine if the complaint is valid. That is, did child abuse or neglect occur or not and is the child at risk?
 - * Where information provided in the report does not meet the grounds for notification, the information is recorded and kept for a short period, in case additional concerns arise or information later comes to light which then constitutes grounds for notification.
 - * Ask the Family and Community Services Officer to inform you if the report is accepted as a notification or not and make sure you and Family and Community Services are clear about what roles you are to fill in the intervention.
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Is this Child Physical/Emotional Abuse or Neglect

For each situation please mark on the scale of 1-5 where 5 = extreme abuse and 1 = a safe situation for the child.

- A. A school teacher noticed that Helen, aged thirteen years was often bruised. She lacked concentration and avoided any sort of physical activity. The teacher gained the child's confidence and found out that her father often hit her for being clumsy at home. He was always shouting at her which made her drop things. This would make him really mad and that's when the hitting would start. The teacher contacted the District Officer who visited the home and spoke with the stepfather. He appeared to care for Helen and was concerned about the number of falls and bumping into the furniture she was having at home.

1 2 3 4 5

- B. George, aged 4, was punished by his father for playing with matches, by inflicting second degree burns on the palms of both hands. The father explained quite calmly and reasonably that he knew that the pain he had caused was horrible, but that George would remember this lesson and would not play with matches again.

1 2 3 4 5

- C. Tommy was three years old and a real handful for his parents. He began biting his sister Jane whenever he couldn't get his own way. One afternoon family friends came over for a barbecue. When Tommy, Jane and Sally, their 2 year old friend were playing in the sand pit, Tommy bit Sally hard and she screamed. Tommy's mother Jill grabbed Tommy's hand and said "Don't bite, look how it hurts" and bit his wrist.

1 2 3 4 5

- D. Alice was a sickly child. She on sooner recovered from one illness than another one would attack. She was nearly 6 years old, very thin, lethargic and quiet. Her parents believed that human illness should be treated through faith. They have never taken Alice to a doctor and refused to allow the school medical officer to examine her.

1 2 3 4 5

- E. Neighbours are concerned about a family who moved into the area 6 months ago. The baby who is believed to be between 6-8 months old is rarely seen outside - spending most of the time in a cot. The 2 year old is seen in the yard, usually poorly and inappropriately clad, holding a bottle of milk in her hand. Parents go out a lot and have an assortment of people minding the children.

1 2 3 4 5

- F. Mary (aged 9 years) lives with her parents in a large brick home in an affluent suburb. She has many new clothes and receives very expensive presents for her birthday and at Christmas. Her parents work long hours at professional jobs and pay for a sitter to care for Mary after school. They are rarely affectionate towards Mary and take very little interest in her school activities and friends. The sitter thinks that Mary's parents are ashamed of their daughter as they never take her on outings and holidays etc.

1 2 3 4 5