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Professional behaviour and boundaries

- Professional behaviour standards apply to all staff who work in the youth justice precincts.
- These standards ensure that all staff and young people are treated fairly and consistently.
- They help to give staff a sense of satisfaction in their daily work.

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[When to use this procedure](#)[Click to hide content](#)

Use this procedure at all times when undertaking your role within the department. Your behaviour and boundaries must meet the standards required as part of your employment and to ensure the safety of young people and other staff.

[What else you need to know](#)[Click to hide content](#)

Make sure you have read and understood the following procedures:

- [How we work with young people in custody](#)
- [Managing sexualised behaviour](#)
- [Progression, Performance and Development system and staff supervision](#)
- [Managing misconduct and unsatisfactory work performance](#)

[Staff responsibilities](#)[Click to hide content](#)

Find your role below to see what your responsibilities are:

- [Senior management, including General Manager, Operations Managers, Client Services Manager and Business Service Manager](#)
- [Unit Coordinator and Unit Manager](#)
- [Human Resources Manager](#)
- [General Manager](#)
- [All staff](#)

Senior management, including General Manager, Operations Managers, Client Services Manager and Business Service Manager

At all times

- Ensure staff behave professionally by providing appropriate and regular training, staff supervision and through the use of the performance management system.

Unit Coordinator and Unit Manager

At all times

- Ensure all unit staff receive effective supervision, to the frequency and level of quality outlined in the Staff Supervision Framework.

When there are concerns that a staff member is behaving unprofessionally, for example by not observing boundaries with young people

- Consult with the Human Resources Manager, and use the performance management system to ensure the behaviour is addressed.

Human Resources Manager

When there are concerns that a staff member is behaving unprofessionally, for example by not observing boundaries with young people

- Help the General Manager and precinct management to address unprofessional behaviour with staff members through the use of the performance management system.

General Manager

When there are allegations of staff criminal conduct

- Is responsible for ensuring the allegations are reported to the police.

All staff

At all times

- Make sure your actions and behaviour reflect the **DHHS code of conduct** described in this procedure, particularly in your interactions with young people.

When rostered on duty

- Be at your place of work (the actual unit or other work site) ready to commence work at the time your shift commences.

When attending meetings, such as staff unit meetings, client case planning meetings and any others

- Be punctual, arriving on time and staying for the entire meeting. Be attentive and participate appropriately. If urgent operational matters occur that require your immediate attention, try not to disrupt the meeting as you leave, and take the opportunity to apologise to the person chairing the meeting.

If a young person seeks inappropriate physical contact

- Do not have any physical contact with the young person. Discuss this situation with the Unit Coordinator or Unit Manager so that an appropriate course of action can be taken.

When there are concerns about the behaviour of another staff member (for example in relation to physical contact with young people)

- You are obliged under the department's duty of care to report the incident to your Unit Manager.

If contacted by a young person after they are released from custody

- Notify the area youth justice unit (and Child Protection, where applicable). If you have an immediate concern about the young person's safety, contact emergency services to attend to the young person. Do this in consultation with the Unit Manager or the most senior staff member on duty at night.

[The procedure in detail](#) [Click to hide content](#)

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- [How are these values put into action in custodial precincts?](#)
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- [Your responsibility to disclose child sexual abuse](#)
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What are the DHHS values?

The Department of Health and Human Services has five core values that are essential to creating the positive working environment

needed to achieve the department's goals. They are:

Client focus

We work towards improving the health and wellbeing of our clients and community.

Professional integrity and respect

We act impartially, treating all people with dignity and respect.

Quality

We always strive to do our best and improve the way we work.

Collaborative relationships

We work together to achieve better results.

Responsibility

We commit to the actions we take to achieve the best possible outcomes for our clients.

How are these values put into action in custodial precincts?

As an employee of DHHS who works in a custodial precinct, there are actions you must take to ensure you meet the DHHS values. You have a responsibility to meet the following:

Client focus

- Get to know the young people you work with and understand their needs.
- Deliver on the promises or commitments you make to young people.
- Work towards maximising positive outcomes for young people by engaging with them in case management and actively encouraging them to meet their goals.

Professional integrity

- Always be well prepared for work, organised and punctual.
- Be honest, open and transparent in dealing with others.
- Be accountable and make sure you document your work thoroughly in case notes, Communication Books and timesheets.

Quality

- Establish and maintain high standards for your work – for example in working with young people on their case management, or making sure the units run effectively.
- Look for ways to improve how work is done with young people and in the precincts generally.
- Attend supervision sessions as scheduled and be well prepared to discuss your work performance and any concerns you have – have an agreed agenda and bring examples of casework for discussion.

Collaborative relationships

- Work cooperatively to support young people – be proactive in introducing yourself to the area worker, research services in the community and follow through with case management tasks that are allocated to you.
- Support your colleagues – especially when times are tough and people are stressed.
- Be open to the ideas and opinions of colleagues and others.

Responsibility

- Show initiative in performing tasks you know need to be done – don't always wait to be asked.
- Take the safety and wellbeing of everyone in the precinct seriously.
- Accept responsibility for, and ownership of, your actions and decisions.

Custodial staff are also bound by the **Code of conduct for Victorian public sector employees** and should ensure they are familiar with this document.

Professional requirements

In reflecting the DHHS values in the workplace, you have a responsibility to:

- distinguish between your personal and professional lives
- respect the personal, physical space of young people and other staff
- recognise that many young people in custody have histories of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and that this may influence their behaviour in custody
- operate in accordance with the physical contact policy outlined below
- maintain information privacy and confidentiality unless there is a risk of harm to the young person or others
- arrive punctually at work and be at the workplace during required hours, unless otherwise authorised

- respond to phone calls, emails and meeting invitations within a reasonable timeframe
- be punctual and attentive at meetings
- respect departmental property and other people's belongings
- use appropriate and non-offensive language.

What are you not allowed to do?

In your everyday interactions with young people, you should conscientiously work within professional boundaries at all times.

Having clear boundaries promotes a feeling of safety, consistency and fairness for staff and young people. It provides a basis for working with young people to bring about change and improve their outcomes.

When you understand your boundaries and the limits to your involvement with young people, it also helps to protect you from vicarious trauma by reinforcing the professional nature of your role.

Professional boundaries apply to all your interactions with young people, and cannot be changed for an individual young person or set of circumstances.

In order to ensure you work within these boundaries, you must not:

- have any physical contact with young people that contradicts the physical contact guidelines described below
- engage in any behaviour that is abusive or violent to young people or other staff – this includes swearing, shouting, name calling or other verbal vilification and use of physical force outside of the preventing occupational violence guidelines
- have any contact with young people after they are released from the precinct unless authorised (including on social networking sites such as Facebook)
- bring any prohibited items into the precinct unless authorised by the General Manager, Assistant Director or the Director Secure Services
- record, use, disclose or communicate confidential information obtained during the course of your employment unless this is necessary for you to perform your role
- purchase or provide any items for young people unless authorised to do so
- accept gifts, food or favours from young people or their families
- attend the precinct unless rostered on duty, except if given permission by the General Manager or the Director Secure Services
- attend court hearings of young people unless given permission by the General Manager or the Director Secure Services.

Staff supervision

Through staff supervision, the Unit Manager is responsible for ensuring that staff demonstrate sound and ethical professional behaviour at all times.

This includes the prohibited actions outlined above and ensuring the physical contact policy is adhered to.

Should concerns arise about the professional conduct of a staff member, use the performance management system to address the behaviour.

Physical contact with young people

Physical contact with young people in a custodial environment is not advised for a range of reasons.

Young people with a history of trauma, sexual abuse, mental health problems and/or tendency for violent behaviour may react adversely to physical touch.

Staff may also be vulnerable to claims of inappropriate behaviour.

Physical contact must be strictly limited and must take into account:

- the context of the situation and who else is in the environment
- the gender of the young person and the staff member
- the working relationship between them
- the young person's age
- the young person's culture.

The most sensible approach is to avoid almost all physical contact. This protects young people and prevents staff from accusations of inappropriate physical contact.

Examples of appropriate physical contact are high fiving a group of young people after they have won a basketball game or shaking hands with a young person who is leaving the precinct.

In exceptional circumstances, such as accompanying a young person to a family funeral, it would be appropriate to place an arm around their shoulders in an open, one-armed hug.

Inappropriate physical contact compromises the professional relationship between staff and young people. It represents a breach of the department's duty of care and may also be against the law. Unacceptable physical contact may result in staff disciplinary action.

Inappropriate, and therefore unacceptable physical actions, include:

- kissing, embracing or any other type of intimate or sexual contact
- massage
- play-fighting, arm-wrestling or any form of violence
- entering an occupied client bedroom alone, unless in response to an emergency (see the instruction on opening bedroom doors at night for further information).

If a young person seeks inappropriate physical contact, you should talk to the Unit Manager, and put in place a suitable course of action. This should include consideration of an Individual Behaviour Management Plan. All discussions and actions must be fully documented.

If you see or find out about an allegation of inappropriate contact or other unethical behaviour, you must report the incident to the Unit Manager.

Allegations of physical or sexual assault **must** be reported to the police by the Unit Manager.

Further information on responding to allegations of physical or sexual assault is provided in the departmental document *Responding to allegations of physical or sexual assault - Technical Update 2014*, found in the Additional Information section.

Contact with young people after they have left the precinct

You must not continue to maintain contact with young people after they have been released from the precinct unless this has been approved by the General Manager.

You must not at any time:

- give your personal contact details to young people or their families
- initiate contact with young people who have exited the precinct
- invite young people or their families to your home
- contact young people outside your professional capacity, or outside rostered working hours
- interact with young people or young people who have been released from the precinct via email or social networking sites such as Facebook.

You should notify the area youth justice unit (and Child Protection, where appropriate) if a young person makes contact after they have been released from the centre.

If you have an immediate concern (such as self-harm, suicide or threat of overdose) about the safety of a young person who has contacted you after release, contact emergency services (police or ambulance) to attend to the young person. Do this in consultation with the Unit Manager or most senior staff member on duty at night.

The area youth justice unit and Child Protection workers (where appropriate) should be notified of the incident immediately and all future contact directed to them.

Your responsibility to disclose child sexual abuse

It is an offence with a maximum penalty of three years imprisonment for an adult (aged 18 and over) to fail to disclose child sexual abuse.

The offence was introduced as part of the *Crimes Amendment (Protection of Children) Act 2014*, in response to the *Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Non-Government Organisations, Betrayal of Trust*.

The requirement to report suspected child sexual abuse applies to all adults, not just certain professionals who work with children.

The new offence requires that any adult who holds a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria by an adult against a child (aged under 16) must disclose that information to police, unless they have a reasonable excuse.

Reasonable excuses include a fear for your own safety, or if the abuse has already been disclosed.

The offence to fail to disclose child sexual abuse applies to all Department of Health and Human Services staff regardless of:

- the type of service the child is receiving
- whether the offence occurred during service delivery, or
- whether the child is a client of the department at all.

What is a reasonable belief?

A reasonable belief is not the same as having proof. For example, you might form a reasonable belief when:

- a child states that they have been sexually abused
- a child states that they know someone who has been sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves)
- someone who knows a child states that the child has been sexually abused
- observations of the child's behaviour or development leads you to form a belief that the child or young person has been sexually

abused

- signs of sexual abuse lead to a belief that the child has been sexually abused.

What do staff need to do?

The simple rule is: if you have a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child in Victoria, you must report that belief to Victoria Police.

If you have any concern that a young person you come into contact with has experienced sexual abuse, be aware that this must be reported to police.

In the first instance, please speak with your line manager to determine how to proceed.

Further information is available in the fact sheet for staff at Additional Information.

Reporting of staff criminal conduct

Any allegations of criminal conduct by employees must be promptly reported to Victoria Police under a protocol between Victoria Police and the Department of Health and Human Services.

Any alleged criminal conduct must also be reviewed internally and a decision made as to whether the alleged conduct requires investigation in accordance with the relevant discipline policy.

The General Manager is responsible for ensuring that alleged criminal conduct is reported to the police.

Further information is available on the department's web page at Additional Information.

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- [Failure to disclose offence- Fact sheet for staff](#)
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Risk management approach

- Risk management means trying to eliminate or minimise risks – to the young person, to staff, other young people or to the broader community.
- Risk assessment focuses on reducing the potential for an adverse event to occur.
- It should be balanced with the young person's needs and should promote learning, growth and their ability to make positive choices.

[Click to hide all content](#)

[When to use this procedure](#)[Click to hide content](#)

At all times when working in the precinct to manage and reduce risks associated with young people.

[What else you need to know](#)[Click to hide content](#)

Make sure you have read and understood the following procedures:

- [How we work with young people in custody](#)
- [Classification and Program Risk Tool](#)
- [Temporary Leave Risk Assessment](#)

[Staff responsibilities](#)[Click to hide content](#)

Find your role below to see what your responsibilities are:

- [All staff](#)
- [Unit Manager](#)
- [Unit management, Operations Manager, General Manager and Director Secure Services](#)

All staff

At all times

- Be alert to the behaviour of young people and the 'climate' of the working environment.

When making decisions about what young people are allowed to do

- Weigh up the possible risks and outcomes before making decisions. Use the attached Risk Assessment Guide and Risk Assessment Matrix to help you make decisions.

Unit Manager

At all times

- Ensure all unit staff use a risk assessment approach in their work.

Unit management, Operations Manager, General Manager and Director Secure Services**As relevant**

- Ensure that formal risk assessment processes are completed – including those for temporary leave, classification and program tool risk purposes.

[The procedure in detail](#)[Click to hide content](#)

- [What is risk management?](#)
- [Risk management in the youth justice context](#)
- [Risk management thinking](#)
- [Formal risk management processes](#)

What is risk management?**What is risk?**

Risk is the potential that a particular action or activity will lead to an undesirable outcome. It is the probability that damage, loss, liability or injury may occur in a given situation.

Risk management as the overall approach

A risk management approach is used in youth justice precincts to help staff make decisions about young people to maintain their safety and support their rehabilitation

Conducting a risk assessment involves making a value judgment based on all the information and evidence available to you at the time.

It is a way of thinking that allows risks – to the young person, to staff, other young people or to the broader community – to be eliminated if possible, or at least minimised.

It is not always possible to eliminate all risk. The level of risk of any option or activity should be balanced with the potential outcomes for the young person in their personal development and addressing their offending behaviour.

Identifying that there are risks associated with a particular activity does not necessarily mean the activity should not go ahead. When potential risks are identified, staff need to think creatively to identify ways to eliminate – or significantly reduce – the likelihood that they will occur.

Risk management is a formal process, which may involve using a specific template to evaluate risk – for example before a young person is allowed to go on temporary leave, or to evaluate whether they can attend a tooled program.

However, and perhaps more importantly, it is also a continuous informal process that underpins all decisions made in a custodial precinct – it is a way of thinking that allows us to identify risks and put in place strategies to address them.

All staff, regardless of their level and responsibilities, need to think about, and reduce, the risks involved in all of the decisions they make during their work day.

Risk management in the youth justice context

Risk assessment in a youth justice precinct:

- is ongoing and dynamic
- is applied to any situation that may pose a risk, such as client placement, program involvement, temporary leave, personal visits, client movements, use of cutlery and so on
- is specific to the young person's age and development, offending history and level of vulnerability
- considers the young person's past behaviour, both positive and problematic, and in particular any incidents they have been involved in – including frequency, severity, duration, type of harm caused
- takes into account any new information as it emerges – such as changes in personal circumstances, new or changed patterns of behaviour, new clients entering the unit, staff changes and so on
- pays attention to received 'intelligence' – information that has been obtained from other staff, young people, area youth justice, the 'grapevine' and so on
- considers the young person as a whole – including contributing factors such as mental health problems, substance use, violent behaviour, disability and so on
- thinks about the physical and social context – what is happening around the young person, who influences them, things in the environment that may be a stressor or may trigger unwanted behaviours.

Risk management thinking

A risk management approach should be second nature for staff. It should be used at all times and in every circumstance when working with young people in custody.

The following case studies show how staff informally use **risk management thinking** in everyday situations.

Risk management thinking: case study 1

Sandra, a Unit Supervisor, notices that clients Paul and Matt are sitting side by side on a couch, watching a movie together. Although they seem okay at the moment, Sandra knows that Paul and Matt have a history of co-offending, that they have often had conflict while in custody and that they had a serious altercation a week ago.

She overhears a few exchanges between them that trouble her – she thinks they may be about to fight again. Sandra considers whether to ask one of them to move to another seat to avoid this, but thinks this may unsettle them and they may escalate.

Instead, Sandra quietly directs Jim, a YJW 1, to sit nearby, watching the movie with them, but alert for any signs of trouble. Paul and Matt sit there quietly until the movie ends then get up and move away to separate areas.

Sandra has avoided making a big issue of the situation, but managed any potential risk by putting in a safeguard to watch for problems and respond quickly should they occur.

Risk management thinking: case study 2

Chloe and Ruby have asked to go outside together for a walk after lock down. YJW1 Luke considers their behaviour throughout the day: how they have interacted with each other, if there has been anything that suggests they may have other intentions than just going for a walk, what their mood has been. After deciding that the two young women would be low risk he checks with the Unit Supervisor for confirmation, in case he is needed on the unit, and then takes Chloe and Ruby outside for a walk.

As they are walking around the perimeter wall, Luke notices that Ronan, a particularly challenging young man from Barnett, is being escorted from the school by a number of staff; it appears he is becoming quite agitated.

Luke quickly considers what the potential risks might be if Chloe or Ruby notice Ronan, and diverts their attention, asking them to go the other way. By doing this he is ensuring that they are not given an opportunity to interact with Ronan in his present distressed state, potentially becoming unsettled and heightened in behaviour themselves.

Formal risk management processes

As well as an overall risk management approach, there are a number of formal risk management processes, used at specific times, which include:

- initial classification
- Program Risk Tool
- Temporary Leave Risk Assessment Plan.

You need to ensure the appropriate risk management assessment is undertaken for these specific circumstances.

A **Risk assessment guide and matrix** is attached to help you undertake a formal risk management process (see **Additional information** below). These tools are not mandatory but may help when it is particularly important that the risks be carefully considered.

Risk management stages

Formal risk assessment has four broad stages:

1. Gather information from:

- client files
- CRIS
- key workers
- family
- area youth justice workers
- others involved with the young person
- the young person themselves
- your own knowledge of the young person.

2. Analyse the information – using the knowledge you have gathered and your own experience to think about the possible outcomes.

3. Make a decision about the intervention under consideration.

4. Review the approach after a period of time to make sure it is still working.

[Additional Information](#)**Click to hide content**

- [Risk assessment guide and matrix \(59.5 KB, MS Word\)](#)

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Make sure you have read and understood the following procedures:

- [How we work with young people in custody](#)
- [Classification and Program Risk Tool](#)
- [Temporary Leave Risk Assessment](#)
- [Risk assessment guide and matrix \(59.5 KB, MS Word\)](#)