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NOTIFICATION OF CHILDREN AT RISK

REVISED POLICY AND PROCEDURAL INSTRUCTIONS

1. Guidelines for notification of children at risk were last issued on 25 July, 1984 (Circular No: 84/147).
2. These guidelines have now been revised by an Interdepartmental Committee comprising representatives from the Police Force, the Department of Health, the Department of Youth and Community Services and the Department of Education.
3. The revised instructions represent the consensus of staff working in the area of child protection services. They provide a framework for a multi-disciplinary approach to child protection using the best available expertise and skill across all departments. This revision encompasses the recommendations of the Premier's Task Force on Child Sexual Assault.
4. These revised instructions are to apply to all forms of abuse of children. They are to be used in conjunction with the already circulated guidelines about Services for Victims of Sexual Assault (Circular 84/77 refers).
5. These instructions update Circular Nos: 82/134, 84/41, 84/78 and 84/147.
6. The major features of the revised instructions are as outlined on pages 1 and 2 of the new procedures, however, the whole document is essential reading for all practitioners in hospital and community services.
7. Further information on the use of the instructions may be obtained from Mr. John Gavaghan of the Southern Metropolitan Health Region, telephone: 818 0200.



D.T. RICHMOND,
 Secretary

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR OFFICERS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF
YOUTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES, THE DEPARTMENT
OF HEALTH, THE POLICE DEPARTMENT AND THE DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION IN MATTERS RELATING TO CHILD PROTECTION

- 1.1 NOTIFICATION OF ABUSED CHILDREN AND CHILDREN AT RISK OF ABUSE
- 1.1.1 Under the Community Welfare Act of 1982, "abuse" in relation to a child, means assault or ill-treat the child, expose or subject the child to behaviour that psychologically harms him or is likely to psychologically harm him, whether or not, in any case, with the consent of the child.
- 1.1.2 Notification of abuse is the beginning of a process of protecting the rights and interests of a child.
- 1.1.3 Medical practitioners are obliged by law to notify the Department of Youth and Community Services if they have reasonable grounds to suspect a child has been abused.
- 1.1.4 Officers of the Department of Youth and Community Services, the Police Force, the Department of Education, the Department of Health and hospital staff are also required to notify, by Ministerial direction, if they have reasonable grounds to suspect a child has been abused.
- 1.1.5 Other persons may notify the Department of Youth and Community Services if they have similar concerns for a child.
- 1.1.6 The Community Welfare Act contains provisions which protect the person notifying a child abuse matter to the Department of Youth and Community Services:
- 1.1.6.1 the notification shall not be held to constitute a breach of professional etiquette or ethics;
- 1.1.6.2 no liability for defamation is incurred by reason of the making of the notification;
- 1.1.6.3 the notification shall not constitute a ground for civil proceedings for malicious prosecution or for conspiracy.

1.2 RECEIPT OF NOTIFICATIONS

- 1.2.1 Notifications of suspected child abuse must be made to any District Office or Child Protection Unit of the Department of Youth and Community Services. Notifications may be made either verbally or in writing. Verbal notifications are preferred and they may be made on a 24-hour basis at the Child Protection and Family Crisis Service, Department of Youth and Community Services, telephone 799 1333.

Arrangements have been made for notifications to be received by toll free phone calls. The toll free phone number is 008 42 5288.

- 1.2.2 If a notification is made to any District Office or Regional Child Protection Unit, the Officer-In-Charge of that Office or Unit shall ensure that the Child Protection and Family Crisis Service is immediately advised of the details of the notification.

- 1.2.3 In the case of notifications made by any hospital or health worker, or any Education Department Officer, a written record must be kept by the hospital or health worker or delegated Education Department Officer attesting to the fact that a notification has been made and to the time and date it was made.

At the time the notification is made, hospital or health workers or the Education Department Officer should obtain the identifying number allocated by the Department of Youth and Community Services.

1.3 THE INDEX OF NOTIFICATION

- 1.3.1 All notifications made to the Department of Youth and Community Services will be recorded centrally at the Child Protection and Family Crisis Service.
- 1.3.2 An index of notifications shall be maintained by the Department of Youth and Community Services. The index shall be used:
- 1.3.2.1 to identify previously notified matters;
 - 1.3.2.2 to assist in the diagnosis of particular children thought to be abused or at risk;
 - 1.3.2.3 to assist in service planning and resource distribution;
 - 1.3.2.4 to research developing trends in child abuse and child protection.
- 1.3.3 All notifications will be the subject of assessment and investigation. Following assessment and investigation, the notified child may be registered as a child at risk.
- 1.3.4 If a child is not registered as a child at risk, the notification will be reviewed after a period of 2 years, or earlier if considered appropriate. A decision may then be made to remove that record from the index of notifications.
- A decision to remove a child's name before 2 years shall only be made if, after detailed examination of the child's and family's interests, except where it can be established that the child is not at risk.
- 1.3.5 Grounds for removing a record from the index of notifications after two years, are as follows:
- 1.3.5.1 there has been no further notification from the same family within 2 years of the last notification of any child in that family;
 - 1.3.5.2 there has been no further reason for involvement of the Department of Youth and Community Services (or other agency) on behalf of the child within that 2 year period.
- 1.3.6 The decision to remove a name from the index of notifications may be made by the Officer-In-Charge of the local Community Welfare office if the family's current address is known to the local Community Welfare Office and 1.3.5 applies. Otherwise, the decision will be made by the Officer-In-Charge of the Child Protection and Family Crisis Service after consultation with the Officer-In-Charge of the local Community Welfare Office.
- 1.3.7 In no case should a notification be retained on the index of notifications beyond five years unless it is registered.

1.3.8 Access to information contained on the index of notifications will be restricted to personnel who can confirm an involvement in diagnosis and/or service delivery issues associated with a child. Access will be given to appropriate personnel from hospitals, the Department of Health, the Police Force, the Department of Education and the Department of Youth and Community Services.

1.3.8.1 Where information is sought by such personnel, the enquirer will be obliged to provide the employer's name and the place of work.

It will then be the responsibility of the staff of the Child Protection and Family Crisis Service to independently confirm these details, including the phone number of the place of work supplied, in order to locate the enquirer.

1.3.8.2 Where the enquirer is not employed by one of these four organisations and is not known to have a genuine role in protecting the child, then the Family Crisis Service Worker receiving the enquiry must consult with the Officer-In-Charge of the Child Protection and Family Crisis Service before providing any information to the enquirer.

1.3.8.3 The Executive Officer of the Child Protection and Family Crisis Service has a discretion to give information to any other appropriate authority.

1.3.8.4 Access to statistical information, where regarded as appropriate for research, service planning, education, publicity, etc., will be considered upon written application to the Director-General of the Department of Youth and Community Services.

1.4 PROCESS OF NOTIFICATIONS

- 1.4.1 At the time the notification is made, a Case Co-ordinator will be assigned to the case. The Case Co-ordinator will always be an officer of the Department of Youth and Community Services, even though such officer may not be directly involved with the child or the child's family.
- 1.4.2 Also at the time the notification is made, a Primary Worker may be nominated. The Primary Worker may not always be an Officer of the Department of Youth and Community Services. If a Primary Worker cannot be assigned at the time the notification is made, the Case Co-ordinator will carry out the role of Case Co-ordinator and Primary Worker so that the immediate statutory responsibilities of the Department of Youth and Community Services are met in assessment and investigation of the notification.
- 1.4.3 The responsibilities of the Case Co-ordinator are therefore as follows:

The case co-ordinator is responsible for ensuring that continuing appropriate and realistic services are offered to families where a child has been notified.

In cases where a child is notified but is not subsequently registered, the case co-ordinator has a responsibility to ensure that families have knowledge of, and access to, the financial and social support services of the Department of Youth and Community Services and local community agencies, as required, although it may be the primary worker who informs them.

The co-ordinator has specific responsibilities in registered cases in ensuring that:

- there is a case plan;
- the case plan is implemented;
- the case plan is regularly reviewed;
- case conferences are held, when appropriate;
- continuing services to the family are negotiated;
- regular case discussions with the primary worker are held;
- support and consultation are provided to primary workers and other case support workers;
- he or she is available if requested to do joint interviews with the primary worker;
- the case is supervised when the primary worker is on leave or when no other appropriate support worker is available;
- the Child Protection and Family Crisis Service is informed when a case is filed;
- regular written reports are obtained from the primary worker;
- a copy of a formal letter is sent to and acknowledged in writing by the primary worker (when not within the Department of Youth and Community Services).

The Primary Worker is the person working most closely with the family, and has the major responsibility for casework, for documenting his/her involvement and for informing the case co-ordinator of progress.

The responsibilities of the Primary Worker are:

- to do initial investigations where applicable;
- to do ongoing family assessments;
- to develop a case plan in consultation with the case co-ordinator;
- to provide referral to other services/agencies when required;
- to provide advocacy, support and assistance to the child/family;
- to review progress in the case on a regular basis with the case co-ordinator;
- to request case conferences as necessary;
- to write reports detailing:
 - assessment information
 - case plans
 - case conference discussions
 - progress of the case
 - significant events
 - termination recommendations.

If the primary worker is to be unavailable, then that worker must inform the case co-ordinator and renegotiate the agreement for a primary worker to be available.

- 1.4.3.1 Where the Primary Worker and the Case Co-ordinator disagree about case directions, the Case Co-ordinator will call a case conference involving other independent officers, to formulate an agreed case plan.
- 1.4.3.2 In registered cases, where the Primary Worker is no longer able to continue contact with the family, but intervention is still necessary, then the Primary Worker will inform the Case Co-ordinator of this change so that the Case Co-ordinator may make the necessary arrangements for a new Primary Worker to be appointed.
- 1.4.3.3 In registered cases, where termination of contact is envisaged because the risk factors no longer exist, the Primary Worker shall inform the Case Co-ordinator so that the necessary steps for termination of contact and filing down can be taken.

1.5 FORMAT OF NOTIFICATIONS

- 1.5.1 Details of notifications are recorded by the Department of Youth and Community Services on the index of notifications.
- 1.5.2 The initial information is recorded on a multi-purpose form, called Form 1. (See attached sample).
- 1.5.3 Within 14 days of the original notification, a follow-up report, called a Form 2, must be completed. (See attached sample). This Form records the decision about registration of the child as a child at risk. The Case Co-ordinator will be responsible for ensuring completion and forwarding of the Form 2 to the Child Protection and Family Crisis Service.
- 1.5.4 Case planning for registered cases is recorded on a Form 3. (See attached sample). The Case Co-ordinator is responsible for ensuring completion and forwarding of this Form to the Child Protection and Family Crisis Service within 28 days of registration.