

POLICY REVIEW NOTES

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YMCA Children's Services Training

27th January 2009

SOPA

Child Protection Notes

- What is a Mandatory Reporting
- Who Is a Mandatory Reporter
- What is Abuse
- Types of Abuse
- Signs of Abuse
- Reporting Checklist / Fax Forms

Certain groups of people are required by law to report to DoCS if they suspect (using their professional judgment and training), on reasonable grounds, that a child or young person is at risk of harm.

If you are a mandatory reporter, you can call DoCS Helpline on 13 3627 (13 DOCS).

Members of the general public should call 132 111.

Who are mandatory reporters?

A "mandatory reporter" is any person who delivers health care, welfare, education, children's services, residential services or law enforcement wholly or partly to children (aged under 16) as part of their paid work and includes any person who directly manages or supervises such work.

If you are a mandatory reporter with current concerns that a child aged under 16 is at risk of harm, you are required to make a report to DoCS.

This is a legal obligation, which carries a penalty if you fail to comply.

When must I make a report?

You must make a report to DoCS when you have current concerns about the safety, welfare and wellbeing of a child for any of the following reasons:

- the basic physical or psychological needs of the child or young person are not being met (neglect)
- the parents or caregivers have not arranged necessary medical care (unwilling or unable to do so)
- risk of physical or sexual abuse or ill-treatment (physical or sexual abuse)
- parent or caregiver's behaviour towards the child causes or risks psychological harm (emotional abuse)
- incidents of domestic violence and as a consequence a child is at risk of serious physical or psychological harm (domestic or family violence).

Possible signs of abuse



How do I know if a child or young person is being abused?

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. Other things need to be considered, such as the circumstances of the child or family.

DoCS caseworkers are trained to work closely with children, young people and families and other professionals to assess whether a child or young person is at risk of harm from abuse or neglect and to provide support and assistance, where needed.

If you know or suspect that a child or young person is at risk, contact **DoCS Helpline on 132 111** immediately.

When considering if a child or young person has been abused or neglected or is at risk of this, it is important to keep in mind the life circumstances of the child, young person and their family.

The following risk factors (either singly or in combination) are associated with increased risk of harm for children and young people:

- social or geographic isolation of the child, young person or family, including lack of access to extended family
- previous abuse or neglect of a brother or sister
- family history of violence including domestic violence
- physical or mental health issues for the parent or caregiver affecting their ability to care for the child or young person
- the parent or caregiver's abuse of alcohol or other drugs affecting their ability to care for the child or young person

The signs below are only possible signs of abuse and neglect. The presence of these signs does not necessarily mean abuse and neglect has been or is, occurring. The child or young person's circumstances and their age or other vulnerabilities, for example disability

or chronic illness, also need to be taken into consideration. If you have concerns then you should report them to DoCS.

Possible signs of neglect

Signs in children

- low weight for age and/or failure to thrive and develop
- untreated physical problems eg sores, serious nappy rash and urine scalds, significant dental decay
- poor standards of hygiene ie child consistently unwashed
- poor complexion and hair texture
- child not adequately supervised for their age
- scavenging or stealing food and focus on basic survival
- extended stays at school, public places, other homes
- longs for or indiscriminately seeks adult affection
- rocking, sucking, head-banging
- poor school attendance

Signs in parents or caregivers

- unable or unwilling to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing, medical attention, safe home conditions
- leaving the child without appropriate supervision
- abandons the child
- withholding physical contact or stimulation for prolonged periods
- unable or unwilling to provide psychological nurturing
- has limited understanding of the child's needs
- has unrealistic expectations of the child

Possible signs of physical abuse

Signs in children

- bruising to face, head or neck, other bruising and marks which may show the shape of the object that caused it eg belt buckle, hand print
- lacerations and welts
- drowsiness, vomiting, fits or pooling of blood in the eyes, which may suggest head injury
- adult bite marks and scratches
- fractures of bones, especially in children under three years old
- dislocations, sprains, twisting
- burns and scalds (including cigarette burns)
- multiple injuries or bruises
- explanation of injury offered by the child is not consistent with the injury
- abdominal pain caused by ruptured internal organs, without a history of major trauma
- swallowing of poisonous substances, alcohol or other harmful drugs
- general indicators of female genital mutilation eg having a 'special operation'

Signs in parents and caregivers

- frequent visits with their child or children to health or other services with unexplained or suspicious injuries, swallowing of non-food substances or with internal complaints
- explanation of injury offered by the parent is not consistent with the injury
- family history of violence
- history of their own maltreatment as a child
- fears injuring their child
- uses excessive discipline

Possible signs of sexual abuse

Signs in children

- bruising or bleeding in the genital area
- sexually transmitted diseases
- bruising to breasts, buttocks, lower abdomen or thighs
- child or child's friend telling you about it, directly or indirectly
- describing sexual acts
- sexual knowledge or behaviour inappropriate for the child's age
- going to bed fully clothed
- regressive behaviour eg sudden return to bed-wetting or soiling
- self-destructive behaviour eg drug dependency, suicide attempts, self-mutilation
- child being in contact with a known or suspected pedophile
- anorexia or over-eating
- adolescent pregnancy
- unexplained accumulation of money and gifts
- persistent running away from home
- risk taking behaviours - self harm, suicide attempts

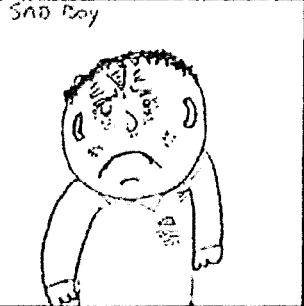
Signs in parents or caregivers

- exposing a child to prostitution or pornography or using a child for pornographic purposes
- intentional exposure of a child to sexual behaviour of others
- previous conviction or suspicion of child sexual abuse
- coercing a child to engage in sexual behaviour with other children
- verbal threats of sexual abuse
- denial of adolescent's pregnancy by family

Recognising the signs in children

The following are just some of the general indicators of child abuse and neglect that you may observe in children or young people. The presence of one or more of these factors does not by itself prove that abuse is happening. However, it can alert you to the possibility of abuse. The possibility of abuse may be higher if more indicators are present.

- A child or young person tells you that he or she is being abused or hurt
- You notice sudden or unexplained changes in mood or behaviour of a child or young person
- You notice frequent or unexplained bruises or injuries on a child or young person
- You see a child or young person with low self-esteem
- You see a child or young person with poor hygiene
- You notice that a child or young person becomes withdrawn or unresponsive
- You notice a child or young person with a lot of exaggerated fears
- You notice that a child or young person seems to lack trust in familiar adults
- You notice that a child or young person has serious difficulties relating to peers and/or adults
- You see a child or young person who is always angry or aggressive
- You find out that a child or young person has difficulty sleeping and experiences nightmares
- You notice a child or young person experience a change in eating patterns

Recognise the signs in parents

The following are just some of the general indicators of child abuse and neglect that you may observe in the behaviour of parents or carers. The presence of one or more of these factors does not by itself prove that abuse is happening. However, it can alert you to the possibility of abuse. The possibility of abuse may be higher if more indicators are present.

- You notice that a parent seems unconcerned about the child's welfare at home or school
- You notice that there is domestic violence between adults in a household
- You notice that a parent feels constantly stressed and tells you they have hurt his/her child
- You see that a parent seems secretive or tries to isolate the child from other children
- You notice that a parent constantly talks about the child in negative ways
- You notice that a parent frequently blames, belittles or insults the child
- You notice that a parent avoids talking about the child's injuries or gives conflicting explanations for them
- You notice that a parent is suffering from depression or other serious mental illness that may be impacting on their ability to care for their children

- You notice that a parent is drinking alcohol excessively or abusing prescription medication and is not able to take care of his/her children properly
- You see or hear that a parent is using illegal drugs and is not able to take care of his/her children properly

Recognise the signs in yourself



As parents, we can relate to sometimes feeling tested to the limits of our parenting ability. Sometimes we can feel out of control. In other situations, we can have personal problems that stop us from caring for our children. As parents, your responsibility is to recognise when you need help before the harm happens. If you feel you may hurt, or have hurt your child, it is important that you seek immediate assistance. **STOP what you are doing.**

THINK about how you and your child are affected by what is happening. **DO** something to change things. **GET SUPPORT** to make the changes.

Seeking support and assistance can take courage. Taking this step, however, is critical for you and your child.

Seeking support and assistance reflects:

- your love for your child
- your ability to appreciate there is a problem
- your desire for things to be different for your family
- your commitment to working towards changing things for the better.

Child abuse is a contributing factor in youth suicide, crime, homelessness, mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse and unemployment in young people and adults.

Research from Australia and overseas has found evidence to support a connection between child abuse and range of social problems. For example:

- More than 80% of women in Australian prisons have been victims of sexual and other types of abuse. More than 70% of women receiving assistance with depression and other mental health issues have experienced child abuse.
- More than 70% of women attending drug and alcohol treatment services have histories of childhood sexual abuse.
- More than 70% of men attending drug and alcohol treatment services have histories of physical abuse in childhood.
- There is a strong link between experiences of childhood abuse and higher rates of some mental health problems in later life, such as depression, anxiety and post traumatic stress.

As a community, we have not always linked these social problems with child abuse. The obvious question is why not?

As a community, we all bear the social and financial costs of these problems. Each year, governments spend more on mental health services, more on drug and alcohol services, more on law and order.

The long term consequences of child abuse not only affect the individual, they affect the whole community. The solution is clear. Preventing child abuse ensures that children are able to experience the safe and happy childhood they require. Preventing child abuse can also reduce the size and impact of a number of other critical social problems in the long term.

We must all act now to prevent child abuse. It will benefit children, young people and their families. It will benefit all of us.