

Child Protection

PROCEDURES

A mandatory reporter is someone who is required by law to make a report to DoCS if they have current concerns about the safety, welfare or well being of a child. A child is a person under 16 years. There are penalties for failing to make a report.

In OOSH services mandatory reporters are:

- Staff who deliver services to children.
- Management, either paid or voluntary, whose duties include direct responsibility or direct supervision for the provision of these services.

(From Information supplied by Department of Community Services Helpline Information Kit 2001).

Staff will undergo training in relation to child protection and notification as part of the training budget:

- **Indicators of significant harm to children:**
In most situations, child abuse is not an isolated incident but a pattern of behaviour occurring over a period of time, the effects of which are cumulative.
- **Physical Abuse**
Physical abuse refers to *non-accidental injury* to a child.

It includes any injury caused by excessive discipline, severe beatings or shakings. Physical abuse may result in a range of injuries ranging from soft tissue injuries to dislocations and fractures. It may also include poisoning, attempted suffocation and strangulation or death.

There are three types of indicators of physical abuse to children:

1. Verbal disclosures by the child.
2. Physical injuries found in the locations where it is unlikely a child has injured him or herself, or where the very nature of the injury itself is of concern.
3. Behavioural indicators which reflect:
 - i. Emotional problems, e.g. The child is depressed, reflections in the child's drawings.
 - ii. The need the child has to "deal with" violent behaviour by mimicking it or expressing it in ways that are outside the normal boundaries of childhood aggression.

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- **Sexual Abuse**

Child sexual abuse refers to any sexual behaviour between a child and an adult or an older, bigger, or more powerful person, for that person's sexual gratification.

There are three types of indicators of child sexual abuse:

1. Verbal disclosures by the child.
2. Physical injuries or signs (medical confirmation is necessary)
3. Behavioural indicators which reflect:
 - i. Emotional problems e.g. Signs a child is depressed, reflections in the child's drawings.
 - ii. The need the child has to "deal with" violent behaviour by mimicking it or expressing it in ways that are outside the normal boundaries of childhood aggression.

- **Neglect**

Neglect refers to any serious omission in the provision of care for a child which has the potential to impair the child's psychological, intellectual, or physical development. Neglect may be said to occur when a child is not provided with the basic physical and emotional necessities of life, for an ongoing period of time.

- **Emotional Abuse**

Emotional abuse refers to a chronic attitude or behaviour directed at a child or young person, or the creation of an emotional environment, which is seriously detrimental to, or impairs the child or young person's well being or development.

- **Responding to the Child**

When a child tells you he or she has been abused, the child may be feeling scared, guilty, ashamed, angry or powerless. You in turn, may feel a sense of outrage, disgust, sadness, anger and sometimes disbelief.

It is important that you appear calm and in control of your feelings in order to reassure and support the child.

- **You can show your concern and care by:**

- Listening carefully to what the child is saying.
- Controlling expressions of panic or shock.
- Telling the child you believe him or her.
- Reassuring the child that to disclose was the right thing to do.
- Telling the child that this has happened to other children.
- Telling the child that this is not their fault.
- Acknowledging that it is hard to talk about such things.
- Indicating what you will do.

- **You will not be helping the child if you:**

- Express anger or disgust about what happened.

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- Make promises that you cannot keep.
- Seek further details beyond those that the child freely wants to discuss.

How to contact Family Services

Any staff member who forms a belief, on reasonable grounds, that a child is being abused or neglected, will discuss these concerns, if possible, with their Superiors **prior** to notifying:

- The DoCS Helpline
 - 13 DOCS (13 3627) Mandatory reporters only
 - 132 111 for members of the general public to report child abuse and neglect.

Staff should phone the DoCS Helpline

- to report child abuse or neglect
- if you have concern about the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a child.

Staff will not question the child or parents prior to any discussions with the Departmental Helpline Officers.

Should the situation arise where the child is considered in immediate danger and the child is taken into Departmental care, staff are to follow the advice of the Departmental Officers.

- Staff should remember that it is not their responsibility to prove the abuse, just to have reasonable suspicion that abuse or neglect has occurred.
- Reports should be treated with strict confidentiality.
- The staff will not question the child or parents prior to any discussions with the Departmental Helpline Officers.
- Staff should be aware that they are protected as a notifier under the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998
- DoCS has published information on mandatory reporting. The following resources for staff and mandatory reporters should be available at the centre for referral at all times.
 - Mandatory Reporters Booklet
 - Reporting Checklist
 - DoCS Helpline fact sheet - mandatory reporters

For copies contact: DoCS Media and Publications Unit: :

FAX: 02 9716 2677

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After an Incident

If the incident was handled as an emergency and DOCS was contacted directly before notifying any Superior, notify the Co-ordinator, Centre Manager and Human Resources Manager, as soon as possible.

Where a complaint is made about a staff member, or someone in the centre

- The same procedures as outlined above should be followed.
- The person making the report should follow the advice of the Departmental Officers.
- Management will also follow this advice.
- The matter will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- Where the allegation is made to a staff member or a member of management, the facts as stated will be recorded in writing including dates, times, name of person involved, name of person making the allegation and the person making the report. This report should be kept on record and treated as strictly confidential.
- If the Co-ordinator is suspected then the Human Resources Manager and Area Manager should be informed.
- The Co-ordinator and Management are to follow the advice of the Departmental officers.
- For the protection of both the children and the staff member involved, the staff member should be encouraged to take special leave or removed from duties involving direct care and contact with children, until the situation is followed up or resolved.
- Support should be given to people making an allegation or persons who have been suspected. This support can be given in the form of counseling or referral to an appropriate.
- Where an allegation is unfounded, the staff member will be given support in their return to work.

What to do if a parent comes to pick up their child while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

- If a parent appears to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol staff should encourage them to walk home or offer to call someone to help them home. If the staff member feels that the child will be put at risk the police should be notified. Try and get the registration number and make of the vehicle to give to the police.
- The incident should be recorded.

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