

2.9 Suspicious/Mandatory Reporting of Harm

Policy Statement

The service actively works to provide all children with a safe and suitable environment. In the event that a child discloses information, the service shall implement the following procedures to ensure that this information is managed appropriately and that all suspicions of harm are reported in accordance with relevant legislative requirements.

Harm is defined under the Child Protection Act 1999 as 'any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing. For harm to be significant, the detrimental effect on the child's wellbeing must be substantial or serious, more than transitory and must be demonstrable in the child's presentation, functioning or behavior.

Harm may be categorised in the following types:

- Physical abuse, for example, beating, shaking, burning, biting, causing bruise or fractures by inappropriate discipline, giving children alcohol, drugs or inappropriate medication.
- Emotional or psychological abuse, for example, constant yelling, insults, swearing, criticism, bullying, not giving children positive support and encouragement.
- Neglect, for example, not giving children sufficient food, clothing, enough sleep, hygiene, medical care, leaving children alone or children missing school; and
- Sexual abuse or exploitation, for example, touching inappropriately, sexual jokes and/or exposing children to pornography.

Procedures

Management will:

- Ensure that educators and Approved provider receive appropriate child protection training annually, ensuring that all educators are aware of the existence and application of the current child protection law and any obligations they may have under that law.
- Ensure that educators receive information and support on how to handle suspicions of harm or situations where information is disclosed to them by a child or by a member of the child's family or other person.

Suspicion of Abuse and/or exhibiting harmful Sexual behaviours:

- Access a copy of your organisation's child protection policy and be knowledgeable about how to respond appropriately.
- Be alert to any warning signs that may indicate the child is being abused.
- Observe the child and make written notes as soon as you begin to have concerns. Pay attention to body cues such as changes in the child's behaviour, ideas, feelings and the words they use.
- Have gentle, non-judgmental discussions with the child. Expressing your concern that the child looks sad or unwell may result in disclosures. Do not pressure the child to respond and do not ask leading questions that put words into a child's mouth.

- Assure the child they can come and talk to you when they need to and listen carefully to what they have to say.
- Promptly advise the Nominated Supervisor or Coordinator of your concerns; and
- Seek expert advice or make a report by ringing the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services or the Queensland Police Service.

Nominated Supervisor, Coordinator and/or Approved Provider will take the following action:

- Ensure that the disclosure/suspicion of harm is documented by the educator involved as soon as possible and placed in the Confidential File.
- Using the appropriate mechanisms, report to the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services or Queensland Police Services, and notify the Department of Education and Training - Early Childhood Education and Care; and
- If appropriate, and upon the seeking of professional advice, the service may arrange a meeting with the family to discuss the nature of the disclosure or allegation. Such a meeting may include the involvement of appropriate support persons.

The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services may be contacted by any member of staff to obtain professional advice in regard to reporting the disclosure or suspicions of harm.

The educator receiving the disclosure may be required to speak with the authorities as part of their investigations. Under section 22 of the *Child Protection Act 1999*, a person who reports suspected child abuse is protected from civil or criminal legal actions and is not considered to have broken any code of conduct or ethics.

References

Education and Care Services National Law Act, 2010 and Regulations 2011
 Family and Child Commission Act 2014
 Child Protection Act 1999 and Regulations 2000
 Relevant Policies; Respect for Children, Reporting of Child Abuse, Anti-bullying, Observational Recording, Employee Orientation and Induction, Communication with Families, Complaints Handling.

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03/01/2024			
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