SAFEGUARDING OUR CHILDREN

Child Protection in Anglican Education and Care Services

A Guide for Parents
USING THE PARENT GUIDE

Through a series of questions and answers, this Parent Guide provides information on key definitions and concepts, child protection reporting processes and options for referring families to local support services.

As you read the Parent Guide, it’s important for you to be aware of your reactions to the content. Information about abuse and neglect can be very confronting. If, at any time, the information in the Guide causes you distress, it’s important that you discuss this with a support person or member of staff.

INTRODUCTION

For most children, childhood is a positive time in their lives. They grow up in loving families that care for and nurture them and help them develop into healthy young adults. However, for a small proportion of children, this is not their experience.

Because of their regular contact with children and families, Education and Care Services play an important role in helping families access support services and identifying and responding to suspected child abuse and neglect.

Parents also play an important part in helping children feel safe and supported. For some children, the first person they will trust enough to talk to about abuse or neglect may be a friend or the parent of a friend. When this happens, it can be very stressful and you will need to know what to do and who you can turn to for help.

This Parent Guide tells you about the policies and procedures our service has to protect children from child abuse and neglect and inappropriate behaviour by an employee or volunteer and what you need to do if you have concerns for a child.

OUR STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

Like all Anglican Education and Care Services, our service supports the rights of all children and we are committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children attending our service.

Our service will provide a safe and supportive living and learning environment for children and we will ensure staff, volunteers and visitors model and encourage behaviours that uphold the dignity, safety and wellbeing of children.

Our service will also respond to all allegations of harm to a child resulting from the conduct, action or inaction of any person, including staff, volunteers and visitors and will support any individuals affected by child protection matters, including children, parents, staff, volunteers and visitors.

HOW DOES OUR SERVICE PROTECT CHILDREN?

Our service recognises that child protection is everyone’s business and we encourage all members of our community, including staff, parents, volunteers and visitors, to understand child protection and play their part, if and when they need to.

Our service will provide information about child protection, including policies, procedures, resources and training, to help guide staff, parents, volunteers and visitors to our service and will develop and implement a Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy. If you would like to read our Blue Card System policy or our Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy you can find it on our website or you can ask our Director/Coordinator for a copy.

By providing this information, our staff, parents, volunteers and visitors will be able to recognise suspected harm to a child as a result of abuse, identify inappropriate behaviour by an employee or volunteer to a child, respond to the ongoing support needs of children and families and report concerns for a child, when required.

LAWS IN RELATION TO CHILD PROTECTION AND FAMILY SUPPORT

Because the safety and wellbeing of our children is so important, there are several pieces of state and federal legislation, including the Child Protection Act 1999, that contain provisions to help us protect children from abuse or inappropriate behaviour and support families when they need assistance.

These laws stipulate when and how suspected child abuse or neglect must be reported to the police or the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (Child Safety), how professionals can better support families and other actions our service must take to protect children, including screening employees and volunteers and having a Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy.

If you would like more information about the legislation that helps us all protect children from harm, please speak to the Director or Coordinator or another member of our staff.

POLICIES THAT HELP OUR SERVICE PROTECT CHILDREN AND SUPPORT FAMILIES

When we suspect child abuse, neglect or inappropriate behaviour by a staff member or volunteer, our actions and decisions, and what we do when you talk with us about concerns for a child or family, will be guided by the Child Protection in Anglican Education and Care Services Policy and Procedures.

If you would like to know more about this policy and procedures, please speak with the Director or Coordinator or another member of staff or visit our service’s website.
WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

There are four different types of child abuse.

**Physical abuse** occurs when a child has suffered, or is at risk of suffering, non-accidental physical trauma or injury.

**Emotional or psychological abuse** occurs when a child’s social, emotional, cognitive or intellectual development is impaired or threatened and may include emotional deprivation due to persistent rejection, hostility, teasing or bullying, yelling, criticism and exposure to domestic and family violence.

**Neglect** occurs when a parent or other caregiver doesn’t adequately provide for a child’s needs. This may include the child’s need for food, clothing, hygiene, supervision, housing or healthcare/treatment or precautions to ensure the child’s safety.

**Sexual abuse** includes sexual behaviour involving a child and another person where the other person bribes, exploits, threatens or is violent toward the child, the child has less power than the other person or there is a significant disparity between the child and the other person in terms of intellectual capacity or maturity.

Sexual abuse can happen suddenly or after a period of grooming. Sexual abusers and victims often know each other for significant periods of time before the first abuse incident.

Research by Professor Stephen Smallbone indicates that grooming typically involves a graduation from attention-giving and non-sexual touching to increasingly more intimate behaviours. Much of this will appear ambiguous, both to the victim and others who may observe it.

WHAT IS HARM TO A CHILD?

The Child Protection Act 1999 defines harm as any detrimental effect of a significant nature on a child’s physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing and can include harm to an unborn child after he or she is born.

Harm can be caused by physical abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, neglect and sexual abuse or exploitation. Harm can also result from a single incident or several different incidents that take place over time (also known as cumulative harm).

Any action or inaction by an individual that harms a child or unborn child or places a child or unborn child at significant risk of harm is NOT acceptable.

WHAT IS INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR BY AN EMPLOYEE OR VOLUNTEER?

Inappropriate behaviour is any behaviour by an employee or volunteer of the service towards a child which is inconsistent with the law, professional standards and our Code of Conduct and policies and which is considered inappropriate by the person making the complaint.

Behaviour of a sexual, physical or psychological nature which exploits the special position of trust and authority between an employee or volunteer and a child, regardless of the child’s age, is a breach of obligations and of the Child Protection in Anglican Education and Care Services Policy and Procedures and is NOT acceptable.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF ABUSE OR INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR ON A CHILD?

All forms of abuse and inappropriate behaviour can have significant impacts on children’s development and functioning. Children may experience a range of emotional, psychological and physical impacts including:

- permanent physical injuries or death;
- long-term medical and health conditions, including eating disorders;
- low self-esteem and behaviour that leads to them being singled out, bullied or victimised;
- increased fear, guilt and self-blame and distrust of adults;
- depression, anxiety, attachment disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder;
- suicidal thoughts and self-harming;
- developmental delay and learning disorders, including poor language and cognitive development;
- aggressive and other behavioural problems;
- delinquency and criminal behaviour, including violence towards others;
- drug and alcohol abuse and high-risk sexual behaviour; or difficulty forming relationships with other adults in later life.
WHEN SHOULD I BE CONCERNED FOR A CHILD?

You might suspect a child has been harmed or is at risk of harm when:

- the child tells you about something that happened to them, or should have happened and didn’t, which lead to the child being harmed;
- someone else, such as the child’s friend or another parent, tells you about an incident when the child was harmed or about a situation that is likely to happen in the future which will place the child at risk of harm;
- the child tells you about a friend or someone else they know who has been harmed – sometimes the child may actually be talking about themselves but they may not feel comfortable telling you yet; or
- you are worried about changes you’ve noticed in the child’s behaviour or unexplained and suspicious injuries.

These are just a few of the possible indicators of harm but every child will be affected differently. Some children show no observable signs of abuse while others show multiple indicators.

If you’re uncertain about what you’ve seen or heard, it’s best to talk about your concerns with the Director or Coordinator or another member of our staff.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE CONCERNS FOR A CHILD?

If you ever have any concerns for the safety or wellbeing of a child or an unborn child or are concerned that a family may need some support, you can discuss your concerns with the Director/Coordinator, Responsible Person or any of our staff.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

The Director/Coordinator, Responsible Person or staff member will listen to your concerns, ask questions to help them understand the situation and who is involved and will make notes about what you’ve said.

When it’s required by law or our policy, the Director/Coordinator, Responsible Person or staff member may report your concerns to Child Safety or the police.

When Child Safety or the police receive a report about suspected child abuse or neglect, they'll review all the information and make a decision about whether further action is required, including gathering more information or starting an investigation.

No matter what action is taken by Child Safety or the police, our service will continue to support children and help to ensure their ongoing safety and wellbeing.

If a report to police or Child Safety isn’t required, the person may speak with the family and offer them help, including referral to local counselling, health or support services.

WHO WILL KNOW I TALKED TO STAFF ABOUT MY CONCERNS?

If you decide to talk with staff about concerns for a child, under Queensland law, this information must be kept confidential and only certain professionals can be given the information.

For example, you talk to the Director about suspected sexual abuse and the Director decides that a report must be made to the police and to Child Safety. When this happens, the Director will need to give the officers your name, contact details and the information about the suspected abuse.

If Child Safety and the police are going to do everything they can to protect children, they need to gather as much information as possible about concerns. This might include speaking directly with any person who has seen or heard things about the child or the suspected abuse.

Under Queensland law, the identity of any person who notifies Child Safety or the police of suspected child abuse or neglect will be protected. In addition, any person who gives information to Child Safety or the police about suspected child abuse or neglect will not be liable civilly, criminally or under any administrative process.

DO OUR STAFF HAVE TO REPORT CHILD ABUSE?

Our child protection policy and procedures state that all staff, volunteers and visitors must tell the Responsible Person when they suspect harm or risk of harm to a child or unborn child.

After talking with the Responsible Person, the staff member or Responsible Person may report the concerns to Child Safety and/or the police, if required by the law or policy.

WHEN ARE CONCERNS NOT REPORTED TO THE POLICE OR CHILD SAFETY?

At times, children may suffer harm but a report will not be required to police or Child Safety. For example, when a child is harmed as a result of bullying by another child at our service.

When incidents like this occur, our staff will immediately respond to ensure all children are safe, follow our policy and procedures and speak with the children involved and their parents. Our staff may also offer families help, such as information about local counselling, health or support services, and may inform parents of their right to make a complaint about an incident to the police.

1The child protection laws in relation to an unborn child refer to concerns a person may have before a child is born about the child’s safety and wellbeing after birth. The laws are intended to be preventative and allow Child Safety to offer the pregnant woman and her family support before their baby is born.
CAN CHILD SAFETY OR THE POLICE TALK TO MY CHILD WITHOUT MY PERMISSION?

The Child Protection Act 1999 does, in certain circumstances, give Child Safety and police the authority to interview any child at our service without a parent’s permission.

The investigating officers are allowed to take this action when they are investigating suspected abuse or neglect, they believe it’s in the child’s best interests to interview them before the parent is told and they believe that informing the parents beforehand could adversely affect their investigation.

After the interview, the police or Child Safety must tell the parent about the contact with their child at our service.

WHAT WILL THE SERVICE DO IF YOU REPORT SUSPECTED INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR?

Our policy and procedures also state that, when staff become aware of alleged inappropriate behaviour by an employee or volunteer towards a child, they must report to the Nominated Supervisor. When the concerns relate to the Nominated Supervisor, the concerns must be reported to Principal of the Anglican School or Chair of the Management Committee.

Once aware of the alleged inappropriate behaviour, the Nominated Supervisor or Principal/Chair must follow our policy and procedures including informing the parents of the concerns and commencing an investigation.

WHAT ELSE WILL OUR SERVICE DO TO HELP CHILDREN WHO MAY HAVE BEEN HARMED?

To help children affected by abuse or inappropriate behaviour, our staff will also:

- provide security through regular routines;
- provide opportunities for the child to talk with someone, if they want to;
- keep an eye on how the child is coping, interactions and general behaviour;
- provide extra support if needed;
- give them opportunities to feel good about themselves and their achievements; and
- work with their family to ensure their ongoing safety and wellbeing.

HOW CAN FAMILIES GET SUPPORT WHEN THEY NEED IT?

At times, families face challenging situations that may stretch their resources and require more than their usual coping strategies. At these times, families may need some extra support from services within the local community to help them work through the issues and develop new strategies and capabilities they can use again in the future.

If our service learns that families are having difficulties, we will, wherever possible, try to help families by linking them with support services within the local community.

If, at any time, you feel your family needs some extra support or information, please speak with any of our staff.

We will always be sensitive to your needs, keep your personal information confidential and will try to help you get the support or information you require.

IF I ASK FOR HELP, WILL THE INFORMATION ABOUT MY FAMILY REMAIN PRIVATE?

If you decide to speak to any of our staff about getting support, under Queensland law, this information must be kept confidential and only those services or professionals who assist your family will be given information.

WHAT IF I’M CONCERNED ABOUT THE SERVICE’S RESPONSE?

If you believe our service hasn’t complied with child protection legislation or our child protection policy you can, in the first instance, speak with the Director/Coordinator or you can make a complaint to the Nominated Supervisor or our Approved Provider. Information about the Nominated Supervisor and Approved Provider is displayed in our service or can be obtained from our Director/Coordinator.
FURTHER INFORMATION

Information about child protection and support services is also available from the following sites:

Child Safety Services at

Domestic and family violence support services at

Family and Child Connect on 13 32 64 or at

Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800 or at
https://kidshelpline.com.au

Office of the Children’s eSafety Commissioner at

OnePlace Community Services Directory at
https://www.oneplace.org.au

ParentLine on 1300 30 1300 or at
https://www.parentline.com.au

Queensland Family and Child Commission at
http://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au

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