

Reporting Guidelines & Directions for Handling Disclosures and Suspicion of Harm

1 Introduction

In accordance with the Queensland Government's *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000*, CTC is a 'regulated organisation'.

This procedure sets out how CTC is complying with its obligation to develop and implement a Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy in particular, how staff and volunteers handle disclosures or suspicions of harm, including reporting of these. This ensures staff and volunteers respond as quickly as possible to a disclosure or suspicion of harm.

CTC promotes child-safe and child-friendly environments by implementing strategies that identify and minimise the risk of harm. This document should be read in conjunction with other relevant policies and procedures adopted by CTC.

2 Procedure

1. Handling Disclosures or Suspicions of Harm, including Reporting

Defining 'harm'

Harm is defined as 'any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing'. Harm can be caused by physical, psychological, or emotional abuse or neglect; or sexual abuse or exploitation (section 9 of the Child Protection Act 1999).

Considerations for employees and volunteers when forming a reasonable suspicion about harm to a child include whether there are detrimental effects on the child's body or psychological or emotional state:

- ◆ that are evident to the person, or
- ◆ that the person considers are likely to become evident in the future, and

in relation to any detrimental effects mentioned above

- ◆ their nature and severity, and
- ◆ the likelihood that they will continue, and
- ◆ the child's age (section 13C of the Child Protection Act 1999).

Remember harm can be caused by a single act or omission or a series of acts or omissions.

Identifying Harm (Actions/behaviours by perpetrator)



Physical Abuse

- Hitting
- Shaking
- Burning/scalding
- Biting
- Causing bruise or fractures by excessive discipline
- Poisoning
- Giving children alcohol, illegal drugs or inappropriate medication
- Domestic and family violence

Psychological or Emotional Abuse

- Scapegoating
- Persistent rejection or hostility
- Constant yelling, insults or criticism
- Cultural affronts
- Teasing/bullying
- Domestic and family violence

Neglect

- Not giving a child sufficient food, housing, clothing, enough sleep, hygienic living conditions, health care and adequate supervision
- Leaving children unattended
- Children missing school

Sexual Abuse or Exploitation

- Kissing or holding a child in a sexual manner
- Exposing a sexual body part to a child
- Exposing children to sexual acts or pornography
- Making obscene phone calls or remarks to a child
- Having sexual relations with a child or young person under 16 years of age

Resulting Harm - Impact Experienced by the Child

Physical (Refers to the body)

- Bruising
- Fractures
- Internal injuries
- Burns

Psychological (Refers to the mind and cognitive processes)

- Learning and developmental delays
- Impaired self-image

Emotional (Refers to the ability to express emotions)

- Depression
- Hypervigilance
- Poor self esteem
- Self-harm
- Fear/anxiety

What is a 'disclosure' of harm?

A disclosure of harm occurs when someone, including a child, tells you about harm that has happened, is happening, or is likely to happen to a child.

Disclosures of harm may start with:

- 'I think I saw...'
- 'Somebody told me that...'
- 'Just think you should know...'
- 'I'm not sure what I want you to do, but...'

It is important to act quickly and in the best interests of the child or young person after a disclosure of harm is received, irrespective of the alleged source of harm.

What is a 'suspicion' of harm?

A suspicion of harm is when someone has a reasonable suspicion that a child has suffered, is suffering, or is at an unacceptable risk of suffering, significant harm. This includes circumstances which relate to an unborn child who may be in need of protection after he or she is born.

A child who has been, or may be experiencing, abuse may show behavioural, emotional or physical signs of stress and abuse.

You have a duty of care to follow up any suspicions of harm or potential risk of harm to children and young people in your care.

You can do this by observing and recording the actions of children who might be at risk, and reporting your concerns to the relevant authority.

You can suspect harm if:

- a child or young person tells you they have been harmed
- someone else, for example another child, a parent, or an employee, tells you that harm has occurred or is likely to occur
- a child or young person tells you they know someone who has been harmed (it is possible that they may be referring to themselves)
- you are concerned at significant changes in the behaviour of a child or young person, or the presence of new unexplained and suspicious injuries, or
- you see the harm happening.

Recording a Disclosure or Suspicion of Harm

Staff and volunteers must document how they receive a disclosure of harm from a child or young person or manage a disclosure or suspicion of harm.

Suspicion of harm (or other concern for a child's welfare)

In relation to a 'suspicion' of harm, staff should:

- remain alert to any warning signs or indicators
- pay attention to changes in the child's behaviour, ideas, feelings and the words they use
- make written notes of observations in a non-judgemental and accurate manner
- assure a child that they can come to talk when they need to, and listen to them and believe them when they do, and
- follow the process for reporting a disclosure of harm set out below and consider whether there are requirements to report matters to the Queensland Police Service or Child Safety

IMPORTANT THINGS TO CONSIDER

(For employees or volunteers in recording a disclosure or suspicion of harm)

- remain calm and listen attentively, actively and non-judgementally
- ensure there is a private place to talk
- encourage the person to talk in their own words and ensure just enough open-ended questions are asked to act protectively (e.g. 'Can you tell me what happened'...or 'Can you tell me more about that'). Don't ask leading questions which tend to suggest an answer.

Ensure the person is advised that the disclosure cannot remain a secret and it is necessary to tell someone in order to get help:

- reassure the person they have done the right thing by telling you
- advise the child that you need to tell someone else who can help the child
- document the disclosure clearly and accurately, including a detailed description of:
 - the relevant dates, times, locations and who was present
 - exactly what the person disclosing said, using "I said," "they said," statements
 - the questions you asked
 - any comments you made, and
 - your actions following the disclosure
 - not attempt to investigate or mediate an outcome, and
- follow the process for reporting a disclosure of harm set out below and consider whether there are requirements to report matters to the Queensland Police Service or Child Safety

CTC's Contact Officer

The contact officer who can deal with child protection issues and act as a point of contact if someone wishes to raise concerns is the YHARS Team Leader.

Ph. 1300 999 282

The YHARS Team Leader's duties are to:

- Review and manage policy and procedure for handling disclosures or suspicions of harm

- Induct and train employees and volunteers in handling disclosures or suspicions of harm
- Provide employees and volunteers with a copy of our policies and procedures for handling disclosures or suspicions of harm, as well as the phone numbers of key contacts
- Offer assistance and support if a person in the organisation receives a disclosure of harm
- Organise external support to assist parties following a disclosure or suspicion of harm

Reporting a Disclosure or Suspicion of Harm

The timeframes and relevant processes for reporting a disclosure or suspicion of harm are as follows:

Reporting of a disclosure or suspicion of harm involves a 3-step-process, namely:

1. Consider whether the disclosure or suspicion needs to be reported to the Queensland Police Service. Circumstances in which such reports must be made are:

- where a child is at imminent risk of harm or
- a child has been the victim of a criminal offence.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO NOTE

If an individual believes a child is in immediate danger or in a life-threatening situation, they should immediately contact the Queensland Police Service by dialling 000.

Queensland Police Service has a number of child protection and investigation units across Queensland. To contact the Queensland Police Service, individuals should contact their nearest Police District Communication Centre (<https://www.police.qld.gov.au/forms/contact.asp#districtComms>)

If a person reasonably suspects a child has been, or is likely to become, a victim of a criminal offence, individuals should contact Queensland Police Service in relation to their concerns.

2. Consider whether the disclosure or reasonable suspicion of harm needs to be reported to Child Safety

Non-mandatory reporting

Child protection is everybody's responsibility and every person SHOULD report to Child Safety if that person forms a reasonable suspicion that a child (including an unborn child) has suffered, is suffering, or is at unacceptable risk of suffering significant harm AND does not have a parent able and willing to protect the child from the harm.

Making a Report

If any individual working with CTC needs to make a report to Child Safety Services, this can be done as follows:

During normal business hours - contact the **Regional Intake Service - Central Queensland**

Phone: 1300 703 762

Fax: 07 4938 4697

After hours and on weekends - contact the Child Safety After Hours Service Centre on **1800 177 135 or (07) 3235 9999**.

The service operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

If any individual in CTC is not sure who to call, or needs assistance to locate their nearest Child Safety Service Centre, contact **Child Safety Services' Enquiries Unit on 1800 811 810**.

Child Safety Service Centres have professionally trained child protection staff members who are skilled in dealing with information about harm or risk of harm to children. A person making a report is protected from liability under the Child Protection Act 1999 from civil or criminal legal actions and is not considered to have broken any code of conduct or ethics.

3. Consider whether referral is required to other support services, including Family and Child Connect.

Employees and volunteers with any concerns for a child that do not amount to a reasonable suspicion of harm should consider what support services could be offered to the family.

A Family and Child Connect service can provide information and advice about connecting families with support services and the circumstances in which a referral can and should be made to one of these services.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO NOTE

Anyone can contact Family and Child Connect for information, advice and support for connecting families with support services. The criteria for Family and Child Connect service to work with the family is:

- the referred family has a child from unborn to 18 years of age, and
- the child is not currently in need of protection, and
- without support the child, young person and family are at risk of entering or re-entering the statutory child protection system, and
- the family would benefit from access to intensive and specialist support services, and
- the family has multiple and complex needs.

The Family and Child Connect website provides useful materials, including Training resources in relation to family support services, which can assist further:

<http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/childsafety/protecting-children/how-to-preventabuse/family-and-child-connect>

References

1. *Child Protection Act 1999*
2. *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000*
3. *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Regulation 2011*
4. *Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy - Toolkit (Queensland Government)*
5. *Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy - Self Assessment Checklist*
6. *Blue Card Services website: www.bluecard.qld.gov.au*
7. *Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services: www.communities.qld.gov.au/childsafety*