

Child Protection Policy Standard

Introduction

Page 1

All organisations working with children and young people have a legal and moral duty of care to ensure their safety and security. This includes taking all reasonable steps to prevent emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect.

The purpose of this standard is to assist organisations in meeting their legal and moral duty to protect children and young people from the risk of abuse.

This standard has been designed for all organisations working with children and young people - regardless of size, funding source or service type.

It is therefore important to note that other specific requirements to ensure client protection may apply to particular services. For further details refer to the specific standards applicable to your service.

This standard is principally based on the Choose With Care Information and Training Program, an initiative of Child Wise. Choose With Care was produced with the assistance of the Department of Human Services (Victoria) and the Commonwealth Department of Family & Community Services. Child Wise is an independent provider of training and consultation services in relation to creating child safe organisations.

This standard has been developed with the assistance of Child Wise and the Choose with Care Information and Training Program.

The standard is being utilised as part of an accreditation process developed by The Australian Council for Children & Youth Organisations ("the Council"). The accreditation process is an initiative of the Council and remains the sole responsibility of the Council.

The Choose With Care package is available by phoning Child Wise on 1800 991 099 (toll free) or by visiting www.childwise.net

Safeguarding Children & Young People

The standard is built around the development and implementation of a Policy to Safeguard Children & Young People. As an integral part of this overall policy, the standard deals with the following broad topics:

- Code of Conduct
- Recruitment/selection of staff & volunteers
- Staff support, supervision & training
- Raising concerns - a comprehensive Complaints Resolution Process

1 Policy for Safeguarding Children & Young People

Each organisation will create, implement and regularly review its own Policy to Safeguard Children & Young People. Essential elements of the policy are:

- Statement of Intention - refer to p. 64 of Choose With Care
- Definition of Abuse - refer to p. 64 of Choose With Care
- Empowering Children & Young People - refer to p.142 of Choose With Care
- Code of Conduct [see section 2 below]
- Recruitment/selection of staff & volunteers [see section 3 below]
- Staff support, supervision & training [see section 4 below]
- Guide to mandatory reporting - [see section 5 below. For full details refer to "Responding to Child Abuse" published by the Victorian Department of Human Services 2002 - available at www.dhs.vic.gov.au/commcare]
- Raising concerns - a comprehensive Complaints Resolution Process [see section 5 below]

Child Protection Policy Standard

1 Policy for Safeguarding Children & Young People

continued

Page 2

Essential elements of the policy development process are:

- That the policy is developed with the active participation of all stakeholders including service users and their families, staff, volunteers.
- That the policy is approved by the organisation's governing body.
- That the policy is widely displayed, circulated and promoted.
- That the policy is evaluated and reviewed at least annually in accordance with a defined evaluation/review process.

2 Code of Conduct

As part of an organisation's Policy to Safeguard Children & Young People a Code of Conduct should be developed. The purpose of the Code is to clarify acceptable behaviour in order to minimise the risk of child abuse occurring within the organisation.

The Code of Conduct should provide practical guidance to staff, volunteers, parents and service users about the types of behaviour that are and are not acceptable within your organisation.

Note: For assistance with developing your organisation's Code of Conduct refer to Chapter 5 of *Choose With Care*.

3 Recruitment/selection of staff and volunteers

- 1) Develop written job descriptions and key selection criteria (including minimum qualifications) for all positions.
- 2) Advertise the vacancy - and include the organisation's commitment to child protection in the advertisement/s.
- 3) Reference Checks: conduct a minimum of three reference checks for a preferred applicant (including verification of applicant's identity and employment history)
- 4) Police Checks: ensure that all staff and volunteers who may have direct contact with children and young people are screened in accordance with the existing DHS Police Checks Standard. **Note:** *Choose With Care* contains a procedure for conducting a National Police Records Check at page 101.
- 5) As part of the letter of offer/contract of employment the successful applicant should provide written acknowledgment of having read, understood and agreed to abide by the organisation's Policy to Safeguard Children & Young People.
- 6) All new staff should be employed on a standard probationary period of 3 months.

Note: *Choose With Care* contains detailed advice regarding Recruitment & Selection. Refer to Chapter 6.

Child Protection Policy Standard

4 Support, supervision & training

Page 3

To create the optimum working environment where the risks to children and young people are minimised, all staff should have the opportunity to:

- Contribute to the development, evaluation and review of the organisation's Policy to Safeguard Children & Young People;
- Participate in a structured induction process when commencing employment;
- Receive regular clinical supervision. The nature and extent of the supervision should be agreed between the staff member and their supervisor;
- Participate in a formal performance appraisal at least once each year; and
- Participate in education and training programs to improve their knowledge of child abuse and best practice in responding to allegations of abuse.

5 Raising concerns - a comprehensive Complaints Resolution Process

As part of an organisation's Policy to Safeguard Children & Young People a written Complaints Resolution Process should be developed. The purpose of the Complaints Resolution Process is to clarify the rights and responsibilities of all parties to an allegation of misconduct. The relevant parties include the child (or young person).

The Complaints Resolution Procedure should balance the following interests:

- The right of the child to be heard, to be protected and to be supported;
- The right of the child and their families to have their concern acted upon and resolved - and for the identity of the child/young person to remain confidential;
- right of the alleged perpetrator to a fair process, including confidentiality;
- The legal requirement for the organisation to report suspected crimes to the Police for proper investigation;
- The legal requirement for mandated professionals (teachers, nurses and doctors) to notify Child Protection Services (within the Department of Human Services) of protective concerns regarding children under 17 years of age;
- The moral duty of all people (including paid and unpaid staff of community service organisations) to notify Child Protection Services (within the Department of Human Services) of protective concerns regarding children under 17 years of age; and
- The contractual requirement for the organisation to provide a report regarding the alleged incident to the Department of Human Services (in respect of organisations which receive DHS funding).

Child Protection Policy Standard

Essential elements of the Complaints Resolution Procedure include:

Page 4

For the person raising a concern (including service user and their family):

- How and to whom a concern should be addressed;
- How the complaint will be dealt with - including internal and external avenues - from beginning to end;
- Support services available to the child (or young person) and their family.

For the alleged perpetrator:

- How the complaint will be dealt with - including internal and external avenues - from beginning to end.

For management:

- How the complaint will be dealt with - including internal and external avenues - from beginning to end;
- Procedure for documenting the concern and the internal handling of the concern;
- Procedure for notifying the Police and/or the Department of Human Services.

For staff:

- Clear guidelines to reinforce the need for staff to refer concerns about the conduct of a fellow staff member to the appropriate manager - thereby ensuring that the organisation meets its legal duty of care to service users.
- Clear guidelines for staff to respond appropriately and sensitively when a child or young person raises an allegation of abuse.

It is recommended that at least one designated person (staff member/volunteer) be appointed as Child Protection Officer. The precise role of the Child Protection Officer should be determined by each organisation. ChildWise Australia recommends that the Child Protection Officer should act as a focal point for children, young people and parents. The Child Protection Officer can receive complaints and concerns and perform an advocacy role on behalf of people who have raised allegations of abuse or improper conduct.

Note: *Choose With Care* contains detailed advice regarding the complaints process. Refer to Chapter 8.