

Child Protection Policy

Policy Statement

This service is committed to child protection and child safe environments.

Considerations

The Child Protection Policy:

- reflects the service's philosophy, which can include values, ethics or code of conduct for management, staff, carers, children, families, students, volunteers and the community;
- establishes the procedures for child protection matters including identifying, documenting, reporting and managing concerns or incidents;
- maintains procedural fairness and natural justice concepts in all circumstances;
- identifies safe protective behaviours for all persons¹ who access the service's premises, facilities and/or programs;
- abides by Federal and State/Territory legislation;
- defines the appropriate direct or indirect physical contact between children and adults in the service;
- identifies and details the procedures when an adult harms a child; a child harms another child; or an adult harms another adult in the service;
- details complaints, grievances and disciplinary procedures;
- demonstrates a commitment to ongoing professional development for staff/carers;
- identifies support and counselling services or agencies for all stakeholders, including strategies to deal with the media; and
- reflects relevant licensing requirements, for example staff/child ratios.

In addition:

- Sparkling Stars Childcare Centre has a duty of care to ensure that all persons are provided with a high level of safety and protection during the hours of the service's operation.

¹ For the purpose of this policy, 'persons' include children, families, staff, carers, carers' family, management, coordination unit staff, ancillary staff (administrative staff, kitchen staff, cleaners, maintenance personnel, students, volunteers, visitors, local community, school community, licensee, sponsor and/or service owner.

- Services may also indicate how children are protected when the service is not operating. For example, the service may have closed for the day but parents and children are still using the car park.
- It is understood by staff/carers, children and families that there is a shared responsibility between the service and all stakeholders that the Child Protection Policy and procedures are accepted as a high priority.
- In meeting the service's duty of care, and legislative requirements outlined in this State or Territory's legislation that the management/coordination unit staff and staff/carers implement and adhere to the service's Child Protection Policy, and ensure a level of safety and protection to all children who access the service's facilities and/or programs.
- Services may be required, in some states or territories, to report suspect incidences of child abuse or neglect to an authority as outlined in mandatory reporting regulations.

How Policy Will Be Implemented (Specific Policies and Procedures)

Participation and empowerment of children

- All forms of abuse are a symbolic representation of 'power' and of the offender's need to control. The promotion of children's participation in the development of child safe strategies and policies is a beneficial step in creating child safe environments.

Staff/Carer support, supervision, performance review and professional development

- Provides an opportunity to identify individuals' attitudes, expectations and values in the workplace.
- It is a legitimate avenue to address the professional and personal partnerships between staff/carers, volunteers, families and children.
- Displays the service's commitment to professional development and ongoing training in child protection issues.

Reporting abuse of children in their family environment

Staff members are responsible for adhering to the following procedures:

- If a staff member suspects that a child may be at risk of abuse or neglect within their family environment, s/he will discuss the situation with his/her supervisor immediately. Parents will be informed if deemed appropriate.
- Concerns will be documented in Sparkling Stars' Accident/Incident form and held in confidential records, accessible only to authorised staff and the licensee. Often, it may only be over time that enough information is available to ascertain a clear picture as to whether or not a child is at risk.
- Detailed records of all concerns will be kept by the nominated supervisor. The records will be based on observation and direct comments from the child, which should be recorded verbatim without interpretation;
- The nominated supervisor will evaluate all concerns and in conjunction with the staff member and make the decision to make a referral to Child First or to Child Protection.
- If the child is at immediate risk, Child Protection Services will be notified immediately.
- If a staff member is unhappy with the decision of the supervisor, the President of the Committee should immediately be contacted to mediate the issue. Whilst it is acknowledged that the staff member is entitled to make a notification her/himself, all efforts to reach agreement as to the most appropriate course of action will be exhausted.
- Staff members are to identify safe and protective behaviour within the environment and establish procedures for child protection matters.
- Staff to demonstrate a commitment of Professional Development by attending accredited training courses.
- Staff to reflect with the services relevant licensing requirements.

If the suspected abuse is not reported the child remains at risk of further abuse or neglect, and subsequently, may be subjected to the risk of permanent harm or possible death. Furthermore, by not notifying, you become, in effect, part of the abuse because you are colluding with the abuser by maintaining the secret therefore, protecting the abuser and not the child. Moreover, you effectively reinforce to the child that no one can or will help them.

It is the responsibility of the Nominated Supervisor of the Centre to ensure that all staff members receive appropriate and adequate training on a regular basis on child abuse and neglect and the responsibilities of mandatory reporting.

Reporting abuse of children at Sparkling Stars Childcare Centre

If a staff member or volunteer suspects an occurrence of abuse of a child perpetrated by another staff person or volunteer, then he/she will immediately report his/her concerns to their supervisor.

- The supervisor will evaluate all allegations seriously.
- The supervisor will immediately discuss the matter with the licensee.
- The supervisor and licensee will determine a relevant course of action to take. The plan will be documented and kept confidential. The plan will include steps to inform the child's parents/carers about of the allegations.

- All allegations of physical and sexual assaults of children at Sparkling Stars will be referred to Child Protection by the supervisor.
- It is the responsibility of the nominated supervisor to ensure that all staff members receive appropriate and adequate training on a regular basis on child abuse and neglect and the responsibilities of mandatory reporting.

Deciding to Refer to Child FIRST or Child Protection

A referral to Child FIRST may be the best way of connecting children, young people and their families to the services they need, where families exhibit any of the following factors that may impact upon a child's safety, stability or development:

- significant parenting problems that may be affecting the child's development
- family conflict, including family breakdown
- families under pressure due to a family member's physical or mental illness, substance abuse, disability or bereavement
- young, isolated and/or unsupported families
- significant social or economic disadvantage that may adversely impact on a child's care or Development

A report to Child Protection should be made in any of the following circumstances:

- Physical abuse of, or non-accidental or unexplained injury to, a child (mandatory reporters must report).
- A disclosure of sexual abuse by a child or witness, or a combination of factors suggesting the likelihood of sexual abuse – the child exhibiting concerning behaviours, for example after the child's mother takes on a new partner or where a known or suspected perpetrator has had unsupervised contact with the child (mandatory reporters must notify).
- Emotional abuse and ill treatment of a child impacting on the child's stability and healthy development.
- Persistent neglect, poor care or lack of appropriate supervision, where there is a likelihood of significant harm to the child, or the child's stability and development.
- Persistent family violence or parental substance misuse, psychiatric illness or intellectual disability – where there is a likelihood of significant harm to the child or the child's stability and development.
- Where a child's actions or behaviour may place them at risk of significant harm and the parents are unwilling or unable to protect the child.
- Where a child appears to have been abandoned, or where the child's parents are dead or incapacitated, and no other person is caring properly for the child.

Many cases will not neatly fit into these categories, and it may be harder to determine whether the level and the nature of any risk is such that the child is in need of protection. The following questions may help resolve the best course of action in such cases:

- What specifically has happened to the child that has caused your concerns and what is the impact on their safety, stability, health, wellbeing and development?

- How vulnerable is the child?
- Is there a history or pattern of significant concerns with this child or other children in the family?
- Are the parents aware of the concerns, capable and willing to take action to ensure the child's safety and stability, and promote their health, wellbeing, and development?
- Are the parents able and willing to use support services to promote?