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Child Protection Policy

Vocalsaints Ltd, 15/01/2021

Policy Summary

This policy outlines our commitment to child protection. It includes our protocols when child abuse is reported to us or suspected by us. It also includes notes regarding the safe practices to be taken to prevent child abuse. All staff are expected to be familiar with this policy and to abide by it.

Purpose statement

We have an obligation to ensure the wellbeing of children and young persons under 17 years of age who are receiving services from any staff member of our organisation. We are committed to the prevention of child abuse and neglect and to the protection of all children. The safety and wellbeing of the child is our top priority when investigating suspected or alleged abuse.

We support the roles of the New Zealand Police and Child, Youth and Family in the investigation of suspected abuse and will report suspected/alleged abuse to these agencies.

We support families/whānau to protect their children.

We provide a safe environment, free from physical, emotional, verbal or sexual abuse.

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Policy Principles

- The interest and protection of the child is paramount in all actions.
- We recognise the rights of family/whānau to participate in the decision-making about their children.
- We have a commitment to ensure that all staff are able to identify the signs and symptoms of potential abuse and neglect and are able to take appropriate action in response.
- We are committed to supporting all staff to work in accordance with this policy, to work with partner agencies and organisations to ensure child protection policies are consistent and high quality.
- We will always comply with relevant legislative responsibilities.
- We are committed to share information in a timely way and to discuss any concerns about an individual child with colleagues or the Person in Charge.
- We are committed to promote a culture where staff feel confident that they can constructively challenge poor practice or raise issues of concern without fear of reprisal.

Definitions

- Child – any child or young person aged under 17 years and who is not married or in a civil union.
- Child protection – activities carried out to ensure that children are safe in cases where there is suspected abuse or neglect or are at risk of abuse or neglect.
- Designated person for child protection – the manager/supervisor or designated person responsible for providing advice and support to staff where they have a concern about an individual child or who want advice about child protection policy.
- Disclosure – information given to a staff member by a child, parent or caregiver or a third party in relation to abuse or neglect.
- Child, Youth and Family – the agency responsible for investigating and responding to suspected abuse and neglect and for providing care and protection to children found to be in need.
- New Zealand Police – the agency responsible for responding to situations where a child is in immediate danger and for working with Child, Youth and Family in child protection work and investigating cases of abuse or neglect where an offence may have occurred.
- Physical abuse – any acts that may result in physical harm of a child or young person. It can be, but is not limited to: bruising, cutting, hitting, beating, biting, burning, causing abrasions, strangulation, suffocation, drowning, poisoning and fabricated or induced illness.
- Sexual abuse – any acts that involve forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not they are aware of what is happening. Sexual abuse can be, but is not limited to:
 - Contact abuse: touching breasts, genital/anal fondling, masturbation, oral sex, penetrative or non-penetrative contact with the anus or genitals, encouraging the child to perform such acts on the perpetrator or another, involvement of the child in activities for the purposes of pornography or prostitution.
 - Non-contact abuse: exhibitionism, voyeurism, exposure to pornographic or sexual imagery, inappropriate photography or depictions of sexual or suggestive behaviours or comments.
- Emotional abuse – any act or omission that results in adverse or impaired psychological, social, intellectual and emotional functioning or development. This can include:
 - Patterns of isolation, degradation, constant criticism or negative comparison to others. Isolating, corrupting, exploiting or terrorising a child can also be emotional abuse.
 - Exposure to family/whānau or intimate partner violence.
- Neglect – neglect is the most common form of abuse and although the effects may not be as obvious as physical abuse, it is just as serious. Neglect can be:
 - Physical (not providing the necessities of life like a warm place, food and clothing).
 - Emotional (not providing comfort, attention and love).
 - Neglectful supervision (leaving children without someone safe looking after them).
 - Medical neglect (not taking care of health needs).
 - Educational neglect (allowing chronic truancy, failure to enrol in education or inattention to education needs).



Identifying Possible Abuse or Neglect

Our approach to identifying abuse or neglect is guided by the following principles:

- We understand that every situation is different and it's important to consider all available information about the child and their environment before reaching conclusions. For example, behavioural concerns may be the result of life events, such as divorce, accidental injury, the arrival of a new sibling etc.
- We understand when we are concerned a child is showing signs of potential abuse or neglect, we should talk to someone, such as a colleague, manager/supervisor or the Designated Person for Child Protection – we shouldn't act alone.
- While there are different definitions of abuse, the important thing is for us to consider overall wellbeing and the risk of harm to the child. It is not so important to be able to categorise the type of abuse or neglect.
- It is normal for us to feel uncertain, however, the important thing is that we should be able to recognise when something is wrong, especially if we notice a pattern forming or several signs that make us concerned.
- Exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV) is a form of child abuse. There is a high rate of co-occurrence between IPV and the physical abuse of children. We recognise the signs of potential abuse:
 - Physical signs (e.g., unexplained injuries, burns, fractures, unusual or excessive itching, genital injuries, sexually transmitted diseases).
 - Developmental delays (e.g., small for their age, cognitive delays, falling behind in school, poor speech and social skills).
 - Emotional abuse/neglect (e.g., sleep problems, low self-esteem, obsessive behaviour, inability to cope in social situations, sadness/loneliness and evidence of self-harm).
 - Behavioural concerns (e.g., age-inappropriate sexual interest or play, fear of a certain person or place, eating disorders/substance abuse, disengagement/neediness, aggression).
 - The child talking about things that indicate abuse (sometimes called an allegation or disclosure).
- We are aware of the signs of potential neglect:
 - Physical signs (e.g., looking rough and uncared for, dirty, without appropriate clothing, underweight).
 - Developmental delays (e.g., small for their age, cognitive delays, falling behind in school, poor speech and social skills).
 - Emotional abuse/neglect (e.g., sleep problems, low self-esteem, obsessive behaviour, inability to cope in social situations, sadness/loneliness and evidence of self-harm).
 - Behavioural concerns (e.g., disengagement/ neediness, eating disorders/substance abuse, aggression).
 - Neglectful supervision (e.g., out and about unsupervised, left alone, no safe home to return to).
 - Medical neglect (e.g., persistent nappy rash or skin disorders or other untreated medical issues).

Every situation is different and staff will consider all available information about the child and their environment before reaching conclusions. For example, behavioural concerns may be the result of life events, such as divorce, accidental injury, the arrival of a new sibling etc.

For further information about identifying child abuse, please see the following:

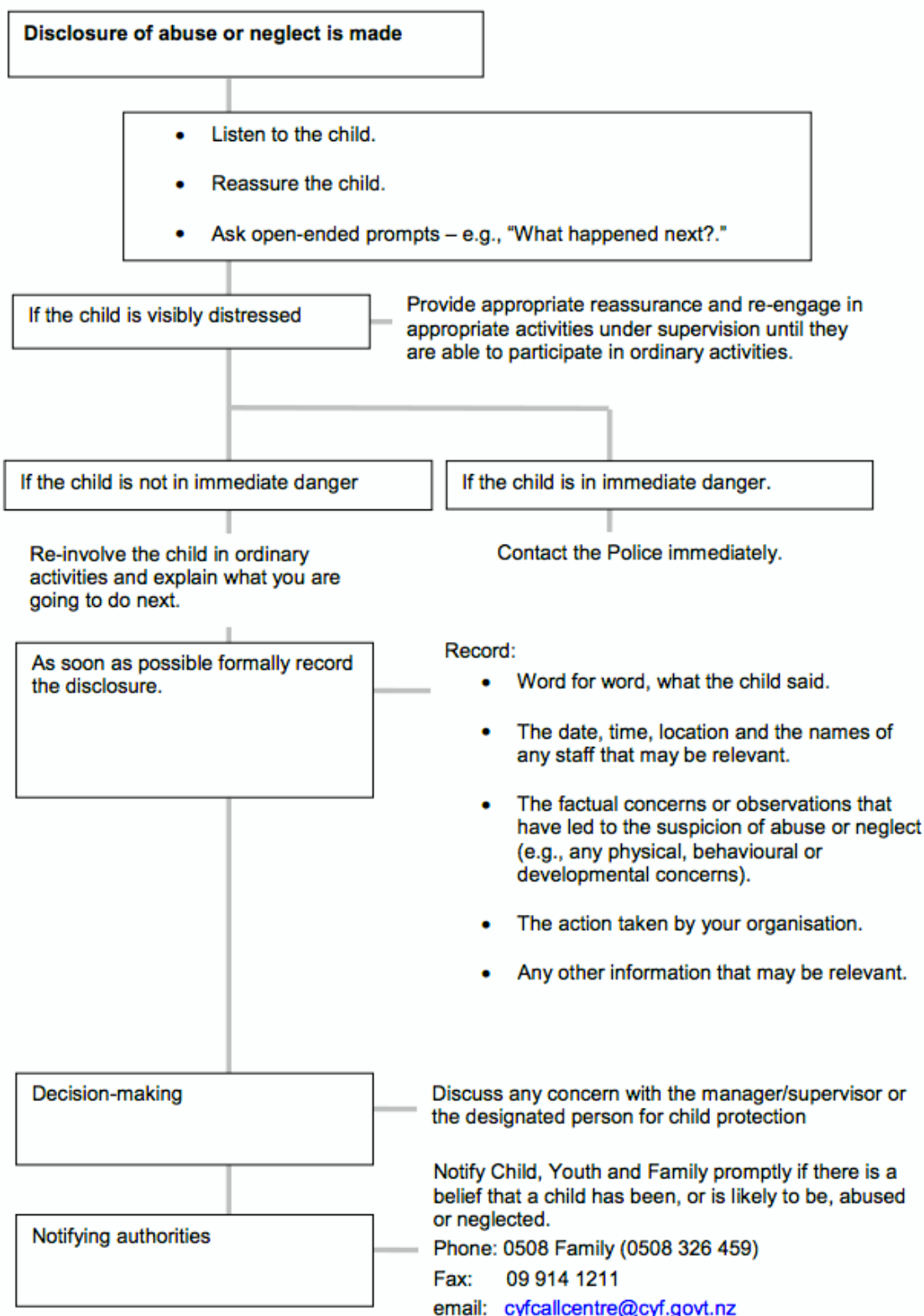
<http://www.cyf.govt.nz/documents/about-us/publications/27713-working-together-3-0-45ppi.pdf>

This resource produced by Child, Youth and Family is for people in social service agencies, schools, healthcare organisations, community and other groups who have close contact with children and families/whānau. It includes useful information about identifying possible child abuse and an assessment framework.



Responding to Suspected Abuse or Neglect

All suspicions or observed incidents or reports of incidents should be reported directly to the Person in Charge as soon as possible, who will immediately take steps to protect the child(ren), record the report and report the concern to Child, Youth and Family. If there is clear evidence or reasonable cause to believe an instance of child abuse having taken place, the Person in Charge shall notify Child, Youth and Family. Please view the Child Abuse Reporting Process flowchart here for details:





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Responding to Suspected Abuse or Neglect (Continued)

This organisation will always act on the recommendations of statutory agencies, including Child, Youth and Family and the Police. We will only inform families/whānau about suspected or actual abuse after we have discussed this with these agencies. When we respond to suspected child abuse or any concerning behaviour we write down our observations, impressions and communications in a confidential register. This is kept separate from our other records and access will be strictly controlled. Staff involved in cases of suspected child abuse are entitled to have support. We will maintain knowledge of such individuals, agencies and organisations in the community that provide support.

Allegations or Concerns About Staff

When a staff member is suspected, the same processes apply. All matters involving allegations against staff need to be escalated to the management team. To ensure the child is kept safe, management may take steps to remove the staff member against whom an allegation has been made from the environment, subject to the requirements of the applicable employment contract and relevant employment law.

If there is a need to pursue an allegation as an employer, we will consult with Child, Youth and Family or the Police before advising the person concerned, informing them that they have a right to seek legal advice and providing them with an opportunity to respond. They should also be informed of their right to seek support from the relevant union/representative body. It is vital to follow ordinary disciplinary policies, guided by the employment contract and relevant statutory obligations.

We commit not to use 'settlement agreements', where these are contrary to a culture of child protection. Some settlement agreements allow a member of staff to agree to resign provided that no disciplinary action is taken, and a future reference is agreed. Where the conduct at issue concerned the safety or wellbeing of a child, use of such agreements is contrary to a culture of child protection.

Confidentiality and Information Sharing

The Privacy Act 1993 and the Children, Young Persons, and their Families Act 1989 allow information to be shared to keep children safe when abuse or suspected abuse is reported or investigated. Note that under sections 15 and 16 of the CYPF Act, any person who believes that a child has been, or is likely to be, harmed physically, emotionally or sexually or ill-treated, abused, neglected or deprived may report the matter to Child, Youth and Family or the Police and, provided the report is made in good faith, no civil, criminal or disciplinary proceedings may be brought against them.

Child Safe Practice Guidelines

- Staff should be aware of where all children are at all times.
- Visitors should be monitored at all times by staff and volunteers and outside instructors should be monitored by staff.
- If activities require one to one physical contact, parents and caregivers should be advised.
- Where a child or young person requires assistance, e.g., if they are intellectually or physically disabled, if possible involve the parents/caregivers to assist. If this assistance is not available, ensure that the staff members are aware of the appropriate procedures when giving assistance.
- Staff should avoid being alone when transporting a child or young person, unless an emergency requires it.
- Except in an emergency, children and young people are not to be taken from our organisation's premises, or from the programme we provide, without written parental consent.



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Recruitment and Employment (Safety Checking)

Safety checking will be carried out in accordance with the Vulnerable Children Act 2014. This will include: a police vet; identity verification; references and an interview. A work history will be sought and previous employers will be contacted. If there is any suspicion that an applicant might pose a risk to a child, that applicant will not be employed.

Training, Supervision and Support

Training, resources and/or advice will be available to ensure that all staff can carry out their roles in terms of this policy, particularly:

- Understanding child abuse and indicators of child abuse.
- How to reduce the risk of child abuse.
- Understanding and complying with legal obligations in regard to child abuse.
- Working with outside agencies on child abuse issues.
- Planning of environment and supervision to minimise risk.
- Dealing with child/parents/family/whānau.

This policy will be part of the initial staff induction programme.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed at least every three years.