



Child Protection Procedure

Policy statement

The principal activity of all education services is to provide care, education and a safe environment for children. Educators are mandated persons are legally obliged to make a report based on reasonable grounds that a child or young person has experienced, or is experiencing sexual abuse, and/or non-accidental physical injury. ETD staff are also required by ETD policy to report suspected emotional abuse or neglect. *“Teachers, particularly in the early years, are often seen by their pupils as someone who care about them, someone they can trust, and a child’s teacher may well be the adult closest to that child, outside the family”* Bishop et al (2002).

This procedure was developed to provide a framework for the protection of the child and to clarify procedures for educators who may be required to make a mandated report.

The goal of this procedure is to:

- promote the safety and wellbeing of all children attending the preschool and their families
- ensure that record keeping is sufficiently detailed to indicate possible abuse
- ensure that educators are trained and skilled in identifying possible indicators of abuse, are aware that they are mandatory reporters who are required to notify any concern or child protection issue and keep up to date on legislation so intervention is possible
- ensure staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities and procedures to follow if a case of abuse is suspected
- ensure that all notifications remain confidential.

Definitions

Child- A person under the age of 16 years.

Child Abuse Conviction- Any conviction of a person, in the ACT or elsewhere, of an offence involving child abuse, and including a finding by the court that a charge for such an offence is proven even though the Court does not proceed to a conviction. The term “allegation” must refer to a description of behaviour that may constitute child abuse and also refers to “conviction” for the purpose of this policy.

Prohibited person- Any person convicted of a serious sex offence will not be permitted to work or seek work in employment which primarily involves direct contact with children where that contact is unsupervised (in either a paid or unpaid role).

Non accidental physical injury (Physical abuse) – any act resulting in an injury to a child or young person by a parent, caregiver or another person who has responsibility for the child or young person.

Sexual abuse - any act or sexual threat imposed on a child or young person. Also when an adult or someone else who is bigger or older involves the child or young person in sexual activity by using their power over the child or young person and taking advantage of their trust. Sexual abuse includes any form of sexual touching, any form of sexual suggestion to children, including

exposure to pornographic material, using the child or young person for pornographic videos or prostitution and exhibitionism and voyeurism.

Emotional abuse - Chronic or repeated ill treatment of a child or young person which causes significant harm to their psychological, social, emotional or cognitive development. This includes exposure to domestic violence.

Neglect - the failure by a parent or caregiver to provide a child or young person with the basic requirements necessary for their proper growth and development, such as food, clothing, shelter, medical and dental care and adequate supervision.

Procedure

Indicators of abuse

There are many indicators of child abuse and neglect. The following is a guide only. One indicator on its own may not imply abuse or neglect. Each indicator needs to be considered in the context of other indicators and the child's circumstances.

General indicators of abuse and neglect include:

- marked delay between injury and seeking medical assistance
- history of injury
- the child gives some indication that the injury did not occur as stated
- the child tells you someone has hurt him/her
- the child tells you about someone he/she knows who has been hurt
- someone (relative, friend, acquaintance, sibling) tells you that the child may have been abused

Procedures to assist centres in the area of child protection

Encourage educator professional learning

- Organise whole school educator meetings during the year for the discussion of child protection guidelines.
- Organise and attend workshops or training seminars for educators on child protection issues and legislation as part of professional learning sessions.
- Provide ongoing educator professional learning in the use of appropriate protective behaviour programs for children

Provide ongoing communication about child protection issues to families

- Communicate with families about the strategies used within the program to help children feel safe and protected, for example, protective behaviours.
- Ensure information about resource organisations, appropriate support networks/agencies, and resource material is easily accessible to families.

Use the program to encourage assertive behaviours and security in children

- Develop programs that take into account the developmental stages of the children.
- Implement protective behaviour programs which will help children learn about self-protection, asking someone they trust for help if they feel unsafe, and the development of positive assertive behaviours for use with other children.
- Provide an environment and strategies which encourage positive self-esteem, secure relationships with adults and children, and assist children in developing pro-social behaviours.

Support and encourage children to develop trust and feel safe within the preschool

- Help children to identify and discuss their feelings in a variety of situations, recognising negative feelings as well as happy, safe feelings.

- Encourage children to talk about situations where they feel safe and do not feel safe.
- Listen to children so they know their questions and concerns are understood.
- Encourage questioning and decision making skills.
- Respect children’s choices and decisions and encourage them to respect other children’s choices, especially where physical contact is concerned.
- Teach children, when developmentally appropriate, the basic principles of "No, Go and Tell", and to say “no” if they feel uncomfortable, to get out of the situation if possible and to tell someone they trust as soon as possible.
- Help children to identify a network of five people they can trust and turn to when they feel unsafe.
- Use correct terminology for all body parts, while being sensitive to cultural and family values.

Procedures for reporting suspected risk of harm

The educators will use the following procedures to assist with recognising and reporting child abuse and neglect.

When there is a concern that a child is being abused or neglected:

Step 1 Raise the matter/concern in confidence with the Educational Leader or School Executive immediately. This concern would be based on:

- first hand observation of the child, young person or family
- what the child, young person, parent or other person has disclosed
- what can reasonably be inferred based on professional training and/ or experience
- written observations of the child available for discussion.

Step 2 Educators will complete a mandatory report with Care and Protection and the Educational Leader or School Executive either by phone or email.

Step 3 Educators follow actions suggested by Care and Protection. This may include preparing for an interview with the child or gathering further information from observations already undertaken. Educators are not required to inform the family of the report, however there may be circumstances where this is necessary and appropriate.

Procedures to follow when a child makes a disclosure

The staff will use the following procedures to assist when a child has disclosed that they have been abused:

- listen to the child
- believe the child
- ensure that you don’t make promises that you cannot keep
- comfort the child
- convey messages that it is not their fault. It is never a child’s fault
- confirm that it was right to tell
- tell them you will need to talk to other people whose job it is to help keep children safe
- do not question the child about the details of the abuse/neglect as legal proceedings may be jeopardised
- if a child makes a disclosure in a group situation calmly follow through on issues discussed with all children regarding protective behaviours. As soon as possible without removing the child from the group inappropriately, move to a quiet area and follow the steps outlined above.

Procedures to follow when being requested by other agencies to share information

The preschool will use the following procedures to respond to a request from another agency to share information regarding a child.

Step 1 Collect the contact details of the person and agency making the request. Seek clarification for the reason for the request.

Step 2 Discuss request with Educational Leader and School Executive. If deemed appropriate they will contact the Legal Section of ACTETD to clarify response options.

Step 3 If Legal Section have cleared the request, seek a written request from the agency for such information, write the report for the agency addressing key significant issues and keep a copy on file at the preschool. Prior to sending written report in the report must be shared with Educational Leader and School Executive.

Step 4 Where the matter is urgent and a written process is not suitable, confirm contact details of the person requesting information, do not give information at this point. Phone back the organisation and seek evidence that the person requesting the information is from this agency. Discuss request with Educational Leader and School Executive. If deemed appropriate they will contact the Legal Section of ACTETD to clarify response options. If Legal Section have cleared the request share the required information verbally with the agency. Inform the agency that you will be taking notes about the conversation and will maintain records at the preschool as well as forward them a copy. As for a copy of the discussion in an electronic format so that educators can use the track changes option to make any changes to the record of conversation. Keep a copy of this record.

Responsibilities of Nominated Supervisor and Educational Leader

It will be the Nominated Supervisor and Educational Leader's responsibility to ensure:

- that all staff undergo annual training in all aspects of child protection and current legislation and its implications for their work
- that parents of children in the preschool are provided with information about relevant legislation and policy
- that all educators appreciate the importance of responding as set out in the policy and legislation.

Acknowledgements

The following references and documents were used extensively in the development of this policy, and are useful resources to assist in implementation of the policy:

- *Children and Young People Act 2008 (ACT)*
- Policy: Child Protection and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect in ACT Public Schools
- Child Abuse and Neglect Guideline for Schools
- Keeping Children and Young People Safe a shared community responsibility
- Bishop, A., Lunn, P., & Johnson, K. (2002). 'I would just like to run away and hide, but I won't!' Exploring attitudes and perceptions on child protection issues with early years teacher trainees on the threshold of their careers. *Westminster Studies in Education*.