

**DUTY of CARE and CHILD
PROTECTION GUIDELINES**



BOOKLET 4

**CRC STANDARD
PROCEDURES FOR
RESPONDING TO
SUSPECTED ABUSE**

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CRC Standard Procedures for Responding to Suspected Abuse:**Identifying an Abuse Situation**

An abuse situation involves a cluster of indicators as listed on (Booklet 1, pages 6 to 9). There may also be indications from the child or young person, or their family, of issues that have led to a destabilization of their normally low risk family routine. Issues such as separation, divorce, illness, death, unemployment, mental health issues and medical issues can have a great impact on the functioning of any family. The accumulation of such information may lead you to develop a suspicion that a child or young person is being abused or neglected.

You have suspicion on reasonable grounds when any of the following four factors are present:

- Your own observations of the **behaviour** of a particular child or young person and / or **injuries** present or your knowledge of the child or young person generally, leads you to suspect that abuse is occurring.
- A child or young person tells you that he or she has been abused.
- Someone reliable such as a relative, friend, neighbour or sibling of the child or young person tells you of the abuse.
- A child tells you that they know someone who has been abused (the child may be referring to themselves).

What to Do When Child Abuse Is Suspected:

CRC Best Practice requires all Leaders and volunteers in Children's / Youth Ministries that work with or have access to children (including those with access to under 18's medical / contact details)

AND

All ordained CRC Trainee Ministers, Ministers and National Ministers...

...to report suspected abuse or neglect to their relevant Reporting Authority, even if their home State legislation does not identify them as Mandated Notifiers.

When any Team Member or ordained Trainee Minister, Minister or National Minister has developed reasonable suspicion that a child or young person is or has been abused or neglected the concern must be **reported to your relevant Reporting Authority as soon as possible**.

****NOTE – GO TO (This Booklet, pages 9 to 10) for the relevant Reporting Authority for your State / Territory***

How to Respond Appropriately if a Child Discloses Abuse or Neglect

Be aware that when a child makes a disclosure they have probably been considering telling you for some time.

They have decided to trust you with their disclosure.

They have probably made indirect disclosures previously.

Be supportive

- Listen to what is being said (active listening, not waiting to respond):
 - Don't interrupt or stop the child
 - Don't panic or look horrified or cry
 - Don't ask leading questions. Be aware that an inappropriate response can contaminate possible evidence in a court proceeding.

- Use supportive language and body language i.e. sit with the child while they are talking (don't stand over them). Use supportive phrases such as:
 - *"I am very glad you chose to tell me about what has been happening".*
 - *"What has happened is not your fault. Sometimes adults (other children or young people) do bad things".*

- Clearly indicate and communicate the following:
 - That you believe the child
 - That whatever has happened is not their fault
 - Reassure the child that telling you was the right thing to do
 - Tell the child that some people do wrong things
 - Don't make promises you can't keep e.g. you cannot promise confidentiality nor can you promise results
 - Reassure the child that the 'secret-cycle' has to be broken

Inquire. Do not investigate into the child or young person's distress*:

- Ask non-leading and open ended questions if you need clarification regarding something the child has told you.
 - *"You said your arm is hurting. Can you tell me why your arm is hurting?"*
 - *"You said you are sad. Can you tell me more about why you are feeling sad?"*

***Note** - the only purpose for inquiring into any information or situation should be to gain clarification from the child in order to determine reasonable suspicion. If you have already developed reasonable suspicion then further inquiry or questioning is not necessary and can appear investigative or leading.

Don't make promises you can't keep:

- Don't tell the child or young person you will keep the information a secret. *CRC Mandatory Reporting Best Practice, requires you to report suspected abuse or neglect, even if what has been said was shared in confidence*
- Don't tell the child or young person that the abuse will stop or that you will take steps to stop the abuse. *This is something that may be beyond your control and in all cases you cannot be sure the child will not fall victim to further abuse.*

Record notes of the child's story:

- Good documentation is extremely important; however notes should always be taken *after* the conversation. It is best to give the full attention to the person / child speaking.
- When taking notes use the specific terminology / descriptions that are used by the child (i.e. direct quotes).
- Write it as it is – don't put your own interpretations on things.
- Don't engage in or arrange counseling for the child or young person. Beyond the initial response do not engage in further discussion unless it is initiated by the child.

Once Reasonable Suspicion Has Been Established

Follow Steps 1-3 to report suspected child abuse to your church's relevant State / Territory Reporting Authority:

STEP 1 – REPORT

STEP 2 – REFRAIN

STEP 3 – INFORM

REPORTING STEPS

STEP 1 - REPORT

Report any suspicion of abuse to your relevant Reporting Authority, as soon as possible

- See This Booklet, pages 9 and 10 for the relevant Reporting Authority for your State / Territory
- If you need assistance to make a report about suspected abuse or neglect or would like to consult with a social worker to discuss any information or concerns you may have, you can also contact your relevant Reporting Authority.

STEP 2 – REFRAIN

Refrain from doing or saying anything to alert the suspected offender

STEP 3 – INFORM

Inform any member of the Leadership Team of your local church that you have/will make a report

- In most instances this will be the CRC Senior Pastor. However, Team Members need to have communicated to them the specific senior leaders they are able to approach to inform the church of any mandatory reports made. I.e. either the Senior Pastor or a choice of 2-3 others (one of whom could be nominated as a 'go to' support person - see *This Booklet, Page 7* for details).
- The Senior Pastor or local Leadership Team member, who becomes aware of this suspicion, is then required to **ensure** a Team Member has made a report to the relevant Reporting Authority. The Senior Pastor or local Leadership Team Member can't rely on 'the word' of another that they have made a report or transfer their responsibility to ensure a report has been made. Senior Pastors / Local Leadership Team members are to verify that a report has been made by asking Team Members to **provide a receipt number** from their relevant Reporting Authority.
- If preferred it is acceptable for the Senior Pastor / Local Leadership Team member and the Team Member reporting suspected abuse, to make a report **together**, that is at the same time with both present. If a report is not made together, the Team Member is still required to report alone and then verify this report by providing a receipt number from their relevant Reporting Authority as outlined above. At any time if the Senior Pastor or Local Leadership Team member becomes aware of additional information that has not been covered in the Team Member's original report, they are required to then report this additional information to their relevant Reporting Authority.
- It is advisable for any person involved in making a report to write down the details of their report, the date the report was made and the receipt number from the Reporting Authority. This information may be needed to verify a report at a later date.

If the alleged offender is a Volunteer or Staff member at your church (including a minor under age 18) all reporting requirements are as above (Steps 1-3). Additionally:

STEP 4 - REFER

In *any* instance where a suspected offender (including a minor under age 18) is a guest, visitor, participant, attendee, service contractor, volunteer or staff member of any church ministry or program within your church, it will be necessary for your CRC Senior Pastor or

local Leadership Team member to refer this information to your Church Oversight immediately.

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- Protective measures may need to be set in place quickly to protect children. This may include a staff member or volunteer being withdrawn from all ministry activity until the matter has been resolved. Your local Leadership Team member or a CRC oversight will keep you informed if this action needs to be taken.
- If it is suspected that an offence has been committed, the appropriate authorities will be contacted. Oversight will immediately initiate your church's **Critical Incident Response Plan** (Booklet 7, page 18) for **Managing Allegations of Abuse** (Booklet 7). Notification of Parents / Carers will then take place as directed by Authorities.

Appoint a 'Go To' Support Person

In order to foster a consistent and thorough approach to providing support to Team Members it is advisable to appoint a person(s) whose role is to provide advice, referrals to Church Oversight and support before, during and after concerns have been raised. This person should be a Senior Leader in your church and have read and be fully conversant with these Guidelines and your church's Duty of Care and Child Protection Policy.

Likely process when Contacting Relevant State / Territory Reporting Authority:

Questions that may be asked initially:

- Is this an immediate life threatening situation?
(If you are dealing with an immediate or life threatening situation you may also need to contact the Police to report your concerns.)
- Is the child or young person of concern to you an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person?
*(i.e. in some states there is a team of skilled workers who specifically work with families and children who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, called **Yaitya Tiramangkotti**.)*
- Do you (*the notifier*) work in education?
(This option should only be used if you work in education as the follow-up questions will be formatted accordingly)

Specific Information that May Be Asked:

Your details:

Your name, your role, the nature of your relationship with the child or young person (i.e. personal or professional) and their family/carers.

Information about the child or young person for whom you are calling:

- Name and Age
- School (if applicable)
- Cultural background
- Suspected Offender details if known (including next expected contact with the child)
- Current whereabouts of child

- Current address

The details of your concern:

- Have you directly observed behaviour and / or injuries?
- What have you heard or observed?
- Did the child disclose information to you?
- What specific observations have led you to believe the child has suffered, or is likely to suffer serious harm?
- How does the child present? (i.e. nature and context of injuries)
- Any other details (i.e. family dynamics)

Some frequently asked questions about reporting suspected abuse or neglect:

- The more times you contact your relevant Reporting Authority with the same information does not mean the notification status will be upgraded or investigated. However, if you have new or additional information you should ring and report that information as soon as possible.
- Notifier's details are kept confidential
- Notifier's can ask for feedback – this is only given on a “*need to know basis*”
- Mandated Notifiers are immune from civil liability
- Mandated Notifiers do not need permission from workplaces or volunteer organisations to notify
- Evidence is not required to make a notification
- Failure to notify could be considered a Criminal Offence and could result in a fine or prosecution

Mandatory Reporting for Junior Team Members

It is important to note in some States / Territories of Australia Mandated Reporting does not only apply to Team Members who are 18 years or older. Junior Team Members (under 18 years) who are given the responsibility to work in and or oversee Children's and Youth programs may also be mandated to report when they suspect abuse or neglect. Either way, whether specific State / Territory laws require them to report suspected abuse, CRC Best Practice clearly outlines that they do so.

It's therefore vital that all Junior Team Members who are given this responsibility to receive clear information about the avenue of support available to them in the event they develop reasonable suspicion that a child or young person has been or is being abused or neglected. Such support should include the option of having an adult Team Member present when contacting the relevant Reporting Authority, if they so desire.

Reporting Authorities by State / Territory:

Reporting Authorities for **Northern Territory, South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Queensland, Tasmania** and **Western Australia** are listed below. Please contact the relevant Reporting Authority for your State / Territory to report suspected child abuse or neglect, as soon as possible:

Northern Territory

- Police on **000** for emergencies
- Reports can be made to the 24 hour toll free number **1800 700 250**

South Australia

- Contact the **Child Abuse Report Line (C.A.R.L) 13 14 78**.
- OR online via <http://www.reportchildabuse.families.sa.gov.au>

Tasmania

- Online via <http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au> for all non-urgent concerns regarding the welfare of children and youth.
- If the matter is urgent, please also call **1300 737 639** to report or additionally advise that you have lodged an online notification.

Victoria

For concerns that are life threatening, ring Victoria Police **000**.

- For concerns about the immediate safety of a child within their family unit, call the Child Protection Crisis Line - 131 278 - toll free for all Victoria (24 hours, 7 days a week). **Note:** this is an emergency service for weekends and after hours only and will pass on cases to the relevant regions the following working day.

Other emergency contacts

- State wide CASA Crisis Line after business hours weekdays, weekends and public holidays - Tel: (03) 9344 2210 or Rural Free Call: 1800 806 292.
- Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre - Tel: (03) 9486 9866.

When it is **not** an emergency:

If it is not an emergency, but you are concerned that a child may be harmed from abuse by their parents or caregivers, then you can discuss your concerns with a Regional Child Protection Worker during office hours.

Western Australia

- Department for Child Protection - **1800 622 258** or contact the district office closest to where the child lives. See the White Pages or **www.childprotection.wa.gov.au**.
- Crisis Care - 24 hour telephone service **(08) 9223 1111** or free call **1800 199 008**
- Western Australia Police - **131 444 or 000** (Emergencies only)

OR complete and lodge the Mandatory Report form via the website:

- <http://www.mandatoryreporting.dcp.wa.gov.au/>

Queensland (QLD)

- During normal business hours contact your regional intake service on:
 - Brisbane - Phone: **1300 682 254**, Fax: **07 3259 8771**
 - Central Queensland - Phone: **1300 703 762**, Fax: **07 4938 4697**
 - Far North Queensland - Phone: **1300 684 062**, Fax: **07 4039 8320**
 - North Coast - Phone: **1300 703 921**, Fax: **07 5420 9049**
 - North Queensland - Phone: **1300 706 147**, Fax: **07 4799 7273**
 - South East - Phone: **1300 679 849**, Fax: **07 3884 8802**
 - South West - Phone: **1300 683 390**, Fax: **07 4616 1796**
- After hours and on weekends – **1800 177 135 or 07 3235 9999** (this service operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

New South Wales (NSW)

- **Child Protection Helpline** on **132 111 (TTY 1800 212 936)** for the cost of a local call, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Australian Capital Territory (ACT)

- **Mandated Reporters** - Phone: **1300 556 728**, Fax: **6205 0641**, Email: childprotection@act.gov.au
- **General Public** - Ph: **1300 556 729**, Fax: **6205 0648**

Follow Up and Pastoral Care

Follow up of a suspicion or allegation of abuse requires wise and experienced handling which is to be overseen by your church's Senior Leadership Team or Church Oversight. While the aim is to support and care wherever possible it's vital to always support, never impede legal process.

The Senior Pastor and local Leadership Team will endeavour to support the child or young person and ensure that appropriate counselling, off-site referrals and other services available from the church are provided to them and their family.

It is also recognised that the person making the notification may require counselling and support from your church.

The alleged perpetrator may also need some pastoral guidance. If the alleged perpetrator is involved in ministry or leadership they are to be removed from any ministry / leadership within the church until the matter is resolved. This would also include isolating them from having contact with *any* children and young people in *any* church related activity.

However, it is important that your church offers adequate counselling or other services to the alleged perpetrator and their family as necessary.

Where the victim and alleged perpetrator both attend the same church it may be appropriate to offer one party the option of attending an alternate service time or relocating to another CRC church or another church. This may only be for the period of the investigation to give both parties space, or in the case of a conviction, a permanent move may be required.

If through a police investigation or judicial proceedings the accused is cleared of all charges, the Oversight will need to guide the process of how this person is to participate in the life of the church community going forward.

However, this does not guarantee that the previously accused person will be restored to their original position. If there is insufficient evidence to complete the police investigation or judicial process, the Oversight is to take all necessary precautions to ensure the protection of children under the church's care. This may include precluding someone from being restored to their original position or working in children or youth ministry at the church in the future.

Media Comment

With issues as emotional and volatile as child abuse, any serious cases may become public record. Whilst anyone has the right and freedom to talk to the media, any comment will come from your church's Senior Pastor or a person designated by them.

The privacy and confidentiality of all involved parties will be protected according to any instructions issued by police and relevant authorities. Also due to the legal process no comments are to be made that will jeopardise current or future legal proceedings.