



Child Protection Policy

POLICY

The Service is committed to providing a child safe environment where children's safety and wellbeing is supported and children feel respected, valued and encouraged to reach their full potential. Uniting Early Learning embeds the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations and promotes a culture of safety and wellbeing to minimise the risk of child abuse or harm to children whilst promoting children's sense of security and belonging. We will ensure all management, educators, contractors and volunteers understand the meaning, importance and benefits of providing a child safe environment and critically, understand their obligations and requirements as Mandatory Reporters.

At all times, management, staff, contractors and volunteers will treat children with the utmost respect and understanding. Our Service believes that:

- Children are capable of the same range of emotions as adults.
- Children's emotions are real and need to be accepted by adults.
- A reaction given to a child from an adult in a child's early stages of emotional development can be positive or detrimental depending on the adult's behaviour.
- Children who enhance their understanding of their body's response to a situation are more able to predict the outcome and ask for help or evade a negative situation.

Purpose

All educators, staff and volunteers are committed to identifying possible risk and significant risk of harm to children and young people at the Service. We comprehend our duty of care responsibilities to protect children from all types of abuse and neglect and will adhere to our moral and legislative obligations.

We aim to implement effective strategies to assist in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all children. Our Service will act in the best interest of each child, assisting them to develop to their full potential in a secure and child safe environment.

Scope

This policy applies to management, staff, contractors, families, visitors and children of the Service.

What is Child Abuse?

Child abuse is any action towards a child or young person that harms or puts at risk their physical, psychological or emotional health or development. Child abuse can be a single incident or can be a number of different incidents that take place over time.

There are different forms of child abuse: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect.

Indicators of Abuse

There are common physical and behavioural signs that may indicate abuse or neglect. The presence of one of these signs does not necessarily mean abuse or neglect. Behavioural or physical signs which assist in recognising harm to children are known as indicators. The following is a guide only. One indicator on its own may not imply abuse or neglect. However, a single indicator can be as important as the presence of several indicators. Each indicator needs to be deliberated in the perspective of other indicators and the child's circumstances. A child's behaviour is likely to be affected if he/she is under stress. There can be many causes





of stress and it is important to find out specifically what is causing the stress. Abuse and neglect can be single incidents or ongoing and may be intentional or unintentional.

General indicators of abuse and neglect may 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, and sibling) tells you that the child may have been abused.

The Queensland Government identifies the following signs of child abuse and includes definitions and physical indicators:

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is when a child suffers physical trauma or injury that is not accidental. It doesn't always leave visible marks or injuries. Physical abuse can include hitting, shaking, throwing, burning, biting and poisoning.

Indicators of Physical Abuse

- Broken bones or unexplained bruising or burns in different stages of healing
- Being unable to explain an injury or giving inconsistent, vague or unlikely explanations for an injury
- Having unusual or unexplained internal injuries
- History of family violence
- Delay between injury and seeking medical assistance
- Repeated visits to the doctor with injuries, poisoning or minor complaints
- Being unusually frightened of a parent or carer
- Wearing inappropriate clothing in warm weather (to hide bruises, cuts or marks)
- Avoiding physical contact
- Becoming scared when other children cry or shout
- Being excessively friendly to strangers
- Starting fires or being fascinated with fire
- Destroying property
- Hurting animals

Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse happens when an adult, a stronger child or a teenager uses their power or authority to involve a child in a sexual activity. The sexual activity does not always need to be a physical act; it can also be a non-contact abusive behaviour such as flashing, exposure to sexually explicit material or inappropriate sexual conversations. Sexual abuse includes:

- Exposing the child to the sexual behaviours of others
- Coercing the child to engage in sexual behaviour with other children or adults
- Verbal threats of sexual abuse
- Exposing the child to pornography

Indicators of Sexual Abuse

- know more about sexual activities than other children their age
- play in a sexual way
- masturbate more than what's normal for their age and stage of development
- refuse to undress for activities or often wearing layers of clothing
- have bruising, bleeding, swelling, tears or cuts on their genitals or anus
- have unusual vaginal odour or discharge





- have itching or pain in the genital area, difficulty going to the toilet, walking or sitting
- have a sexually transmitted disease, especially in a young child
- have torn, stained or bloody clothing, especially underwear
- be afraid of being alone with a particular person
- be frequently depressed, feel suicidal or attempt suicide
- create stories, poems or artwork about abuse.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse happens when a child's social, emotional or intellectual development is damaged or threatened. It can include constant rejection, teasing, bullying, yelling, criticism and exposure to domestic and family violence. Some examples are:

- constant or excessive criticism, condescending, teasing of a child or ignoring

admiration and affection

- excessive or unreasonable demands
- persistent hostility, severe verbal abuse, and rejection
- belief that a specific child is bad or 'evil'
- using inappropriate physical or social isolation as punishment
- exposure to domestic violence
- intimidating or threatening behaviour.

Indicators of emotional abuse

- extreme behaviour ranging from being overly aggressive to submissive
- delayed emotional development
- compulsive lying or stealing
- high levels of anxiety
- lack of trust in people
- persistent bedwetting, urinating or soiling in clothes
- regressive behaviour, such as baby talk or thumb sucking
- having feelings of worthlessness about life and themselves
- overeating or hardly eating at all
- self-harming.

Neglect

Neglect occurs when a child's health and development are affected because their basic needs are not met. These include the need for food, housing, health care, adequate clothing, personal hygiene, hygienic living conditions, medical treatment and adequate supervision. Some examples include:

- inability to respond emotionally to the child
- child abandonment
- depriving or withholding physical contact
- failure to provide psychological nurturing
- treating one child differently to the others

Indicators of Neglect in children

- Starving, begging, stealing or hoarding food
- Having poor hygiene, matted hair, dirty skin or body odour
- Frequent illness, infections or sores
- Talking about no one being at home to provide care
- Frequently late or absent from school
- Wearing inadequate clothing, especially in winter
- Being left unsupervised for long periods





- Alcohol or drug abuse at home
- Delayed physical, emotional or intellectual development.

Definitions

Mandatory reporting is the legislative requirement for selected classes of people to report suspected child abuse and neglect to government authorities. In Queensland (QLD), mandatory reporting is regulated by the Child Protection Act 1999.

Mandatory reporters

Mandatory reporters in Queensland, are people who deliver the following services, wholly or partly, to children as part of their paid or professional work:

- a doctor
- a registered nurse
- a teacher
- certain police officers
- a child advocate under the Public Guardian Act 2014
- an early childhood education and care professional
- Child Safety Services
- licensed care services

All staff have a responsibility to recognise and respond to concerns for safety, welfare and the wellbeing of children and young people, and to report these concerns to management and appropriate Child Safe authorities.

Child Protection Guide

Professionals who encounter concerns related to possible abuse or neglect of children should use the online Child Protection Guide to assist in making decisions about where to report or refer their concerns.

The online Child Protection Guide is a tool to assist professionals' decision making if concerns arise about a child who appears:

- o to have experiences or is likely to experience significant harm AND
- o may not have a parent willing and able to protect them from harm.

The CPG will help professionals decide to report to the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (Child Safety) or refer to other service providers, to help families receive appropriate supports.

Blue Card

Queensland's Working With Children Check is administered by the Blue Card Services. All employees working or volunteering with children within Education and care services are required to hold a valid Blue Card at all times when working or volunteering with children. Education and care services are required to validate employee Blue Cards BEFORE an employee begins working with children. Education and care services are required to register the organisation details with Blue Card Services and link each new employee with the organisation at the start of employment through the Organisation Portal. Blue Card Services will advise organisations if an employee's Blue Card has been suspended/cancelled or disqualified. Blue Card Services monitors and audits service providers to ensure compliance including risk management to ensure that appropriate safeguards are implemented and maintained to protect children from harm.

Implementation

UEL strongly opposes any type of abuse against a child and endorses high quality practices in relation to protecting children. We have policies and procedures in place that demonstrate our aim and willingness to keep children and young people safe in accordance with the Working with Children (Risk Management and





Screening) Act 2000 (the Act) and the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Regulation 2020.

Educators have an important role to support children and young people and to identify concerns that may jeopardise their safety, welfare, or wellbeing. To ensure best practice, all educators will attend approved Child Protection training certified by a registered training organisation. Educators will continue to maintain current knowledge of child protection and Mandatory Reporter requirements by completing Child Protection Awareness Training.

The Approved Provider/Nominated Supervisor will ensure:

- any Responsible Person in day-to-day charge of the Service has successfully completed a course in child protection approved by the Regulatory Authority
- all educators, staff, students and volunteers Blue Cards are validated unless the person meets the criteria for exemption from a Blue Card
- all employees, students and volunteers are:
 - provided with a copy of the current Child Protection and Child Safe Environment Policies as part of the induction process at the Service
 - aware of their mandatory reporting obligations and responsibilities to report a reasonable suspicion that a child has suffered, is suffering or is at an unacceptable risk of suffering, significant harm caused by physical or sexual abuse; and may not have a parent able and willing to protect the child from the harm to Child Safety Services
 - aware of indicators showing a child may be at risk of harm or significant risk of harm.
- training and development are provided for all educators, staff, and volunteers in child protection on an annual basis
- educators are provided with a reporting procedure and professional standards to safeguard children and protect the integrity of educators, staff and volunteers
- educators are provided with training and ongoing supervision to ensure they understand that child safety is everyone's responsibility
- access is provided to all staff regarding relevant legislations, regulations, standards and other resources to help educators, staff, and volunteers meet their obligations
- records of abuse or suspected abuse are kept in line with our Privacy and Confidentiality Policy
- to notify the regulatory authority through the NQA-ITS (within 7 days) of any incident where it is reasonably believed that physical and/or sexual abuse of a child has occurred or is occurring while the child is being educated and cared for by the Service
- to notify the regulatory authority through the NQA-ITS (within 7 days) of any allegation that sexual or physical abuse of a child has occurred or is occurring while the child is being educated and cared for by the Service

Educators will:

- be able to recognise indicators of abuse
- respect what a child discloses, taking it seriously and follow up on their concerns through the appropriate channels
- comprehend their obligations as mandatory reporters and their requirement to report any situation where they believe, on reasonable grounds, that a child is at risk of significant harm to the Child Safety Services:
 - during normal business hours - contact the Regional Intake Service
 - After hours and on weekends - contact the Child Safety After Hours Service Centre on 1800 177 135. The service operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- refer families, in consultation with their Director/Coordinator or Area Manager/Operations Managers to appropriate agencies where concerns of harm do not meet the threshold of significant harm.





These services may be located through Family and Child Connect at <https://familychildconnect.org.au/>. Family consent will be sought before making referrals.

- promote the welfare, safety, and wellbeing of children at the Service
- allow children to be part of decision-making processes where appropriate
- prepare accurate records recording exactly what happened, conversations that took place and what was observed to pass on to the relevant authorities to assist with any investigation
- understand that allegations of abuse or suspected abuse against them are treated in the same way as allegations of abuse against other people
- NOT investigate suspicion of abuse or neglect but collect only enough information to substantiate concerns and pass on to Child Safety Services or appropriate authority.
- contact the police on 000 if there is an immediate danger to a child and intervene if it is safe to do so

Documenting A Suspicion Of Harm

When receiving a disclosure of harm, the educator will:

- give the child or young person their full attention
- remain calm
- not make promises that can't be kept. For example, never promise that you will not tell anyone else
- honestly tell the child or young person what you plan to do next
- tell the child/person they have done the right thing in revealing the information but that they'll need to tell someone who can help keep the child safe
- only ask enough questions to confirm the need to report the matter because probing questions could cause distress, confusion and interfere with any later enquiries
- let the child or young person take his or her time
- let the child or young person use his or her own words
- not attempt to conduct their own investigation or mediate an outcome between the parties involved
- not confront the perpetrator
- document as soon as possible so the details are accurately captured including:
 - o time, date and place of the disclosure
 - o 'word for word' what happened and what was said, including anything they (the staff member/educator) said and any actions that have been taken
 - o date of report and signature.

Making A Report

Mandatory reporters must report to Child Safety a reasonable suspicion that a child has suffered, is suffering or is at unacceptable risk of suffering significant harm caused by physical or sexual abuse and may not have a parent able and willing to protect them from the harm. Mandatory reporters should still report to Child Safety a reasonable suspicion a child may be in need of protection where the harm or risk of harm relates to any other type of abuse or neglect.

Educators should refer to the Child Protection Guide and discuss with their Coordinator/Director or Area Manager/Operations Manager to decide whether to refer a family for help or to make a report to Child Safety. To report a concern to Child Safety, educators are to discuss with their Coordinator/Director or Area Manager/Operations Manager how this will be completed.

When a report is made, ensure the following information is provided:

- the name, age and address of the child or young person
- the reasons you suspect the child or young person may have experienced or is at risk of experiencing harm
- the immediate risk to the child or young person





- contact details. You may remain anonymous; however, it is preferable to provide these details so that the officer can call you if further information is needed.

Confidentiality

It is important that any notification remains confidential, as it is vitally important to remember that no confirmation of any allegation can be made until the matter is investigated. The individual who makes the notification should not inform the suspected perpetrator (if known). This ensures the matter can be investigated without contamination of evidence or pre-rehearsed statements. It also minimises the risk of retaliation on the child for disclosing.

Protection for reporters

All reporters are protected against retribution for making or proposing to make a report under amendments to the Child Protection Act 1999 effective 31 August 2020. The identity of the reporter is protected by law from being disclosed, except in certain exceptional circumstances. Provided the report is made in good faith:

- The report will not breach standards of professional conduct
- The report cannot lead to defamation and civil and criminal liability
- The report is not admissible in any proceedings as evidence against the person who made the report
- A person cannot be compelled by a court to provide the report or disclose its contents
- The identity of the person making the report is protected.

A report is also an exempt document under the Freedom of Information Act 1989.

Sharing of information

Sharing information is a key part of ensuring that vulnerable children are protected and supported. The Child Protection Act 1999 sets out the legal framework for reporting concerns about children to Child Safety and referring families to Family and Child Connect and support services, including intensive family support services. It outlines information sharing rights and responsibilities between professionals, Child Safety and services that support children and families.

Sharing concerns and information about a family with the right service enables a comprehensive assessment, informs decision making and leads to better outcomes that ensure the child's safety. Sharing information can also facilitate a coordinated multi-agency response to families with multiple or complex needs.

Where possible, you should obtain a family's consent to share information. You do not need written consent to share information. A verbal agreement or acknowledgment is sufficient. It is advisable to document the conversation for your own records.

The legislative provision that enables direct referrals without consent allows early support to be offered to the family before problems escalate and require statutory intervention. Sharing information takes precedence over a parent's right to confidentiality or privacy because the safety, welfare and wellbeing of the child is paramount.

Breach Of Child Protection Policy

All educators and staff working with children have a duty of care to support and protect children. A duty of care is breached if a person:

- does something that a reasonable person in that person's position would not do in a particular situation
- fails to do something that a reasonable person in that person's position would do in the circumstances or
- acts or fails to act in a way that causes harm to someone the person owes a duty of care.





Managing A Breach in Child Protection Policy

Management will investigate the breaches in a fair, unbiased and supportive manner by:

- discussing the breach with all people concerned and advising all parties of the process
- giving the educator/staff member the opportunity to provide their version of events
- documenting the details of the breach, including the versions of all parties
- recording the outcome clearly and without bias
- ensuring the matters in relation to the breach are kept confidential
- reach a decision based on discussion and consideration of all evidence.

Outcome Of a Breach In Child Protection Policy

Depending on the nature of the breach outcomes may include:

- emphasising the relevant element of the child protection policy and procedure
- providing closer supervision
- further education and training
- providing mediation between those involved in the incident (where appropriate)
- disciplinary procedures if required
- reviewing current policies and procedures and developing new policies and procedures if necessary

Educating Children About Protective Behaviour

Our program will educate children

- about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, and what is appropriate and inappropriate contact at an age-appropriate level and understanding
- about their right to feel safe at all times
- to say “no” to anything that makes them feel unsafe or uncomfortable
- about how to use their own knowledge and understanding to feel safe
- to identify feelings that they do not feel safe
- the difference between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ secrets
- that there is no secret or story that cannot be shared with someone they trust
- that educators are available for them if they have any concerns
- to tell educators of any suspicious activities or people
- to recognise and express their feelings verbally and non-verbally
- that they can choose to change the way they are feeling.

Continuous Improvement/Reflection

Our Child Protection Policy will be reviewed on an annual basis in consultation with children, families, staff, educators and management.

Policy Name	Child Protection Policy
Related NQS	QA 2
Related Regulation & Law	(s)162(A), (r)84, (r)155, (r)175
Related Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Safe Environment Policy • Code of Conduct Policy • Health and Safety Policy • Interactions with Children, Family and Staff Policy • Privacy and Confidentiality Policy • Staffing Arrangements Policy • Student and Volunteer Workers Policy





	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervision Policy • Work Health and Safety Policy
Related Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Injury on Intake
Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian Children’s Education & Care Quality Authority. (2014). • Australian Government Department of Education. Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia.V2.0, 2022 • Australian Government Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2018). Australian child protection legislation • Australian Government: Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2020). Mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect • Child Protection Act 1999 • Child Protection Regulation (2011) • Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics. (2016). • Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010. (Amended 2023). • Education and Care Services National Regulations. (Amended 2023). • Family and Child Connect. Funded by Queensland Government https://familychildconnect.org.au/ • Guide to the National Quality Framework. (2017). (Amended 2023). • Revised National Quality Standard. (2018). • Queensland Government. Blue cards for working with children https://www.qld.gov.au/law/laws-regulated-industries-and-accountability/queensland-laws-and-regulations/regulated-industries-and-licensing/blue-card • Queensland Government. Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs About Child Protection. • Queensland Government. Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women. Child Protection Guide. https://secure.communities.qld.gov.au/cpguide/engine.aspx • Queensland Government. Department of Health Child Abuse. How to recognise child abuse. https://www.qld.gov.au/community/getting-support-health-social-issue/support-victims-abuse/child-abuse/recognise-child-abuse • Queensland Government. Child abuse and neglect education module. Responsibility, recognising and reporting (2013) https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0024/150693/childabuse-module.pdf • Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000
Amendments (June 2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • addition of Child Safe Organisation
Amendments (Aug 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • minor formatting • continuous improvement section added
Amendments (Mar 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reformatting • inclusive language “contractor” to include In home Care and Family Day Care educators.

