Developing and implementing your service's child protection policy

by Megan Shaw

Every child has a right to feel safe in any environment. Educators have a legal and moral obligation to ensure the safety of all children in their care and to report any concerns they have for a child's wellbeing.

This article relates to:	
FDCQA Principle:	4.6
OSHCQA Principles:	7.1 and 8.1
QIAS Principle:	5.1

What is child abuse and neglect?

Child abuse comes in many forms and can affect children in different ways. Types of abuse include physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Neglect occurs when a child is deprived of necessities such as food, shelter, warmth and medical attention. Abuse and neglect may take place over a period of time, or be a one off incident. In either case, it is very serious and can have life-long effects on a child.

Physical abuse: Physical abuse means harming a child physically, such as by hitting, kicking or restraining. You may notice bruises or other marks on a child who has been physically abused, but sometimes there are no visible marks.

Emotional abuse: Takes place when a child is spoken to in a degrading way, such as repeated name calling, bullying, verbal and physical threats. Isolating or intentionally frightening a child also constitutes emotional abuse. While there may not be any physical signs of emotional abuse, it is still very serious and can cause extreme low self-esteem and withdrawal.

Sexual abuse: Can take many forms, including a person exposing themselves to a child and any inappropriate touching of a child. Showing children explicit films or pornographic images is also a form of sexual abuse.

Neglect: Occurs when a child is deprived of basic needs such as food, water, shelter and/or medical attention.

Domestic violence: If a child witnesses violence within the home, this can also put them at risk of harm. While the child may not be in immediate danger of abuse or neglect, the emotional damage domestic violence causes can be extreme.

Keeping children safe within the service

Child protection goes beyond reporting concerns you may have for children. It also involves the level of supervision and safety within your service. There are many ways in which you can ensure the safety of the children in your care and make sure that all educators are aware of their child protection responsibilities.

Having a clear child protection policy will guide the practice of educators in the service. The policy will inform educators of their role in terms of supervision, releasing children to authorised persons, what to do when they have concerns for a child's wellbeing and who to contact when making a report of suspected child abuse.

Developing your child protection policy

The first step in developing any policy is to research recognised authorities for current information. For a child protection policy this will also involve gathering information on the current legislation in your state or territory. Once you have gathered all of the information you need, a draft policy can be written.

The draft policy can be shared with families and service educators and staff. This may be done in whichever way works for your service, for example, face-to-face meetings, via email or newsletters. It is a good idea to have a deadline date for feedback to be submitted to ensure the policy development is not delayed.

Once the consultation process has been completed, the feedback can be considered for inclusion in the policy. The final policy can then be accepted and communicated to all families, educators and staff. It is very important to include the date the policy was created and a list of all sources of information. This will assist future reviews of the policy.

What to include in your child protection policy

When developing a child protection policy for your service, the following information should be included:

• Mandatory reporting requirements.

Each state and territory has different requirements for mandatory reporting. Information on mandatory reporting requirements for each state and territory can be found on the National Child Protection Clearing House website

- Contact details for reporting suspected child abuse and neglect – these details should be very clear within the policy. It is also a good idea to have the contact details displayed somewhere within the service so educators do not have to refer to the policy when making a report

- A process for undertaking 'Working with Children Checks'. Requirements for these vary between each state and territory

- Types of abuse and indicators of abuse – possible behaviours and physical signs that can indicate a child is being abused or neglected

- Supervision procedures for the service – this will include supervision points within the service, procedures relating to family members in a family day care home and procedures for having students and volunteers at the service

- Procedures for releasing children from the service. This should include who is authorised to collect the children from the service and the process to follow if a child has a court order in place and/or an unauthorised person arrives to collect a child

- Communication strategy – this refers to how the policy will be communicated to families and educators to ensure that everybody understands their responsibilities in relation to child protection. You may also consider including information in the policy about how and when child protection training will be conducted with educators

- A list of the recognised authorities from which the policy information was sourced

- The date on which the policy was finalised or reviewed

- The next policy review date.

Policy review process

All service policies require regular reviews to ensure the information in them is still current. For the child protection policy this is particularly important, as it is bound by legislation and is the guide the service uses to ensure the safety of every child within the service. Your service should include a policy review date on each policy. This serves as a useful reminder to ensure all policies are reviewed regularly. However, it

is also essential to check the policy sources at more regular intervals in case there are changes to legislation. It is vital that your child protection policy includes information that is consistent with the current legislation in your state or territory.

When you are reviewing the service policy, the steps you follow will be similar to those followed during the development stage; however, you will circulate the current policy for feedback and suggested updates.

You may not need to make changes to the policy at every review, as legislation and current recommendations may not have changed between review dates and respondents may not suggest any updates. The date the policy was reviewed should still be recorded to keep a record of all changes made to the policy.

Implementing your child protection policy

Service policies are in place to guide everyday practice. For this reason, it is essential that all educators are provided with regular child protection training. This may be done by:

- Educators and staff engaging in professional development activities

- Including information about the service's child protection policy and procedures in the service's induction process

- Compiling child protection resources for educators and staff, such as relevant print

articles and information packages from recognised child protection agencies

• Discussing child protection at educator and staff meetings.

Teaching children protective behaviours

When a child is being abused, especially if it is by a parent or someone close to the child, they are often too scared to tell someone. Teaching protective behaviours helps children to know that it is okay to tell someone if they are being hurt. It also assists a child to identify who can touch them and how they can be touched. Young children may also find it difficult to explain what is being done to them as they do not have the words to describe it. Teaching protective behaviours can include giving children the words to describe different feelings, such as scared, nervous and uncomfortable.

Conclusion

Having an effective child protection policy that is in line with current legislation for your state or territory is vital in keeping children safe. Having clear procedures will also assist all educators to implement the policy in the same way to help ensure all children in your care are safe and secure ∎

Custody orders

A custody order is a document issued by the Family Court that sets out the terms and conditions of who has custody of a child. Custody is defined in the Family Law Act 1975 as being:

• *the right to have the daily care and control of the child, and*

• *the right and responsibility to make decisions concerning the daily care and control of the child*

(Australian Government, 2010).

All educators should be aware of any requirements in relation to any custody orders that may be in place for children. There should be clear procedures in the service's policy on what to do if a prohibited person enters the service and it would be beneficial for educators to also receive training on this. You may consider practicing this procedure at staff meetings, similar to practicing emergency evacuation procedures.

References and further reading

• Australian Government. (2010). *Guide to Social Security Law*. Retrieved 5 November, 2010, from http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/guides_acts/ssg/ssguide-1/ssguide-1.1/ssguide-1.1.c/ssguide-1.1.c.380.html

• Berlyn, C., Bromfield, L., Higgins, D., Holzer, P., & Richardson, N. (2010). *Mandatory reporting of child abuse*. Canberra, ACT: National Child Protection Clearinghouse.

• Boyle, L., & McFarlane, J. (2008). *NCAC Family Day Care Quality Assurance Factsheet #19: Child Protection*. Surry Hills, NSW: NCAC.

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• Hughes, L., & Owens, A. (2007). *NCAC Family Day Care Quality Assurance Factsheet #13: Children in overnight care*. Surry Hills, NSW: NCAC.

• Rowe, K. (2006). *NCAC Quality Improvement and Accreditation System Factsheet #4: Developing a Policy*. Surry Hills, NSW: NCAC.

Useful websites

• NAPCAN: www.napcan.gov.au

• National Child Protection Clearing House website: www.aifs.gov.au/nch

• Kids Help Line: www.kidshelp.com.au