

Child Protection_Policy

PURPOSE

Nextt is committed to the safety, wellbeing and welfare of children and young people. Nextt is committed to ensuring that staff understand their legal and ethical obligation to act to protect any child who is at risk of abuse or neglect. Australia is a signatory of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and many of the principles within the Convention are embedded within child protection legislation.

This policy must be read and implemented in conjunction with Nextt Human Rights and Freedom from Abuse and Neglect Policy – Reporting and Responding to Abuse.

BACKGROUND

The vulnerability of children with disabilities

The additional pressures experienced by families who have a child with a disability can make their children more vulnerable to abuse and neglect.

This may happen due to the following factors:

- Dependency needs of the children are so great, that they require more parent/caregiver time
- Children may display more extreme behaviours
- Family feels stigmatised and isolated from their extended family, friends and social community
- A lack of community resources exists, thereby limiting access to support networks
- Financial pressures on the family are increased
- Parents/caregivers have decreased employment opportunities and a lack of time to pursue their own interests.

Consequently, some families find themselves increasingly unable to cope, experiencing recurrent and often intensified periods of exhaustion, frustration and stress.

Difficulties in communication and reliance on others for their personal care needs may also make children with disabilities less able to prevent or stop abuse and neglect occurring.

SCOPE

All Nextt employees including Field Staff, Office Staff and Independent Workers (such as Contractors and Volunteers) acting in roles which may be directly or indirectly involved with a child or young person or their personal information.

This Policy is an adjunct to the Nextt Human Rights and Freedom from Abuse and Neglect Policy, Code of Conduct and the Bullying and Harassment Policy, and the Anti-Discrimination Policy.

DEFINITIONS

Child abuse occurs in all socio-economic and cultural groups and may take the form of:

- **Physical abuse:** hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, applying physical 'discipline' or 'punishment' causing harm or injury.
- **Emotional or psychological abuse:** constant criticism, name-calling, excessive teasing, ignoring, exposure to domestic and family violence, withholding praise and affection.
- **Neglect:** failing to meet the child's basic needs for adequate supervision, food, clothing, shelter, safety, hygiene, medical care, education, love and affection or failure to use available resources to meet those needs.
- **Sexual abuse or exploitation:** any sexual act or sexual threat imposed upon a child including exposure, indecent comments, voyeurism, persistent intrusion of a child's privacy.

(Refer also to the Nextt Human Rights and Freedom from Abuse and Neglect Policy)

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RESPONSIBILITIES

The responsibilities of Nextt management are to

- Promote a safe environment for children and young people who receive services from Nextt entities.
- Report children and young people suspected to be at risk of significant harm.
- Follow the Risk Management Policy/Procedure (see Internal References for the link).
- Complete an Incident Report (including if a near miss event) and immediately refer it to their Manager. This is a “red” adverse-event issue per Risk Management Policy. It is compulsory to report it to the respective General Manager and to the Group Manager Quality.
- If a matter involves a Nextt worker, the General/Group Manager will determine the immediacy of the suspension of the employee. The General Manager will consult the Group Manager: People and Culture. The suspension and investigation should be immediate.
- Ensure that employees are aware of their obligations to assess risk of harm and procedures for reporting.
- Ensure that employees are aware of the child and parental indicators of abuse and neglect.
- Comply with the following:
 - i) NSW Working with Children Check and NSW Criminal Record Check
 - ii) SA Child Related Employment Screening
 - iii) VIC Working with Children Check and Police Check
 - iv) QLD “The Blue card System”
 - v) Investigate any allegations of reportable conduct relating to a Nextt employee

POLICY

INDICATORS OF CHILD ABUSE

Children who have been harmed or are at risk of harm may show emotional, behavioural, or physical signs, although some children may provide no signs at all.

Children enrolled at Lizard have an autism spectrum diagnosis with disability including developmental disorders; therefore, special consideration must be taken when addressing child protection issues. Many abuse indicators are seen in behaviours that children with autism display, in addition the child may be unable to understand or communicate what has actually happened. The list below contains many behaviours that can commonly be seen in children with autism, therefore staff should in particular be noticing any unusual or out of character behaviours that occur.

Some general indicators that a child or young person may have been harmed or is at risk of harm include:

- showing wariness and distrust of adults
- excessive rocking, sucking and biting
- difficulty sleeping, often being tired and falling asleep
- inconsistent explanation for injuries
- extreme attention seeking behaviours
- low self esteem
- difficulty relating to adults and peers
- aggressive or demanding behaviour
- bedwetting or soiling (in toilet trained children)
- being seemingly accident prone
- difficulty concentrating
- being withdrawn or overly obedient
- reluctance to go home
- creating stories or artwork about abuse.

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Employees who have regular contact with young children and their families, are in a position to recognise possible indicators of child abuse and as such have a responsibility to report their concerns.

Failure to express concerns about suspected incidents of abuse means that children's safety and well-being cannot be ensured and they may be vulnerable to further abuse or maltreatment.

Employees **must not** take on the role of investigator in cases of alleged abuse, because without specific knowledge, skills and training in this area, contamination of vital evidence could occur.

DISCLOSURE

Children's Disclosure of Abuse

If a child discloses to adults an abusive situation that he/she is experiencing or that is happening to someone else, it is important for the adult to:

- believe the child, letting him/her know that it is not his/her fault
- not ask the child leading or probing questions
- not make promises that cannot be kept. Instead, the adult should tell the child that it will be necessary to talk to other people, whose job it is to help children
- comfort the child, reassuring him/her that it was right to tell

Conditions that may be mistaken for abuse and neglect

Some children appear to have symptoms that may be mistakenly identified as indicators of abuse and neglect. It is important for employees to minimise the likelihood of such mistakes occurring and this can be achieved by:

- discussing with families all relevant details about their children
- recording these on either the children's enrolment forms or their developmental records.

This communication should begin at the time of enrolment or the creation of the childcare booking or Crèche, and be maintained on an ongoing basis throughout the children's attendance.

Typical information to be included would be children's medical histories, any existing medical conditions, allergies, distinguishing birthmarks and behaviours.

Cultural Diversity and Child Protection

Employees need to be sensitive to culturally diverse child rearing practices. If, however, there are child protection issues of concern relating to particular families, culture alone should not be the reason for deviating from the established procedure for reporting those concerns.

Knowledge of the cultural context in which the action or inaction occurred, is vital in determining a response that is of optimal benefit to individual children.

Nextt Employee Recruitment for Roles (per the Policy Scope)

Employees are professionally screened and personally selected for all child services roles. All applicants are interviewed and reference-checked as part of the registration process.

All applicants are required to meet the relevant 'Working with Children' legislation in each state and territory before being registered as employees. The type of check and the outcome are recorded in the Nextt database, along with the expiry dates where applicable.

Training

Nextt is not a training organisation. We recruit applicants with current training, qualifications and certification. Nextt supports skill development and where possible and practical, training is undertaken in-house by Company personnel or externally accredited trainers/training firms.

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REPORTS

Mandatory Reporting Guide

To help reporters decide whether a case needs to be reported to the Child Protection Helpline and other state authorities, staff can access advice via

- NSW -Mandatory Reporter Guide
www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au
- SA- Reporting Child abuse and Neglect
[Report child abuse or neglect | Department for Child Protection](#)
- Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme
<https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/reportable-conduct-scheme>
- QLD - Mandatory Reporting Page
<https://www.qld.gov.au/community/getting-support-health-social-issue/support-victims-abuse/child-abuse/reporting-child-abuse>

It is advisable to have all documentation available at the time of making the call. It is important to report facts only not opinions or assumptions.

The Child Protection Helpline will tell mandatory reporters whether the report they have made meets the threshold of significant harm or not.

Mandatory Reporters

Mandatory reporters are those who deliver the following services to children as part of their paid or professional work:

- Healthcare (e.g. doctors, nurses, dentists and other health workers)
- Welfare (e.g. psychologists, social workers and youth workers)
- Education (e.g. teachers)
- Children's services (e.g. child care workers, family day carers and home based carers)
- law enforcement (e.g. police)

Any person with direct responsibility to provide the above mentioned services must report risk of significant harm to children. Managers – including both paid employees and volunteers – who supervise direct services are also mandated to report.

Safeguards for Reporters

Reports made to relevant state authorities are confidential and the law generally protects the reporter's identity. However, law enforcement agencies have the ability to access the identity of the reporter if this is needed in connection with the investigation of a serious offence against a child or young person.

Notification of Abuse

Child Protection Helpline – 133 627 NSW

Child Abuse Report Line - 131 478 SA

Child Protection Crisis Line – 131278 VIC

Child Safety Services – QLD (through a QLD Regional Intake Service or Child Safety Service Centre or the QLD Child Safety Services After-Hours number) 07 3235 9999

Any employee who has reasonable grounds to suspect a child or young person is at risk of *significant harm* and has current concerns about the safety, welfare or wellbeing of the child should immediately discuss reporting the matter to the relevant authorities, with their respective Managers such as:

- Lizard Centre management before making a report to the Child Protection Helpline.
- Nextt Manager before making a report to the Child Protection Helpline.

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What is significant harm?

A child or young person is at risk of significant harm if the circumstances that are causing concern for the safety, welfare or well-being of the child or young person are present to a significant extent. Significant is not minor or trivial and may reasonably be expected to produce a substantial adverse impact on the child or young person's safety, welfare or wellbeing.

RECORDS

The child protection helpline may request the following information;

Child's Information

- Name, age and date of birth of the child
- Cultural background of the child, language spoken, religion
- Name, age of other household children or young people
- Address of child and family
- If the child has a disability – nature/type, severity, impact on functioning
- Is the child subject of an Apprehended Violence Order?

Family Information

- Name, age of parents/carer and household adults
- Phone number
- Cultural background of parents, languages spoken, religion
- Information about parental risk factors and how they link to child's risk of harm
- Domestic violence
- Alcohol or other drug misuse
- Unmanaged mental health
- Intellectual or other disability
- Protective factors and family strengths
- Any previous suspicious death of a child or young person in the household?
- Is the carer/parent pregnant?
- Is the parent/carer subject of an Apprehended Violence order?
- Description of the family structure
- Name, age, gender of siblings. Do siblings live with the child or young person?

Reporters Details

- Position
- Name, Service name, address, phone and email details
- Reasons for reporting today
- Nature of contact with child or family
- Nature of ongoing role with child or family
- If report is being made by someone else in the agency, name of employee who sourced the report

Other Information

- If parent knows of the report and their response
- If child or young person knows about the report and their views
- Information related to worker safety issues