

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Summary

This policy outlines the commitment of Family Support (SC) Inc to child protection. It includes our protocols when child abuse is reported to us and suspected by us. It also includes practice notes on measures to be taken to prevent child abuse. All staff of Family Support (SC) Inc are expected to be familiar with this policy and abide by it.

Purpose

Family Support (SC) Inc has an obligation to ensure the wellbeing of children in our care and are committed to the prevention of child abuse and neglect and to the protection of all children. The safety and wellbeing of the child is our top priority when investigating suspected or alleged abuse.

We support the New Zealand Police (the Police) and The Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki in the investigation of suspected abuse and will report suspected/alleged abuse to these agencies. We support families/whanau to protect their children and we provide a safe environment, free from physical, emotional, verbal or sexual abuse.

Scope

This policy applies to all staff of Family Support (SC) Inc, including contractors and volunteers.

Principles

Family Support (SC) Inc is committed to the following principles:

- The interest and protection of the child is paramount in all actions
- We recognise the rights of family/whanau to participate in decision-making about their children
- We have a commitment to ensure that all staff are able to identify the signs and symptoms of potential abuse and neglect and are able to take appropriate action in response.
- We are committed to supporting all staff to work in accordance with this policy, to work with partner agencies and organisations to ensure child protection policies are consistent and high quality.
- We will always comply with relevant legislative responsibilities.
- We are committed to share information in a timely way and to discuss any concerns about an individual child with the Manager of Family Support (SC) Inc.
- We are committed to promote a culture where staff feel confident that they can constructively challenge poor practice or raise concern without fear of reprisal.

Definitions

- **Abuse** – the harming (whether physically, emotionally or sexually), ill-treatment, neglect or deprivation of any child.

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- **Child** – any child or young person aged under 17 years and who is not married or in a civil union.
- **Child protection** – activities carried out to ensure that children are safe in cases where there is suspected abuse or neglect or are at risk of abuse or neglect.
- **Disclosure** – information given to a staff member by a child, parent or caregiver or a third party in relation to abuse or neglect.
- **The Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki** – the agency responsible for investigating and responding to suspected abuse and neglect and for providing care and protection to children found to be in need.
- **New Zealand Police** – the agency responsible for responding to situations where a child is in immediate danger and for working with The Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki in child protection work and investigating cases of abuse or neglect where an offence may have occurred.
- **Physical abuse** – any acts that may result in physical harm of a child or young person. It can be, but is not limited to: bruising, cutting, hitting, beating, biting, burning, causing abrasions, strangulation, suffocation, drowning, poisoning and fabricated or induced illness.
- **Sexual abuse** – any acts that involve forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not they are aware of what is happening. Sexual abuse can be, but is not limited to:
 - **Contact abuse:** touching breasts, genital/anal fondling, masturbation, oral sex, penetrative or non-penetrative contact with the anus or genitals, encouraging the child to perform such acts on the perpetrator or another, involvement of the child in activities for the purposes of pornography or prostitution.
 - **Non-contact abuse:** exhibitionism, voyeurism, exposure to pornographic or sexual imagery, inappropriate photography or depictions of sexual or suggestive behaviours or comments.
- **Emotional abuse** – any act or omission that results in adverse or impaired psychological, social, intellectual and emotional functioning or development. This can include:
 - Patterns of isolation, degradation, constant criticism or negative comparison to others. Isolating, corrupting, exploiting or terrorising a child can also be emotional abuse.
 - Exposure to family/whānau or intimate partner violence.
- **Neglect** – neglect is the most common form of abuse and although the effects may not be as obvious as physical abuse, it is just as serious. Neglect can be:
 - Physical (not providing the necessities of life like a warm place, food and clothing).
 - Emotional (not providing comfort, attention and love).

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Neglectful supervision (leaving children without someone safe looking after them).

Medical neglect (not taking care of health needs).

Educational neglect (allowing chronic truancy, failure to enrol in education or inattention to education needs)

Identifying possible abuse or neglect

Information on identifying possible abuse or neglect is detailed in “Working together to keep children and young people safe. An Interagency Guide” (The Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki. 2011(Working Together)).

This document should be read in conjunction with this policy.

In brief, staff need to be aware of the indicators of potential abuse and neglect. These indicators as noted in Working Together include:

Physical signs	Behavioural concerns
Developmental delays	The child talking about things that indicate abuse (sometimes called an allegation or disclosure)
Physical neglect	Neglectful supervision
Medical neglect	Abandonment

Every situation is different and it's important to consider all available information about the child and their environment before reaching conclusions. For example, behavioural concerns may be the result of life events, such as divorce, accidental injury or the arrival of a new sibling etc.

Responding to suspected abuse or neglect

Family Support (SC) Inc recognises that staff who have a concern about a child need to know how to respond if this concern is about a possible abuse or neglect. They need to know how to contact the statutory agencies (The Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki or the Police) to make a referral.

If the concern is more general, then the policies should provide advice on how to work with other services in the community to make sure the child and their families/whānau get the help they need.

Throughout New Zealand statutory and non-statutory agencies provide a network of mutually supportive services and it is important for our agency to work with these to respond to the needs of vulnerable children and families/whānau in a manner proportionate to the level of need and risk.

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Family Support (SC) Inc will always act on the recommendations of statutory agencies, including The Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki and the Police. We will only inform families/whānau about suspected or actual abuse after we have discussed this with these agencies.

When we respond to suspected child abuse or any concerning behaviour we write down our observations, impressions and communications in a confidential register. This is kept separate from our other records and access will be strictly controlled by the Manager. Staff involved in cases of suspected child abuse are entitled to have support.

A referral to The Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki may be made at any time. It is mandatory for all concerns to be reported/referred to the Manager within a time period which allows for effective consultation/advice to be given.

Where appropriate, the person making the allegation will be given a copy of this policy.

Responding to a child when the child discloses abuse:

Listen to the child	Disclosures by children are often subtle and need to be handled with particular care, including an awareness of the child's cultural identity and how that affects interpretation of their behaviour and language.
Reassure the child	Let the child know that they: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are not in trouble.• Have done the right thing.
Ask open- ended prompts – e.g., "What happened next?"	Do not interview the child (in other words, do not ask questions beyond open prompts). Do not make promises that can't be kept, e.g., "I will keep you safe now".
If the child is visibly distressed	Provide appropriate reassurance and re-engage in appropriate activities under supervision until they are able to participate in ordinary activities.
If the child is not in immediate danger	Re-involve the child in ordinary activities and explain what you are going to do next.
If the child is in immediate danger	Contact the Police immediately.
As soon as possible formally record the disclosure	Record: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Word for word, what the child said.• The date, time and who was present. .

Recording and notifying The Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki of suspected child abuse or neglect:

What process to follow	For example	Key considerations
Recording	Formally record: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anything said by the child. • The date, time, location and the names of any staff that may be relevant. • The factual concerns or observations that have led to the suspicion of abuse or neglect (e.g., any physical, behavioural or developmental concerns). • The action taken by your organisation. • Any other information that may be relevant. 	Relevant information can inform any future actions.
Decision- making	Discuss any concern with the Manager	No decisions should be made in isolation.
Notifying authorities	Notify The Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki promptly if there is a belief that a child has been, or is likely to be abused or neglected. A phone call to the National Contact Centre is the preferred initial contact with The Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki (see below) as this enables both parties to discuss the nature of the concerns and appropriate response options. Phone: 0508 Family (0508 326 459) Fax: 09 914 1211 Email: cyfcallcentre@cyf.govt.nz	The Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make the decision to inform the parents or caregivers, in consultation with our organisation. Advise what, if any, immediate action may be appropriate, including referring the concern to the Police.
Following the advice of The Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki	The Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki advice will include what, if any, immediate action may be	The Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki is responsible for looking into the situation to find out what may

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	appropriate, including referring the concern to the Police.	be happening, whether our organisation needs to work with the family/whānau or put them in touch with people in their community who can help.
Storing relevant information	<p>Securely store:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The record of the concern. • A record of any related discussions (including copies of correspondence, where appropriate). • A record of any advice received • The action your organisation took, including any rationale. • This concern with any earlier concerns, if the notification is based on an accumulation of concerns (rather than a specific incident). 	Records assist in identifying patterns.

Allegations or concerns about staff

All matters involving allegations against staff need to be brought to the attention of the Manager.

To ensure the child is kept safe, the Manager may take steps to remove the staff member against whom an allegation has been made from the environment, subject to the requirements of the applicable individual or collective employment contract and relevant employment law.

The Manager will consult with The Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki and/or the Police before taking any further actions.

Family Support (SC) Inc commits not to use 'settlement agreements', where these are contrary to a culture of child protection. Some settlement agreements allow a member of staff to agree to resign provided that no disciplinary action is taken, and a future reference is agreed. Where the conduct at issue concerns the safety or wellbeing of a child, use of such agreements is contrary to a culture of child protection.

Confidentiality and information sharing

All observations, after an investigation has been notified, shall be kept in writing but the file will be sealed for confidential reasons. The Privacy Act 1993 and the Children, Young Persons, and their

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Families Act 1989 allow information to be shared to keep children safe when abuse or suspected abuse is reported or investigated. Note that under sections 15 and 16 of the CYPF Act, any person who believes that a child has been, or is likely to be harmed physically, emotionally or sexually or ill-treated, abused, neglected or deprived may report the matter to The Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki or the Police and, provided the report is made in good faith, no civil, criminal or disciplinary proceedings may be brought against them.

Recruitment and employment (safety checking)

Safety checking will be carried out in accordance with the Vulnerable Children Act 2014. This will include: a police vet; identity verification; references and an interview. A work history will be sought and previous employers will be contacted. If there is any suspicion that an applicant might pose a risk to a child, that applicant will not be employed.

Training, supervision and support

Training, resources and/or advice will be available to ensure that all staff can carry out their roles in terms of this policy, particularly:

- Understanding child abuse and indicators of child abuse.
- How to reduce the risk of child abuse.
- Understanding and complying with legal obligations in regard to child abuse.
- Working with outside agencies on child abuse issues.
- Planning of environment and supervision to minimise risk.
- Dealing with child/parents/family/whānau.

This policy will be part of the initial staff induction programme.

Related documentation and review

Relevant Legislation

- Vulnerable Children Act 2014
- Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act, 1989
- Care of Children Act 2004
- Domestic Violence Act 1995
- Privacy Act 1993
- Victims' Rights Act 2002
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC)
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