



Child Protection (ACT)

Policy;

To provide and maintain a safe environment is the main consideration in all Stepping Stones Child Care Centre activities and management practices. It is the aim that the Centre takes a preventive stance on Child Protection issues, by developing and maintaining an open and aware culture that is dynamic in its processes and encourages active participation from all Educators and Staff at Stepping Stones Child Care Centre.

It is important for individuals to feel that voicing a concern is not viewed as an accusation and that Educators, Staff and others have confidence that their concerns will be dealt with professionally and in a timely manner.

Background:

This Policy is based on the *Children and Young Peoples Act (2008)*, as well as information provided by Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (DHCS) and Office for Children Youth and Family Support (OCYFS).

Definitions of Child Abuse: (Child: person under the age of 12 years old Young person 12 up until 18 years old)

Physical abuse: is any non-accidental injury or serious harm inflicted upon a child or young person by any person who is in a position of power over that child.

Sexual abuse: occurs when anyone uses their power or authority to take advantage of a child or young person's trust or uses fear to involve that child in activity for the sexual gratification of the abuser.

Neglect: is failure to provide an adequate standard of nutrition, shelter, clothing, hygiene or medical care. It also includes inadequate supervision, which may result in exposure to dangerous or life threatening situations.

Emotional: is a chronic attack on a child or young person's self esteem. It can take the form of name-calling, threatening, ridiculing, intimidating or isolating the child or young person. It also incorporates the impact of domestic violence on children and young people which impacts on their development and wellbeing.

(Appendix 1 – definitions, abusive behaviours and child behaviour indicators. Appendix 1 is available from the Centre, please ask the Centre Director if you wish to see a copy).

MANDATORY REPORTING

What is Mandatory Reporting?

The legal requirement to report a reasonable belief that a child or young person is experiencing or has experienced non accidental physical injury or sexual abuse

(NCPC/resource sheet/ Aug 2010)



Who is mandated to notify?

Subsection 356(2) of the *Children and Young Peoples Act 2008 (ACT)* has a list of people that are mandated reporters. Paragraph 356(2)(j) provides that a person caring for a child at a childcare centre is a mandated reporter. Under s356 of the Act it is an offence for a mandated reporter not to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect.

You do not have to be able to prove the abuse has occurred. It is your legal responsibility to report what you believe has occurred from evidence presented.

A mandated reporter is not legally required to report emotional abuse or neglect but is encouraged to do so as a voluntary reporter if they believe or suspect that a child or young person is being abused or neglected or is at risk of abuse or neglect.

Procedure;

It is very important to report concerns about child abuse and neglect in a timely manner. Stepping Stones Educators, Staff and Management must comply with the following procedure to ensure Mandated Reporting requirements are met.

If Child Abuse (any form) is suspected;

1. Discuss with Stepping Stones Child Care Centre Director and Company Management to decide severity and next step taken:
 - a) The Centre Director shall notify Company Management of the suspected abuse.
 - b) The Centre Director or representative from Company Management shall contact Care and Protection Services via the Centralised Intake Service – Mandated Reporters line as soon as possible. (

Centralised Intake Service – Mandated Reporters, Telephone: 1300 556 728

(24 HRS 7 DAYS) Fax: 02) 6205 0641 | Email: childprotection@act.gov.au

- c) The Centre Director and Company Management will comply and follow the directions given by Care and Protection Services eg whether to contact the parents/legal guardians or not, gather evidence, may include taking photos and any other requirements.
- d) The Centre Director, Educators and staff are to collate accurate documentation of events
- e) A representative from Company Management will notify a Children's Services Licensing Advisor of the reported suspected child abuse

If in the event a parent or legal guardian is suspected of perpetrating abuse, the Centre will contact Care and Protection Services as soon as possible. This is to allow Care and Protection Services the opportunity to investigate appropriately.

If in the event an Educator, Staff member or any other Company Employee is suspected of perpetrating abuse, the Centre will contact Care and Protection Services as soon as possible. This is to allow Care and Protection Services the opportunity to investigate appropriately.



2. Relevant staff need to be **debriefed** by the Centre Director.
3. **Counselling** is to be provided to relevant Educators and staff members, to facilitate them on how to deal with the issues appropriately and professionally, as well as giving Educators help to care for an affected child/children.
4. Educators and Staff, as part of their regular Professional Development, **education / in-service** program will cover Child Protection issues. This will take the form of videos, small workshops, handouts, and if possible guest speakers.
5. Regular **risk assessment** will be carried out in the centre to help strengthen and add value to the activities and services offered, by evaluating whether:
 - There are other activities we could be offering.
 - Current activities and services are organised and conducted in the most productive way.
 - Methods and skills we are currently using can be improved.
 - We are engaged in the activities best suited to our objectives.

Main areas of risk that should be examined when identifying child sexual abuse risk factors:

Staff and volunteers	Potential to recruit a child sex offender
Policy and Procedures	Policies and procedures can either support or limit opportunities for child sexual abuse
Place	The physical layout for or location of an activity or service setting, can hide or expose abuse.
Activities and Programs	Particular activities, such as those in isolated environments or in peoples homes, increase the opportunities for child sex offending.
Training and Information	Management, staff and volunteers, children and other participants awareness or lack of awareness and training of child abuse, policies and procedures can hide or expose child sexual abuse.
Organisational Culture	Whether the culture of the organisation is open or closed, aware or unaware, participatory undemocratic. Child sexual abuse thrives in cultures secrecy and denial.



Source:

- Department of Housing and Community Services (dhcs) ACT / Keeping Children and Young People Safe, a shared community responsibility / A guide to reporting child abuse and neglect in the ACT http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0017/5660/Web_copy2009_Keeping_Children.pdf
- NCPC (National Child Protection Clearinghouse) / resource sheet / August 2010 / Daryl Higgins, Leah Bromfield, Nick Richardson, Prue Holzer & Claire Berlyn <http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/sheets/rs3/rs3.pdf>

This policy links to the following CCQA Principles:

Quality Practices Guide (2005) - Principle 5.1

This policy and procedure links to the National Quality Standard: 2.3.4 Action is taken to respond to every child at risk of abuse and/or neglect.

Developed: April 2007

Last Reviewed: 28th June 2011

To be Reviewed: June 2012.

Reviewed in consultation with Children's Services (ACT) & Educators, current at April 2010.