



# What to do... when you are concerned a child is being abused or neglected

## Protecting children is everyone's business

Children and young people rely on responsible adults to help keep them safe. If a child talks to you about worries or feeling unsafe:

- Focus on the best interests of the child or young person.
- Listen carefully to what they say.
- Write down the information.

If your agency has child protection guidelines, refer to them.

### Ask yourself:

- Is the child showing behaviours or saying things that might suggest abuse or neglect?
- Has new information increased your concerns about the child?
- Do you continue to worry after the child has visited your service?
- Do you feel you need to 'do something' to help the child?

## Abuse and neglect

Consider the following to understand how a child might experience abuse and neglect:

### Physical abuse

When a child has been severely hurt or injured. This can be from excessive physical punishment, beating, shaking babies, giving alcohol and drugs, strangling, scalding/burning, punching, leaving a child alone in a car.

### Sexual abuse

When a child has been touched or involved in sexual activities not appropriate to the child's age and development. This can be from sexual penetration, inappropriate touching, seeing sexual acts or being exposed to pornographic materials.

### Neglect

When a child has not been provided enough care or supervision which has resulted in the child being injured or their development affected. This can be from lack of food, shelter or affection, a lack of adult supervision, untreated medical problems and abandonment.

### Emotional abuse

When a child has been repeatedly treated in ways that damages their ability to feel and express a range of emotions and/or being repeatedly treated in ways that damages their self-esteem, personal development, and intellectual development. This can be from verbal abuse, rejection, threatening words or behaviours, bullying and teasing. This can also be from belittling, being made to feel worthless, unloved, "dumb" etc.

The term 'emotional abuse' includes psychological abuse (the sustained, repetitive, inappropriate, ill-treatment of a child or young person through behaviours including threatening, isolating, neglecting, discrediting, misleading, disregarding, ignoring and inappropriate encouragement) and exposure to family and domestic violence, which causes serious emotional, psychological and physical harm to children, as well as placing them at increased likelihood of abuse and neglect.

## What to do when...

You are worried but there is nothing specific to report:

- Try to stay in touch with the family.
- Talk to them about services that can help families.
- Encourage their involvement in parenting activities.
- Link them with community groups from similar cultural or religious backgrounds.
- Link the family with day care or play activities.
- Talk with someone experienced in supporting families or in child protection (a colleague, or worker in another agency).

You can describe the abuse or neglect, or the risk. Contact:

- the Department of Communities or Crisis Care if outside business hours
- Police if you are concerned about the child's immediate safety or if criminal acts have occurred.

A child tells you they have been abused:

- Believe them.
- Thank them for telling you.
- Let the child know that:
  - It's not their fault.
  - Telling you is the right thing to do.
  - You will need to tell the authorities to stop the abuse.
- Let them use their own words. You may need to ask open questions (what? when? who? etc) to work out if they need immediate protection. Avoid asking questions that may lead or influence their response or that provide more details than you need.
- Do not make promises to the child that you may not be able to keep.
- Contact the Department of Communities.
- Only discuss the child's situation with people dealing with this matter.

## Referring to the Department of Communities

An officer will discuss your concerns and ask about:

- The child's details.
- Why you believe the child has been abused or neglected, or is at risk.
- The child's **immediate** risk.
- The person suspected of causing the harm.
- Your ongoing contact with the child.

The Department will make decisions about the kind of action that needs to be taken.

## Contacts and resources

### Department of Communities

Call the Central Intake Team on 1800 273 889 or email [cpduty@communities.wa.gov.au](mailto:cpduty@communities.wa.gov.au)

### Crisis Care – 24 hour telephone service

(08) 9223 1111 or free call 1800 199 008

### Western Australia Police

131 444 or 000 (emergencies only)

### Kids Helpline

1800 55 1800