

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY
COMMUNITY CHILDREN'S CENTRE

PROTOCOL ON MANDATORY REPORTING

Introduction

The Victorian Government has reviewed the Children and Young Persons Act, 1989. The purpose for mandating the reporting of physical and sexual abuse is due to the lasting consequences for the emotional well-being of the children concerned. Research indicates that early detection lessens the long-term effects of the abuse.

Mandatory reporting legislation clarifies the action of professionals who suspect a child is being sexually or physically abused.

The following groups will be mandated, in a stage process, as they have high levels of contact with children therefore are most likely to become aware of child abuse:

- . medical practitioners (including psychiatrists) and nurses;
- . pre-school, primary and secondary teachers and principals;
- . social workers, youth workers and welfare workers;
- . persons working as Youth and Child Care Officers for the Department of Health and Community Services;
- . registered psychologists;
- . police officers, parole officers and probation officers

Whilst staff in this Centre are not mandated under the Act to report child abuse the La Trobe University Community Children's Centre does have a duty of care to report to Child Protection Victoria, if there are reasonable grounds, any child attending the service of being physically or sexually abused. The following information outlines what is deemed as 'reasonable grounds' under the Act, and the protocol that staff must follow when abuse of a child in their care is suspected.

CHILD ABUSE

'Child abuse is an act by parents or caregivers which endangers a child or young person's physical or emotional health or development. **Child abuse is not usually a single incident, but takes place over time.**

In Victoria a child or young person is a person under seventeen years of age.'

(Protective Services Branch, May '93).

CAUSES OF CHILD ABUSE

There is not any single factor which causes child abuse; abuse usually occurs in families where there is a combination of risk factors. Most abuse, **other than sexual**, occurs in families to which some, or all, of the following apply:

- . poverty;
- . lack of education;
- . serious marital problems;
- . frequent changes of address;
- . violence between family members;
- . lack of support from the extended family;
- . loneliness and social isolation;
- . unemployment; and
- . inadequate housing.

The abuser, may in some cases, display the following:

- . very high expectations of the child and what the child should achieve;
- . the parent may have been abused as a child;
- . a lack of knowledge and skills in bringing up children;
- . low self-esteem and self-confidence;
- . depression;
- . alcohol or drug abuse;
- . mental or physical ill health; and/or
- . work pressures

HOW TO RECOGNISE CHILD ABUSE

Behavioural or physical signs, which assist in recognising child abuse, are known as indicators. **The presence of a single indicator does not prove that a child has been abused.** The repeated occurrence of one indicator or the presence of several indicators raises the possibility that a child maybe experiencing abuse.

A child's behaviour is likely to be affected if he/she is under stress. There can be many causes of stress, including child abuse, and it is important to find out specifically what is causing the stress.

Physical Abuse

Physical indicators include:

- . bruises, burns, sprains, dislocations, bites, cuts;
- . fractured bones, especially in an infant where a fracture is unlikely to occur accidentally;
- . poisoning; and
- . internal injuries.

Possible behavioural indicators include:

- . showing wariness or distrust of adults;
- . wearing long sleeved clothes on hot days (to hide bruising or other injuries);
- . demonstrating fear of parents and of going home;
- . becoming fearful when other children cry or shout;
- . being excessively friendly to strangers; and
- . being very passive and compliant.

Sexual Abuse

Physical Indicators:

Sexual abuse is not usually identified through physical indicators. Often the first sign is when a child tells someone they trust that they have been sexually abused. However, the presence of sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, or vaginal or anal bleeding or discharge may indicate sexual abuse.

Possible behavioural indicators:

- . child telling someone that sexual abuse has occurred;
- . complaining of headaches or stomach pains;
- . experiencing problems with school work;
- . displaying sexual behaviour or knowledge which is unusual for the child's age;
- . experiencing difficulties in sleeping;
- . showing behaviour such as frequent rocking, sucking and biting; and
- . having difficulties in relating to adults and peers.

PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING CHILD ABUSE AT LA TROBE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY CHILDREN'S CENTRE

The procedures have been prepared to give primary contact personnel clear guidelines for the reporting of suspected child abuse. In addition - given the seriousness of child abuse allegations - the procedures attempt to ensure that reasonable grounds are established before a report of suspected child abuse is made to Child Protection Victoria. It is strongly recommended that all primary contact personnel observe the stated procedures.

The Centre's Staff Development Team meets on a fortnightly basis and discusses as part of the agenda, the Act and associated issues/clarifications in regard to Child Protection.

All Staff must ensure, in keeping with La Trobe University Community Children's Centre policy, child/family respect and confidentiality is maintained at all times.

Children's Services Officers, Assistant Trained/Untrained and other personnel:

- a) If you are presented with any of the above-mentioned indicators it is to be referred directly to the person in-charge or supervisor of your section (Children's Services Officer Level 3 and above).
- b) If you have concerns or issues relating to individual clients and/or this subject, discuss them with the person in-charge or supervisor of your section.

Children's Services Officers, Qualified – Diploma and above:

- a) If presented with, or attention has been drawn to a client with any of the above-mentioned indicators, the following steps are to be undertaken:
 - i) Date, time and description of indicator is to be placed on child's file. File is to be checked for any other reports of indicators.
 - ii) The Manager is to be informed, at which time she will request the child's file.

The Manager

- a) The Manager will check the child's file for any other reports or indicators.
- b) The Manager will discuss with the Children's Services Officer, Qualified - Diploma and above, the written observations maintained on the child.
- c) The Manager will determine from the above two procedures whether to:
 - i) continue to observe the child for a further period (determined by the Manager and Children's Services Officer, Qualified - Diploma); or
 - ii) report the matter to Northern Metropolitan Child Protection Unit.

When reporting an incident of child abuse based on **reasonable grounds**, the Manager must undertake the following procedures:

- i) Contact will be made with the nearest Health & Community Services Office (H&CS) and speak with a protective worker (Northern Metropolitan Child Protection Unit).
- ii) The following details will be provided at the time of making a report:
 - . the child's name, age, address and present location;
 - . the reasons for the report (as factual and specific as possible);
 - . the names of professionals or agencies known to be involved with the family;
 - . the best time to find the family at home; and
 - . whether the family know a report is being made.
- iii) Seek assistance/advice from the Child Protection Unit on client support/management.
- iv) Licensee informed of report.

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Children and Young Persons Act, 2005

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