

**REPORTING CHILD SAFETY CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY**

In order for CHIPS to comply with the Failure to Disclose, Failure to Protect and Mandatory Reporting legislation, we require anyone involved with our programs to report any concerns or complaints they have about child safety. Please refer to the table below for CHIPS' reporting process summary. Anyone may contact the police, DHHS Child Protection or Child First at any time if they believe on reasonable grounds, that a child is in need of protection.

<b>Who can report?</b>	<b>Anyone – including parents, children, schools, volunteers or staff</b>
<b>What to report?</b>	<b>Any child safety concerns, including:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ disclosure of abuse or harm</li> <li>▪ allegation, suspicion or observation of abuse or harm</li> <li>▪ any breach of the Code of Conduct</li> <li>▪ equipment, activity and environmental safety issues</li> </ul>
	<b>Call 000 if a child is in immediate danger</b>
<b>How?</b>	<b>A face-to-face verbal report, letter, email, phone call or meeting</b>
<b>Who to?</b>	<b>The CHIPS Child Safety Officer Cathy Wieckmann or any CHIPS leader</b>
<b>What happens next? (*this is a summary, please refer to the details in the following pages)</b>	<p><b>The person informed will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ offer support to the child (*don't ask leading questions)</li> <li>▪ make notes about what was reported or observed</li> <li>▪ inform the CHIPS Child Safety Officer or event co-ordinator</li> <li>▪ if they are unable to inform the relevant CHIPS person, or if they feel that the concern has not been addressed appropriately, follow the making a report process below</li> </ul> <p><b>The CHIPS Child Safety Officer or event co-ordinator will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ initiate internal processes to ensure the safety of the child, clarify the nature of the complaint, and commence disciplinary processes if required</li> <li>▪ offer further support to the child, the parents, the person who reported and the accused person</li> <li>▪ decide, in accordance with legal requirements and duty of care, whether the matter should or must be reported to the police or Child Protection and make a report as soon as possible if required</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Investigation occurs; Outcome decided; Relevant staff, volunteers, school, parents and children are notified of the investigation outcome; Policies and procedures are updated where necessary</b>

The CHIPS Child Safety Officer will also review all feedback surveys about CHIPS' programs, noting any child safety concerns or complaints, and address them as described in this document.

### **SUPPORTING THE CHILD AND THEIR FAMILY**

If a child tells you they have been harmed or abused, it is very important to validate what they have told you, no matter how you feel about it. This means listening to the child, concealing any shock or distress you may have, taking them seriously and responding to and acting on the disclosure as described in the table above.

Key support steps when listening to a child include:

- Don't push them for more information or ask leading questions.
- Let the child talk about their concerns in their own time and in their own words. Give them your full attention.
- Be a supportive and reassuring listener. Comfort them if they are distressed.
- Tell them it is not their fault and that telling you was the right thing to do.
- Let them know that you will get some help and that you will need to let other people know. If the child does not want you to do this, explain that that it is very important.
- Praise them for helping CHIPS become safer for children.

Further support steps for the CHIPS Child Safety Officer only:

- Contact Child First for initial advice.
- Contact the child's parents to let them know (if the disclosure does not relate to abuse within the family).
- Assist the child and their family to access appropriate support for the child, such as counselling.

- Let the child and their family know about the steps CHIPS is taking, and any resulting action.

For concerns not relating to a child's disclosure, the child and their family may still require some of the support steps above.

### **RECORDING INFORMATION**

When making notes about the concern or complaint, include details about:

- when it arose or occurred,
- where it happened,
- where you were when told about it or you noticed it,
- who was present,
- what happened,
- what you saw or heard to cause concern,
- what was said to you about it,
- if it relates to a child's disclosure, record it using the child's words,
- any other conversations you have had about it since,
- your name and role at the time.

Once informed of the concern or complaint, the CHIPS Child Safety Officer will collate all the information available, keep a record of the action taken, of any internal investigations and of any reports made to statutory authorities or professional bodies.

All this information will be kept securely and confidentially in accordance with CHIPS Privacy Policy and the potential legal requirements if police or other investigators become involved. The person reporting the concern must also keep the information confidential.

### **MAKING A REPORT TO CHILD PROTECTION**

Please follow the DHHS Guide to Making a Report to Child Protection or Child FIRST at the end of this policy, found at:

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/guide-to-making-a-report-to-child-protection-or-child-first>

## INVESTIGATION PROCESS AND DISCIPLINARY ACTION

For concerns involving staff, volunteers and parents who attend CHIPS programs, please refer to our Recruitment and Disciplinary Policy, available on request to CHIPS.

For both concerns involving people who attend CHIPS programs, and concerns not involving people such as equipment, facilities, activities, program content and procedures:

- Review all the policies, procedures, risk assessments, and any other documents pertaining to the concern for both CHIPS and any other relevant organisations.
- Determine if any amendments are required.
- Implement the amendments and educate staff, volunteers, schools, parents and children about them.
- Request that everyone involved with CHIPS re-sign the Codes of Conduct and Child Safe Policy if necessary.

## REVIEWING THIS POLICY

This Reporting Child Safety Concerns and Complaints Policy was approved by the CHIPS Board on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2016. It is due to be reviewed in November 2018, and every two years.

# A step-by-step guide to making a report to Child Protection or Child FIRST

## Protective concerns

You are concerned about a child because you have:

- received a disclosure from a child about abuse or neglect
- observed indicators of abuse or neglect
- been made aware of possible harm via your involvement in the community external to your professional role.

## At all times remember to:

- record your observations
- follow appropriate protocols
- consult notes and records
- consult with appropriate colleagues if necessary
- consult with other support agencies if necessary

STEP 1	RESPONDING TO CONCERNS	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4
	<p>1. If your concerns relate to a child in need of immediate protection; or you have formed a belief that a child is at significant risk of harm*.</p> <p><b>Go to Step 4</b></p> <p>2. If you have significant concerns that a child and their family need a referral to Child FIRST for family services.</p> <p><b>Go to Step 3</b></p> <p>3. In all other situations</p> <p><b>Go to Step 2.</b></p> <p><small>* Refer to Appendix 2: Definitions of child abuse and indicators of harm in the Protocol – <i>Protecting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people</i></small></p>	<p>1. Consider the level of immediate danger to the child.</p> <p>Ask yourself:</p> <p>a) Have I formed a belief that the child has suffered or is at risk of suffering significant harm? <b>YES / NO</b> and</p> <p>b) Am I in doubt about the child's safety and the parent's ability to protect the child? <b>YES / NO</b></p> <p>2. If you answered yes to a) or b) <b>Go to Step 4</b></p> <p>3. If you have significant concerns that a child and their family need a referral to Child FIRST for family services. <b>Go to Step 3</b></p>	<p><b>Child Wellbeing Referral</b></p> <p>1. Contact your local Child FIRST provider.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See over for contact list for local Child FIRST phone numbers.</li> </ul> <p>2. Have notes ready with your observations and child and family details.</p>	<p><b>Mandatory/Protective Report*</b></p> <p>1. Contact your local Child Protection Intake provider immediately.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See over for contact list for local Child Protection phone numbers.</li> <li>• For <b>After Hours Child Protection</b> Emergency Services, call <b>131 278.</b></li> </ul> <p>2. Have notes ready with your observations and child and family details.</p> <p><small>* Non-mandated staff members who believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection are able to report their concerns to Child Protection</small></p>

For further information refer to *Protecting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people – A joint protocol of the Department of Human Services Child Protection, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Licensed Children's Services and Victorian Schools*