

## Child abuse - Child Protection Service

Child protection services provide support to help protect children and young people from harm caused by abuse or neglect within the family. Anyone can make a report to the Victorian Child Protection Service if they believe a child is in need of protection. Suspected abuse may be physical, emotional or sexual or may involve neglect.

The responsibility for making sure that children are safe is shared by the family, the general community, community agencies, and professionals working with children, police and government. Early identification and effective intervention can reduce the initial and long-term effects of child abuse and promote recovery of the children and families involved.

### The child protection system

There is a range of services in our community that aim to support families and protect children. These can be categorised into three levels:

- **Universal (primary) services** – these services are offered to everyone in the community. They include antenatal services (pregnancy counselling and advice), maternal and child health services and preschool education. These services aim to provide support and help to prevent abuse and neglect.
- **Secondary services** – these programs identify and reduce the personal and social stresses on parents that may lead to family breakdown or child abuse. Services include in-home family help, financial or family counselling, respite care and various parenting and self-help groups.
- **Tertiary (statutory) services** – these services are for children who are or may be at risk of significant harm and for whom intervention is needed for their ongoing safety. These services include the statutory Child Protection Service and Placement Service for children who are unable to live at home. Generally, where families are experiencing difficulties, it is more appropriate that less intrusive community-based professionals and agencies attempt to assist. Referral to the Child Protection Service occurs only where children and young people are at risk of significant harm.

### The role of the Child Protection Service

The Child Protection Service is part of the Victorian Department of Human Services. Child Protection provides child-centred, family-focused services to protect children and young people from significant harm resulting from abuse or neglect within the family.

It also aims to ensure that children and young people receive services to deal with the impact of abuse and neglect on their wellbeing and development.

The Child Protection Service:

- Receives reports from people who believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection
- Provides advice to people who report such concerns
- Investigates matters where it is believed that a child has been abused or is at risk of significant harm
- Refers children and families to services, which help to provide for the ongoing safety and wellbeing of the children
- Takes matters before the Children's Court if the child's safety cannot be assured within the family
- Supervises children on legal orders granted by the Children's Court.

## Legally mandated reporters

The *Children Youth and Families Act (2005)* Section 182(1) states that certain professionals must report to the Child Protection Service when, in the course of their work, they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical or sexual abuse.

These professions are:

- Primary school principals and teachers
- Secondary school principals and teachers
- Registered nurses
- Registered medical practitioners (doctors)
- Police.

## Voluntary (non-mandated) notification

Anyone can make a report to the Child Protection Service if they believe a child is in need of protection. Suspected abuse may be:

- Physical
- Emotional
- Sexual
- Neglect.

The person making the report is not expected to prove the abuse. The law also protects the identity of the person making the report. Making the decision to report can be a difficult decision. However where a child's parents appear unwilling or unable to care and protect them, some other responsible adult needs to ensure that the child's situation is assessed and the necessary action is taken to protect them.

## Contacting the Child Protection Service

To make a report of child abuse, contact your regional Child Protection office as soon as possible. If you are making a report, please use the Intake Unit number. For all other enquiries, please contact the appropriate regional office. (See the **Where to get help** section below for a full listing of Child Protection Service contact numbers.)

Child Protection Intake Workers are skilled in assessing the risks to children. When you phone, they will talk with you about your concerns and ask a series of questions. The answers to these questions will assist them to gain a clear understanding of the situation and to make an assessment of what action may need to be taken.

## How the Child Protection Service responds to a report

After you have reported your concerns, the Child Protection Service will decide whether the child or young person is in a situation that falls within the legal definition of 'a child in need of protection'. If the report does not require Child Protection's further action, a child protection worker may speak with you about other options including referrals to other organisations that may assist the family. If the report requires further action, a decision will be made regarding the urgency of the situation. Where a case is assessed as urgent, contact with the family will occur within 48 hours. If a case is considered non-urgent, the investigative process may take up to 14 days. In cases where physical or sexual abuse has been alleged, the police will need to be involved in the investigation.

## Where to get help

### Child Protection Service – metropolitan regions

- **Eastern** – Intake Unit Tel. 1300 360 391, Box Hill Tel. (03) 9843 6000
- **North & West** – Intake Unit Tel. 1300 664 977, Footscray Tel. (03) 9275 7000
- **Southern** – Intake Unit Tel. 1300 655 795, Cheltenham Tel. (03) 8585 6000, Dandenong Tel. (03) 9213 2111, Frankston Tel. (03) 9784 3100

## Child Protection Service – rural regions

- **Gippsland** – Intake Unit Tel. 1800 020 202, Bairnsdale Tel. (03) 5150 4500, Leongatha Tel. (03) 5662 4311, Morwell Tel. (03) 5136 2400, Sale Tel. (03) 5144 9100, Warragul Tel. (03) 5624 0600
- **Grampians** – Intake Unit Tel. 1800 000 551, Ballarat Tel. (03) 5333 6530, Horsham Tel. (03) 5381 9777, Stawell Tel. (03) 5358 4374
- **Hume** – Intake Unit Tel. 1800 650 227, Benalla Tel. (03) 5761 1222, Seymour Tel. (03) 5793 6400, Shepparton Tel. (03) 5832 1500, Wangaratta Tel. (03) 5722 0555, Wodonga Tel. (02) 6055 7777
- **Loddon Mallee** – Intake Unit Tel. 1800 675 598, Bendigo Tel. (03) 5434 5555, Mildura Tel. (03) 5022 3111, Swan Hill Tel. (03) 5032 0100
- **Barwon-South West** – Intake Unit Tel. 1800 075 599, Geelong Tel. (03) 5226 4540, Portland Tel. (03) 5523 9999, Warrnambool Tel. (03) 5561 9444

## After-hours emergency service

- **Child Protection Crisis Line Tel. 131 278** – for emergency child protection matters outside of normal business hours.

## Things to remember

- The Child Protection Service provides services to protect and support children and young people from harm caused by abuse or neglect within the family.
- Community-based family support services may be able to assist families having difficulties.
- A report to Child Protection needs to occur when the risk to children is significant.
- Some professionals are legally obliged to report to the Child Protection Service if they encounter abuse in the course of their work.
- Anyone who is concerned about a child's welfare can voluntarily make a child abuse report to Child Protection or a referral to a family support agency.

## This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

DHS - Children Youth & Families

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