

# Child Protection Policy

Last Review: April 2017

Next Review: April 2019

## 1. Introduction and Purpose

ChangeAbility is committed to the prevention and early detection of abuse and/or neglect of children and young people. In all interaction with clients we will be guided by the principle that the safety, welfare and interests of the child or young person are the first and paramount consideration when investigating suspected or alleged abuse.

We support the roles of the New Zealand Police (the Police) and Child, Youth and Family in the investigation of suspected abuse and will report suspected/alleged abuse to these agencies.

We support families/whānau to protect their children.

We provide a safe environment, free from physical, emotional, verbal or sexual abuse.

## 2. Guidelines

ChangeAbility is also guided by the principle that the family/whānau have the primary role in caring for and protecting children and young people and unless this poses further risk to the child or young person, family and whānau will be involved in all decision making.

Where any form of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, or neglect, is suspected, immediate action will be taken to ensure the safety of the child or young person. In all cases, the matter will be referred to Child, Youth and Family for full investigation in accordance with the Child Abuse Reporting Protocol, as outlined in the following service provision procedures section.

## 3. Identifying child abuse and neglect

Our approach to identifying abuse or neglect is guided by the following principles:

- We understand that every situation is different and it's important to consider all available information about the child and their environment before reaching conclusions. For example, behavioural concerns may be the result of life events, such as divorce, accidental injury, the arrival of a new sibling etc.
- We understand when we are concerned a child is showing signs of potential abuse or neglect we should talk to someone, either a colleague, manager/supervisor – we shouldn't act alone.
- While there are different definitions of abuse, the important thing is for us to consider overall wellbeing and the risk of harm to the child. It is not so important to be able to categorise the type of abuse or neglect.
- It is normal for us to feel uncertain, however, the important thing is that we should be able to recognise when something is wrong, especially if we notice a pattern forming or several signs that make us concerned.
- Exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV) is a form of child abuse. There is a high rate of co-occurrence between IPV and the physical abuse of children.

## 4. We recognise the signs of potential abuse:

- **Physical signs** (e.g. looking rough and uncared for, dirty, without appropriate clothing, underweight, unexplained injuries, burns, fractures, unusual or excessive itching, genital injuries, sexually transmitted diseases).
- **Developmental delays** (e.g., small for their age, cognitive delays, falling behind in school, poor speech and social skills).
- **Emotional abuse/neglect** (e.g., sleep problems, low self-esteem, obsessive behaviour, inability to cope in social situations, sadness/loneliness and evidence of self-harm).
- Behavioural/Attachment concerns (e.g., age- inappropriate sexual interest or play, fear of a certain person or place, eating disorders/substance abuse, disengagement/neediness, aggression, trauma, grief).
- **Neglectful supervision** (e.g., out and about unsupervised, left alone, no safe home to return to).
- **Medical neglect** (e.g., persistent nappy rash or skin disorders or other untreated medical issues).
- **Allegations/Disclosures** (the child talking about things that indicate abuse (sometimes called an allegation or disclosure).

Every situation is different and staff will consider all available information about the child and their environment before reaching conclusions. For example, behavioural concerns may be the result of life events, such as divorce, accidental injury, the arrival of a new sibling etc.

ChangeAbility will always act on the recommendations of statutory agencies, including Child, Youth and Family and the Police. We will only inform families/whānau about suspected or actual abuse after we have discussed this with these agencies.

When we respond to suspected child abuse or any concerning behaviour we write down our observations, impressions and communications and attach this information to the ChangeAbility Risk Sheet.

## 5. Responding to suspected abuse or neglect

In all cases where a member of staff has a concern about a child or young person being or likely to be abused or neglected by an adult or another young person, they will report this to the manager or clinical leader to assist in the formulation of a plan to address the care and protection concerns.

A referral to Child, Youth and Family may be made at any time.

It is mandatory for all concerns to be reported/referred to the Child Protection Coordinator within a time period which allows for effective consultation/advice to be given.

Our organisation recognises that in some cases the involvement of statutory agencies would be inappropriate and potentially harmful to families/whānau. Throughout New Zealand statutory and non- statutory agencies provide a network of mutually supportive services and it is important for our organisation to work with these to respond to the needs of vulnerable children and families/whānau in a manner proportionate to the level of need and risk.

## 6. Allegations or concerns about staff

All matters involving allegations against staff need to be escalated to the management team of Governance Group.

To ensure the child is kept safe, management may take steps to remove the staff member against whom an allegation has been made from the environment, subject to the requirements of the applicable individual or collective employment contract and relevant employment law, including the Human Resources disciplinary procedures.

Management will consult with Child, Youth and Family and/or the Police before taking any further actions.

Our organisation commits not to use 'settlement agreements', where these are contrary to a culture of child protection. Some settlement agreements allow a member of staff to agree to resign provided that no disciplinary action is taken, and a future reference is agreed. Where the conduct at issue concern the safety or wellbeing of a child, use of such agreements is contrary to a culture of child protection.

## 7. Confidentiality and information sharing

All observations, after an investigation has been notified, shall be kept in writing but the file will be sealed for confidential reasons.

The Privacy Act 1993 and the Children, Young Persons, and their Families Act 1989 allow information to be shared to keep children safe when abuse or suspected abuse is reported or investigated. Note that under sections 15 and 16 of the CYPF Act, any person who believes that a child has been, or is likely to be harmed physically, emotionally or sexually or ill-treated, abused, neglected or deprived may report the matter to Child, Youth and Family or the Police and, provided the report is made in good faith, no civil, criminal or disciplinary proceedings may be brought against them.

## 8. Recruitment and employment (safety checking)

Our recruitment policy reflects a commitment to child protection by including comprehensive screening procedures. Safety checks will be carried out, as required by the Vulnerable Children Act 2014.