

What is Child Abuse?

An information sheet for the public.

DISABILITY, CHILD, YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES

What is Child Abuse?

Abuse or neglect includes sexual abuse and/or physical or emotional injury to the extent that the child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, harm detrimental to his/her well being or development. Neglect can take many forms and it is extremely damaging to children.

Why should I report my concerns?

Children and young people have the right to emotional and physical safety at all times.

Reporting an incident may also:

- uncover serious hidden abuse
- prevent serious injury or death through early intervention
- assist professionals by allowing them to tell families they are required by law to report
- understand the extent and nature of the problem

Who has responsibility to report?

- The *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997* (the Act) legally requires members of certain professions within the community to report concerns, or suspected abuse or neglect of children to Child Protection Services, or to a Gateway Service.
- For example, all employees within the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education are mandated to report their knowledge, belief or suspicion that a child has suffered, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect

What about members of the public?

- While mandated reporters have a legal responsibility to report, ***all adults*** in the community share a responsibility to report their concern. The Act states that:
“An adult who knows, or believes or suspects on reasonable grounds, that a child is suffering from, has suffered or is likely to suffer abuse or neglect has a responsibility to take steps to prevent the occurrence or further occurrence of the abuse or neglect.”

What are ‘reasonable grounds’ for suspecting abuse?

- A child tells you he/she has suffered non-accidental physical injury, neglect, sexual abuse, and/or severe emotional abuse.
- Someone else tells you that a child has been abused.
- Your own observations of the child’s physical condition or behaviours lead you to believe that the child has suffered non-accidental physical injury, sexual abuse or neglect.
- You have serious concerns about the well-being of the child (this could be physical, emotional or development issues).
- You have serious concerns about the health and well-being of an unborn child (ie: concerns relating to a pregnant woman).

If I am not sure, can I talk to someone in DHHS about it?

- If in doubt about whether or not to notify, telephone Child Protection and discuss the case anonymously with a worker. This should help you make the decision.
- You can also contact the Gateway Service to discuss your concerns.

What are the legal and ethical issues around reporting?

- You cannot be sued or have defamation charges made against you for reporting your concerns to Child Protection.
- As a notifier, your details are strictly confidential and cannot be disclosed to others, including the individual(s) / family you are concerned about. It is illegal for the child protection program to identify the notifier
- In fact you may well be legally obligated to report and may be held accountable if you fail to do so.
- If you are legally required to notify, this overrides any confidentiality requirements that may otherwise govern your behaviour in this regard (for more information on this see the information sheets on Mandatory Reporting and Information Sharing.)

How and where should I report?

You can now make a report to either a **Gateway Service** or **Child Protection Services**. Your notification will be accepted by whichever service you contact.

(1) GATEWAY SERVICES

Gateway Services are able to connect vulnerable children, young people and their families to the services they need to protect and promote their healthy development. A community-based Child Protection worker works in each of the Gateway Services and is able to act on notifications of neglect and abuse where appropriate.

Contact number for Gateway Services: 1800 171 233	
From 9am-5pm Monday – Friday, this number will divert you to your regional Gateway Services office.	
South West Gateway is run by Baptistcare	South East Gateway is run by Mission Australia
Northern Gateway is run by Baptistcare	North West Gateway is run by Mission Australia

More information about Gateway Services will be provided as it is available on the Department's website:

http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/future_communities/reform_implementation_unit.

(2) Child Protection Intake in DHHS

Child Protection Intake is the 'entry point' for the statutory child protection service in Tasmania. Staff receive enquiries and reports made during business hours Monday to Friday. Outside normal working hours, calls to Intake are automatically transferred to the Emergency After-hours Service for urgent child protection notifications or serious issues affecting children in care only.

Contact number for Child Protection: 1300 737 693
This Statewide number can be used 24 hrs a day to report concerns about children. However, outside of usual business hours (9-5) it should only be used to report emergencies or urgent concerns regarding risk of immediate harm.
Website: http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/service_information/information/making_a_notification_to_the_child_protection_advice_and_referral_service