



## The Meeting House Inc

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### Child Protection Policy

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**Aim:** The Meeting House Inc. has a commitment to providing quality care for the children entrusted to its care. The preschool endorses the principle that children have the right to adequate standards of care and maintenance and that staff are responsible for ensuring the safety, wellbeing and protection of children in our care. Children are to be treated by staff with utmost respect and understanding. We have a duty of care and responsibility to protect children from all types of abuse, and adhere to our legislative obligations at all times.

#### **Background Information:**

Child abuse can occur within all communities, regardless of culture, religion or socio-economic backgrounds. Staff who work with children are responsible for providing a safe and secure environment. Staff are in a position to monitor behavioural and emotional changes, physical injuries and the general well-being of a child. The supportive environment of a preschool and the relationships that staff develop with children may lead to a child making a disclosure about child abuse.

Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 outlines the roles and responsibilities of child care workers in relation to the prevention, protection and reporting procedures when a child is identified as being at risk of harm.

#### **Relevant Legislation:**

'Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998', 'Education and Care Services National Regulation, Children's (Education and Care Services) National Law, 'Children Legislation Amendment (Wood Inquiry Recommendations) Act 2009', Ombudsman Act 1974

#### **Resources:**

ECA Code of Ethics.

Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998

The Ombudsman's Act 1974

The Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998

Child Story Reporter <https://reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/>

**Note:** In this policy "staff" refers to staff employed by The Meeting House Inc. Kindergarten.

## **Definitions:**

**Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH)** refers to circumstances causing concern for the safety, welfare and wellbeing a child or young person present to a significant extent. This means it is sufficiently serious to warrant a response by a statutory authority irrespective of the family's consent.

What is significant is not minor or trivial, and may reasonably be expected to produce a substantial and demonstrably adverse impact on the child's or young person's safety, welfare, or wellbeing. In the case of an unborn child, what is significant is not minor or trivial and may reasonably be expected to produce a substantial and demonstrably adverse impact on the child.

Risk of significant harm to the Child Protection Helpline on **132 111** (available 24 hours/7 days a week).

**Reasonable grounds** refers to the need to have to be objective for suspecting that a child may be at risk of significant harm based on:

- First hand observation of the child or family
- What the child, parent or other person has disclosed
- What can reasonably be indirect based on observation, professional training and/or experience

**Mandatory Reporting** is the legislative requirement for selected classes of people to report suspected child abuse and neglect to government authorities. In NSW, mandatory reporting is regulated by the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (The Care Act).

## **Mandatory Reporters**

Mandatory reporters are people who deliver the following services, wholly or partly, to children as part of their paid or professional work:

- Health care (e.g. registered medical practitioners, specialists, general practice nurses, midwives, occupational therapists, speech therapists, psychologists, dentists and other allied health professionals working in sole practice or in public or private health practices)
- Welfare (e.g. psychologists, social workers, caseworkers and youth workers)
- Education (e.g. teachers, counsellors, principals)
- Children's services (e.g. child care workers, out of school hours services, family day carers and home-based carers)
- Residential services (E.g. refuge workers)
- Law enforcement (E.g. police)

All staff have a responsibility to recognise and respond to safety, welfare and wellbeing for children and young people and inform management. According to the *Children and Young Persons (Care and*

*Protection) Act 1998* mandatory reporters (including people employed in children's services and unpaid managers of these services) must make reports if they suspect on reasonable grounds a child is at risk of significant harm because of:

- Physical abuse
- Neglect
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Psychological abuse
- Domestic violence

## **ChildStory Reporter**

Mandatory reporters in NSW should use the Mandatory Reporter Guide (MRG) if they have concerns that a child or young person is at risk of being neglected or physically, sexually or emotionally abused. The MRG assists in providing mandatory reporters with the most appropriate reporting decision. It is not designed to determine whether the matter constitutes risk of significant harm (ROSH). This is done at the Child Protection Helpline through the **Screening and Response Priority (SCRPT)** tool.

The MRG supports mandatory reporters to:

- Determine whether a report to the Child Protection Helpline is needed for concerns about possible abuse or neglect of a child (including unborn) or young person.
- Identify alternative ways to support vulnerable children, young people and their families where a mandatory reporter's response is better served outside the statutory child protection system.
- It is recommended that mandatory reporters complete the MRG on each occasion they have risk concerns, regardless of their level of experience or expertise. Each circumstance is different and every child and young person is unique.
- Helpline caseworkers will make determinations on reports received from mandatory reporters using SCRPT in conjunction with additional information, which may not be available to mandatory reporters.

For more information on ChildStory Reporter, refer to: <https://reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/>

## **Practices:**

To ensure best practice, all staff will attend approved Child protection training. Staff will continue to keep up to date, by completing Child Protection Awareness Training annually, ensuring they keep up to date with their current responsibilities as Mandatory Reporters. Staff will be asked to attend refresher courses or in service workshops, conducted by the Nominated Supervisor, as required.

The Nominated Supervisor and responsible person in day-to-day charge of the preschool must have successfully completed a course in child protection approved by the Regulatory Authority.

All staff are to be aware of the indicators of abuse and neglect of children and young people.

To validate a Working with Children Check for all staff and volunteers unless the person meets the criteria for exemption from a WWCC. See exemption factsheet at <http://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-organisations/working-with-children-check/apply>

All staff are mandatory reporters. It can be a difficult and emotional process to make a report. It is therefore recommended that staff discuss their concerns with the Director/Senior Co-ordinator to ensure that they are provided with support during the reporting process. However, staff are bound by this Law, and staff must not delegate this responsibility to the Director/Senior Co-ordinator. The Director/Senior Co-ordinator of the Centre is to help support the staff through this process and should not discourage or forbid a staff member from making a report. Staff may request a counselling session if any incident has caused them any concern.

The Director/Senior Co-ordinator is required to notify The Meeting House Inc.'s Committee of any current concerns or notifications made.

The regulatory authority (within 7 days) of any incident, will be notified, where you reasonably believe that physical and/or sexual abuse of a child has occurred or is occurring while the child is being educated and cared for by the preschool.

The regulatory authority (within 7 days) of any allegation, will be notified, that sexual or physical abuse of a child has occurred or is occurring while the child is being educated and cared for by preschool.

### **Responding to a disclosure**

Children do not often disclose abuse or neglect the first time something happens. They may experience a sense of helplessness and hopelessness and may take weeks or years before making their abuse known.

You should respond to a disclosure

- By being calm and listening carefully and non-judgmentally.
- Let the child tell their story freely and in their own way.
- Not promise to keep a secret
- Acknowledge how difficult it may have been to disclose and reassure the child or young person that it was the right thing to do in revealing the information but that they'll need to tell someone who can help keep the child safe.
- Ask only questions to confirm the need to report the matter and not probing questions that could cause distress, confusion or interfere with any later enquiries.
- Do not attempt to conduct an investigation or mediate an outcome between the parties.

### **Documentation of a disclosure**

When a child discloses about harm that has happened or is likely to happen, it is an opportunity for an adult to provide immediate support and comfort and to assist in protecting the children from the abuse. It is also a chance to help connect the child to professional services that can keep the child safe, provide

any support and facilitate recovery from any trauma caused. Disclosure is about seeking support and our response can impact on the child's ability to seek further help.

- Document what was disclosed in a non-judgemental and accurate manner
- Document as soon as possible so the details are accurately captured including
  - Time, date and place of disclosure
  - Word for word of what happened and what was said and any actions that have been taken
  - Full details of the suspected abuse
  - Date of report and signature.

It is important that any disclosure remains confidential, as it is important to remember that no confirmation of any allegation can be made until the matter is investigated.

### **Protection of reporters**

Reports that are made are kept confidential. However, law enforcement agency may access the identity of the reporter, if needed, for the investigation of an alleged serious offence against a child. Under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* if the report is made in good faith:

- The identity of the person making the report is protected.
- The report will not breach any standards of professional conduct
- The report cannot lead to defamation proceedings
- The report cannot be used as evidence against the person who made the report
- A person cannot be compelled by a court to disclose the contents in the report.

### **Allegations against a Meeting House Inc. Employee**

A MHI employee or volunteer who believes, on reasonable grounds, that a child or young person is at risk of harm from a MHI employee must report this concern immediately. The report should be made to the Director or Senior Co-ordinator. The Senior Co-ordinator should then inform The Meeting House Inc. Committee without delay. Reports will be made to the Child Protection Helpline where a child is at risk of significant abuse by a person at the preschool. If the Director/Person Responsible is involved in the abuse then the Approved Provider or most senior educator will assist in notifying the Child Protection Helpline.

Parents who have concerns regarding the manner in which another staff member is treating a child or group of children **must** refer this matter to the either to the Director or the Senior Coordinator. Reports will be made to the Child Protection Helpline where a child is at risk of significant abuse by a person at the preschool.

The NSW Ombudsman will be notified within 30 days of becoming aware of any allegations and convictions for abuse or neglect of a child made against an employee or volunteer and ensure they are investigated and appropriate action taken.

### **Crisis numbers and helplines**

**Child Protection Helpline**

13 2111 (NSW)

For interstate child protection reporting

**If you are calling from an international number**

call: **+61 2 9765 5117**.

The Helpline is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

**Domestic Violence Line**

Free call **1800 656 463**

Translating and Interpreting Services: 13 14 50

TTY 1800 67 14 42

The Domestic Violence Line is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

**Lifeline**

13 1114

**NSW Victims Access Line**

1800 633 063

The hours of operation are 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday.

NQS – Quality Area 2.2, 2.2.1, 2.2.2, 2.2.3