



Child Protection Policy

“Child abuse and neglect are triggered by a combination of forces at work in the individual, the family, the community and the culture. Such complex cases require a multi-professional response that is sensitive to cultural diversity and other special needs. Thus, the prevention and treatment of child abuse have become shared responsibilities between government agencies and services involved with children, families, and the community. Most important on the list of ‘human services’ are the teaching and childcare professions”.

Objective

Albert Waterways Children’s Centre aims to promote the safety and wellbeing of all children within our care, which is each child’s ‘Human Right’.

Other related policies and procedures

Child Supervision Policy

Centre Morning and Afternoon Supervision plans

Code of Conduct for Albert Waterways Children’s Centre

Confidentiality of Records Policy

Child Safe Environment Policy

Application of this policy

This policy applies to all employees, committee members, volunteers, students, and contractors while they are in the workplace including at a site away from their usual workplace. Should the need arise, the policy will be translated into appropriate languages.

Explanation

All staff in early childhood services have a responsibility to protect children. All early childhood educators are mandatory reporters and are legally required as part of their profession to report suspicions of child abuse. Educators are in a unique situation in relation to observing changes in children's behaviour. This policy was developed to provide a framework for the protection of the child and to clarify procedures for staff.

It is inevitable that at some stage a child at risk will attend Albert Waterways Children's Centre, so it is essential that the policy and procedures for notification and protective guidelines for staff be specified.

Centre Preparedness

- All staff employed at the Centre will hold a current Blue Card issued by Blue Card Services: Public Safety Business Agency (or have completed and sent the application form).
- Parents, upon being appointed a position on the Albert Waterways Children's Centre Committee (President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer and general members) must hold a blue card issued by Blue Card Services: Public Safety Business Agency.
- Volunteers/students wishing to undertake volunteer or Practicum work at the Centre must already hold a current Blue Card issued by Blue Card Services: Public Safety Business Agency prior to commencement.
- An authorised copy of an employee's/volunteer's blue card will be kept on file.
- All staff will read and sign that they understand this Policy before commencing employment at the Centre as included in the Induction checklist.
- Staff will be trained in Child Protection yearly from a reputable Child protection agency such as Bravehearts.

Definitions

Harm may be categorised in the following types:

- Physical abuse – for example, beating, shaking, burning, biting, causing bruise or fractures by inappropriate discipline, giving children alcohol, drugs, or inappropriate medication.
- Emotional or psychological abuse – for example, constant yelling, insults, swearing, criticism, bullying, not giving children positive support and encouragement
- Neglect – for example, not giving children sufficient food, clothing, enough sleep, hygiene, medical care, leaving children alone or children missing school, and
- Sexual abuse or exploitation – for example, sexual jokes or touching, exposing children to sexual acts or pornography, or having sexual intercourse with a child or young person under 16 years of age (even if the child appears to have consented).

Suspicion of harm

You can suspect harm if you are concerned by significant changes in behaviour or the presence of new unexplained and suspicious injuries.

Disclosure of harm

A disclosure of harm occurs when someone, including a child, tells you about harm that has happened or is likely to happen.

Disclosures of harm may start with:

- “I think I say....”
- “Somebody told me that....”
- “Just think you should know...”
- “I’m not sure what I want you to do, but....”

Procedures to minimise harm to children and young people

Our Centre works to minimise harm to children and young people by acting in a manner that supports their interests and wellbeing, by:

- making sure that children know that it is their right to feel safe at all times.
- teaching them about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in general
- letting them know who is and who is not an employee in the Centre
- allowing them to be part of decision-making processes
- making sure they are safe by monitoring their activities and ensuring their environment meets all safety requirements
- taking anything a child or young person says seriously and following up their concerns
- letting them know there is not a secret too awful, not a story too terrible, that they can’t share with someone they trust
- teaching them about appropriate and inappropriate contact in a manner appropriate to their age and level of understanding
- teaching children and young people to say ‘no’ to anything that makes them feel unsafe and if possible, to remove themselves from the situation and tell somebody they can trust
- teaching children to identify and discuss negative feelings such as “butterflies in the tummy”, “tight feelings” in the throat, as well as happy, safe feelings
- encouraging them to tell staff of any suspicious activities or people, and
- listening to children and young people and letting them know that staff are available for them if they have any concerns.

Procedure for receiving a disclosure of harm

When receiving a disclosure of harm:

- remain calm and find a private place to talk
- don't promise that you'll keep a secret: tell them they have done the right thing in telling you but that you'll need to tell someone who can help keep them safe
- only ask enough questions to confirm the need to report the matter: probing questions could cause distress, confusion and interfere with any later enquiries, and
- do not attempt to conduct your own investigation or mediate an outcome between the parties involved.

Reporting guidelines for disclosures or suspicions of harm

Following are the actions our Centre will take immediately following a disclosure or suspicion of harm.

Documenting a suspicion of harm

If you or others have concerns about the safety of a child, record your concerns in a non-judgmental and accurate manner as soon as possible following this procedure:

- Record concerns: date, anecdotes, and observations (specify interactions objectively). Photographs may be used to show any physical injuries or health and hygiene issues. Staff could document conversations between caregivers and staff. Each room has a specific book to document this which is kept in a confidential place away from families. The confidentiality of the child and the family concerned must be recognised and abided by all staff.
- On collecting facts, speak to the other staff members in the room expressing and sharing concerns and the documented observations. Discuss the urgency of the situation and/or the necessity for further observations.
- The staff members must inform the Director/Nominated Supervisor and share observations.

If you see unsafe or harmful actions towards a child in your care, intervene immediately, provided it is safe to do so. If it is unsafe, call the police for assistance.

Documenting a disclosure of harm

Complete a disclosure of Harm report form (attached) or record the details as soon as possible so that they are accurately captured. Include:

- time, date, and place of the disclosure
- 'word for word' what happened and what was said, including anything you said and any actions that have been taken, and
- Date of report and signature.

If you need to take notes as the person is telling you, explain that you are taking a record in case any later enquiry occurs.

Reporting the disclosure or suspicion of harm to authorities

If unsure of whether to make the report to the Department of Communities Child Safety and Disability Services, the Educator/Director/Nominated Supervisor may use the **Online Child Protection Guide** to help guide them in making the decision. Note – this is just a tool and the ultimate decision rests with the educators and Director.

Our Centre will not conduct its own enquiries in relation to the disclosure or suspicion of harm or try to come to an agreement between the parties involved.

We will report the matter formally - the Director/Nominated Supervisor or Assistant Director in their absence will contact the relevant authority to ensure the information provided is comprehensive and accurate.

Report the matter to:

Department of Communities Child Safety and Disability Services on free call 1300 679 849, or
Queensland Police Service (Broadbeach Station – 07 55812800)

Actions following the disclosure of harm

Support and counseling will be offered to all parties involved.

Processes for those involved in the report

The child - The children involved will be offered appropriate counseling and support.

The person who made the report – Under Section 22 of the *Child Protection Act 1999*, a person who reports suspected child abuse is protected from civil or criminal legal actions and is not considered to have broken any code of conduct or ethics.

Details of the person who made the report are to be kept completely confidential and will not be made available to the family of the child, or the person against whom the allegation has been made.

The person against whom the allegation has been made – If the person responding to the allegation of harm is a member of the organisation, their duties will be reviewed, and their employment may be suspended pending further investigation. The Centre reserves the right to seek legal advice as to the extent to which the person can carry out duties within the Centre.

Procedures for dealing with complaints regarding the abuse of a child at Albert Waterways Children's Centre by a staff member

If

- There is any suspicion of a child being abused by a person working at the Centre, or
- A parent or outside person reports an alleged act of abuse against a child while at the Centre, or
- A staff member reports an alleged act of abuse against a child while at the Centre, or
- A child makes a report of an alleged act of abuse by a person working at the Centre

The following must take place

- The person suspecting, witnessing, or receiving a verbal report must immediately inform the Director or the person in charge at the time. If it is the Director or the person in charge at the time, that is the subject of the complaint, then the staff member can contact the Committee President confidentially.
- Written reports of time, place and children involved are to be documented and these reports are to be taken to the Committee.
- The Director and Committee President will then talk with the person involved so that they can have the opportunity to respond to the allegations.
- A decision will be made, and the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) office will be contacted for advice and support and to complete necessary paperwork.

Staff – Child Interactions

- Staff will be trained to understand that they are likely to find some children more difficult than others, to discuss these situations with other staff and the Director, and to devise strategies to minimise negative interactions with children.
- Individuals or groups of children will never be withdrawn into areas where they cannot be seen by other staff or taken into rooms that can be locked.
- There must always be two staff members on the premises during the opening hours, 7.45am and in the closing hours, 5.45pm; one of which will be a Certified Supervisor (in emergency situations this may not always be possible but will always try to be maintained).
- Students or volunteers are not to be alone with children or out of sight of other staff, or away from ready access by other staff.
- Staff are not permitted to have conversations of a sexual nature, have inappropriate pet names for children, make jokes of a sexual nature, use obscene gestures and/or language.

Prohibited discipline practices

The following behaviour by staff is not permitted:

- Corporal punishment or any type of physical punishment including hitting, spanking, beating, shaking, pinching, or other measures which produce physical pain.
- Abusive, profane, or derogatory language including yelling and belittling.
- Any form of public or private humiliation including threats or physical punishment.
- Withdrawal of food, rest, or opportunity to use the toilet.
- Physical restraint of children will not be used except as necessary to ensure a child's safety or that of others, and then only for as long as is necessary for control of the situation.

Common Indicators of abuse and neglect

Indicators should be seen as a guide rather than conclusive proof. It is important to be aware that many of the indicators listed are not only common to different forms of child abuse but may be caused by factors other than child abuse. There may be instances where the results of problems are associated with family disruptions/tensions, or stem from a child's illness, undiagnosed disability or learning problems. While it is important to avoid jumping to conclusions, it is equally as important to recognise that a child who shows several physical signs and/or behavioral symptoms has some kind of problem. Even if the problem is not related to child abuse, the child is still clearly in need of some help.

Physical Abuse

"Any non-accidental injury to a child"

Child Physical Indicators

- 1 Unexplained welts and bruises
- 2 Unexplained burns
- 3 Unexplained fractures
- 4 Unexplained lacerations or abrasions
- 5 Head injuries
- 6 Human bite marks
- 7 Premature loss of teeth
- 8 Verbally reports abuse
- 9 Wary of adult contacts
- 10 Consistent anger, aggression, hyperactivity
- 11 Behavioral extremes
- 12 Role reversals
- 13 Developmental lags
- 14 Appears frightened of carer and/or anxious just prior to collection
- 15 Apprehensive when other children cry
- 16 Wears clothes to cover injuries
- 17 Seeks affection from any adult with no discrimination

- 18 Non-expression of his/her needs
- 19 Non-communicative

Carer Behaviour Indicators

- 20 Seems unconcerned about child
- 21 Seems anxious and overwhelmed by their child's needs
- 22 Takes an unusual amount of time to obtain medical care for their child
- 23 Offers an inadequate or inappropriate explanation for their child's injury
- 24 Takes child to a different doctor or hospital for each injury
- 25 Substance abuser
- 26 Disciplines the child too harshly
- 27 Describes child in a consistently negative manner
- 28 Has poor impulse control

Sexual Abuse

“Utilisation of a child for sexual gratification by an adult or an older child in a position of power, or permitting another person to do so”

Child Physical Indicators

- 29 Difficulty in walking or sitting
- 30 Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- 31 Pain or itching in genital area
- 32 Bruises or bleeding in external genitalia, vaginal or anal areas
- 33 Venereal diseases (especially in pre-teens)
- 34 Pregnancy
- 35 Foreign matter in bladder, rectum, or urethra
- 36 Recurrent urinary tract infections

Child Behaviour Indicators

- 37 Aggressive, overt sexual behaviour
- 38 Drawing pictures of people with genitals
- 39 Cruelty to animals without physiological basis
- 40 Pre-mature knowledge of explicit sexual acts
- 41 Sleep disorders
- 42 Taking frequent baths
- 43 Starting fires
- 44 Poor peer relationships
- 45 Wary of physical contact, especially with an adult
- 46 Onset of bedwetting, nightmares, or thumb sucking
- 47 Reports of sexual abuse
- 48 Self-inflicted injuries

Carer Behavioral Indicators

- 49 Very protective or jealous of child
- 50 Extremely protective of family privacy
- 51 Does not allow child to be involved in extra-curricular activities
- 52 Encourages child to engage in prostitution
- 53 Substance abuser
- 54 Is geographically isolated and /or lacking in social and emotional contacts outside of family
- 55 Has low self esteem

Emotional Abuse

“Chronic failure by the carer to provide support and affection necessary to develop a sound and healthy personality”

Child Physical Indicators

- 56 Speech disorders
- 57 Lags in physical development
- 58 Failure to thrive
- 59 Attempted suicide
- 60 Child behavioral indicators
- 61 Habit disorder (sucking, biting, rocking, etc.)
- 62 Has low self esteem
- 63 Difficulty forming positive relationships
- 64 Elimination problems
- 65 Neurotic traits (sleep disorders, inhibition of play, etc.)
- 66 Behavioral extremes (complaints, passive, shy, aggressive, demanding)
- 67 Overly adaptive behaviour (inappropriately infantile)
- 68 Apathetic
- 69 Withdrawal
- 70 Inability to trust
- 71 Reports emotional maltreatment

Carer Behavioral Indicators

- 72 Treat child in family unequally
- 73 Does not appear to care much about the child’s problems
- 74 Blames and belittles child
- 75 Is cold and rejecting
- 76 Withholds love
- 77 Finds nothing good or attractive in the child
- 78 Demonstrates inconsistent behaviour in the child

Neglect

“Chronic failure to provide for a child’s physical and emotional needs, such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education or supervision”

Child Physical Indicators

- 79 Consistent hunger, poor hygiene, inappropriate dress, chronically unclean
- 80 Consistent lack of supervision, especially in dangerous activities for long periods
- 81 Unattended physical problems or medical/dental needs
- 82 Often tired or listless
- 83 Abandonment
- 84 Underweight
- 85 Dirty
- 86 Developmental lags
- 87 Flat bald spots on infant's head
- 88 Begging or stealing food
- 89 Extended stays in school (early arrival and late departure)
- 90 Attendance at school infrequent
- 91 Substance abuser
- 92 States there is no parent or carer

Carer Behavioral Indicators

- 93 Has disorganised, chaotic, upsetting home life
- 94 Is apathetic, feels nothing will change
- 95 Is isolated from friends, relatives, neighbours
- 96 Cannot be found
- 97 Expects too much from child
- 98 Substance abuser
- 99 Exposes child to unsafe living conditions

Review - The Centre's policy and procedure for handling disclosures or suspicions of harm will be reviewed and assessed annually to ensure that the Centre is continuing to provide a safe and supportive service environment.

Sources

Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services

13 QGOV (13 74 68)

Blue Card Services - Public Safety Business Agency

Child Protection Act 1999

Bravehearts

Childwise

Policy Review Record

Date	Management Committee Name	Nominated Supervisors Name	Review Cycle	Next Review Date
March 2024	Elizabeth Maddock	Tamara Fallon	Every year	March 2025