

Content warning

This procedure includes information relating to child harm. C&K acknowledge that this content may trigger an emotional response. If reading this procedure causes distress or discomfort, reach out to your support network and/or access the [Employee Assistance Program](#) (free for C&K employees or affiliated members).

If you believe a child is at immediate risk of harm, telephone 000.

Background

C&K is committed to safety and protection of all children enrolled at our centres. We believe that safe, protective, and healthy environments are essential for every child to learn, grow and reach their full potential. We prioritise children's rights and wellbeing by fostering culturally safe, inclusive, supportive, respectful learning and care environments; places where every child feels valued and empowered to speak up if they feel unsafe.

This procedure outlines the steps and responsibilities for responding to and reporting suspicions of child abuse occurring externally to a centre.

This procedure does not apply to disclosures, complaints or allegations of child harm occurring at a centre. For those matters, follow the *Reporting Allegations of Child Harm at a C&K Centre Procedure*.

This procedure applies to C&K board members, employees, students, volunteers, external contractors and visitors. Collectively, for the purposes of this procedure, these individuals are referred to as 'C&K Representatives'.

Implement this procedure alongside the [Child Safety and Protection Definitions and Indicators Guideline](#).

C&K's commitment to child protection and safeguarding aligns with the 10 [Queensland Child Safe Standards](#), and the [Universal Principle for Cultural Safety](#). This procedure aligns with Standard 2: Voice of Children, Standard 3: Families and Communities, Standard 4: Equity and Diversity, Standard 6: Complaints management and Standard 10: Policies and Procedure.

Child Protection Reporting Responsibilities

Under the [Child Protection Act 1999](#), early childhood teachers and educators are mandatory reporters. This means they are required by law to make a report to Child Safety (Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety) when they:

- Have a reasonable suspicion a child has suffered, is suffering or is at unacceptable risk of suffering, significant harm caused by physical or sexual abuse AND
- There is not a parent or guardian able and willing to protect the child from harm.

The *C&K Child Safety and Protection Policy* requires C&K Representatives to report all types of child abuse to Child Safety when they:

- Have a reasonable suspicion a child has suffered, is suffering or is at unacceptable risk of suffering, significant harm AND
- There is not a parent or guardian able and willing to protect the child from harm.

What is child harm?

The *Child Protection Act 1999* defines harm to a child as any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing. It is immaterial how the harm is caused. Harm can be caused by physical, psychological or emotional abuse or neglect or sexual abuse or exploitation. Harm can be caused by a single act, omission or circumstance, or a series of acts, omissions or circumstances.

There are four main types of child abuse:

- **Physical abuse** occurs when a child is intentionally hurt or injured. It may not always leave visible marks or injuries. Examples include hitting, shaking, choking, smothering, throwing, burning, biting, poisoning, or using physical restraints.
- **Sexual abuse** occurs when an adult, teenager, or another child uses their power or authority to involve a child in sexual activity. This includes **grooming**, where a person builds trust with a child, their family, or educators to enable future sexual abuse. Grooming often occurs in stages and can occur in person or online.
- **Emotional abuse** involves behaviour that damages a child's emotional, social or intellectual development. This can include rejection, criticism, yelling, bullying, isolation, humiliation or exposing a child to domestic or family violence.
- **Neglect occurs** when a child's basic needs are not met, impacting their health or development. This includes inadequate food, shelter, hygiene, medical care, clothing, or supervision.

Recognising indicators of child abuse

Indicators of child abuse are observable signs or patterns in a child's behaviour, appearance or circumstances that may suggest they are experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect. Indicators can be physical, emotional, behavioural or situational and often occur in combination rather than as isolated events.

One or more indicators of child abuse do not necessarily mean child abuse is occurring but can signal the need for further observation. In some cases, signs may reflect trauma or grief rather than abuse. C&K representatives are required to recognise the types and possible indicators of child abuse to respond appropriately and take required action. Refer to [Child Safety and Protection Definitions and Indicators Guideline](#).

Immediate Steps - Responding to and reporting child protection concerns externally to centre

C&K representatives will:

- 1. Monitor**
 - Monitor and observe child's behaviour, emotions and language.
 - Refer to appendix one of this procedure for types and possible indicators of child abuse.
- 2. Record**
 - As soon as practically possible, record concerns via the *Child Concern Form*.
 - Record information objectively and factually, focusing on physical and behavioural observations, and (if applicable) exact words of any disclosure. Avoid using emotive language.
 - Never record, upload or share any images related to child harm under any circumstances.
- 3. Act**
 - If required, seek support of your Early Childhood Pedagogy Advisor (ECPA).
 - Complete the [Online Child Protection Guide](#) (Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women) AND attach copy of Online Child Protection Guide 'decision' to this form. The [Online Child Protection Guide](#) is a support tool designed to help you think through the concern rather than replace your own judgement. It does not stop you from any making any reports you feel is needed for a child.
 - Determine and record action(s) on *Child Concern Form*.

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| A. Make a passive OR active Family and Child Connect Referral AND continue to monitor, observe and support child. Follow <i>Family and Child Connect Procedure</i>. | OR | B. Report concern to <u>Child Safety</u> AND continue to monitor, observe and support child. Refer to <u>Making a Child Safety Report</u> section of this procedure. | OR | C. Continue to monitor, observe and support child. |
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 - Scan and upload completed form with attached Online Child Protection Guide 'decision' to child's Kidsoft record under 'Child Concern Form'. Tick document as confidential. Confidentially destroy paper record.

Making a Child Safety Report

Making a report to Child Safety can be distressing. Whenever possible, reach out to and make a report with a supportive colleague.

A report to Child Safety can be made by:

- Telephoning a local [Regional Intake Service](#) (during business hours) or 1800 177 135 (after business hours) OR
- Completing an [Online Child Safety Report](#).

When making a report, Child Safety will request the following information:

- Details about the child (e.g. name, age, address) and their parents or other relevant persons (e.g. names, addresses, contact details).
- The reasons you suspect the child has experienced or may be at risk of experiencing harm.
- Whether the child or family is currently receiving any support.
- The immediate risk to the child's safety and wellbeing.

Refer to the completed *Child Concern Form* and the child's *Enrolment Booklet* or Kidsoft Record when providing information to Child Safety.

Child Safety Officers are required by law to keep the identity of the person making the report confidential.

Post Steps - Responding to and reporting child protection concerns externally to centre

C&K representatives will:

- Maintain confidentially. Only share information with others who are responsible for the child's support, care and protection.
- Never confront the alleged perpetrator, as this may increase risk to the child or others.
- Understand there is no legal obligation to inform parents that a report to Child Safety about their child has been made. Before informing the child's parents or guardians:
 - Seeking advice from your ECPA and/or Family and Child Connect (13 32 64).
 - Consider, if sharing information:
 - May place child, staff or others at risk.
 - Will strengthen trust and collaboration with the family and support the child's wellbeing and safety.
 - May lead to the child being withdrawn from the centre, limiting protection and support.
 - Is the child already experiencing vulnerability? Known to Child Safety? Under the guardianship of a foster carer or kinship carer?
 - Determine whether the child's parents or guardians are already aware of the harm or potential harm.
- Practice self-care. Responding to and reporting child protection concerns can be distressing. Reach out to your support network and/or access the [Employee Assistance Program](#) (free for C&K and affiliated centre employees).
- Continue to provide support and closely monitor child's appearance, wellbeing and behaviour. Repeat the procedure, if additional child protection concerns arise for the child.

References and Resources

- Queensland Government - [Report child abuse](#)
- Queensland Government - [Indicators and signs](#)
- Queensland Government - [Child Protection Guide](#)
- Queensland Government - [Information Sheet – Mandatory reporting by early childhood education and care professionals](#)