

Working with Children Policy and Procedure - Victoria

Purpose

MATCHU PTY LTD recognises the participant's right to feel safe and to live in an environment that provides protection from assault, neglect, exploitation or any other form of abuse. This policy specifically looks at the requirements when working with participants under the age of eighteen (18) years.

Scope

This policy applies to all Staff and stakeholders linked to our organisation.

Policy

MATCHU PTY LTD will encourage and support any person who has witnessed the abuse of a participant, or who suspects that abuse has occurred, to make a report and be confident of doing so without fear of retribution.

Matchu PTY LTD, as a mandatory reporting body, is required to report any indicators.

MATCHU PTY LTD acknowledges that prevention is the best protection from abuse and neglect and recognises their duty of care obligations to implement prevention strategies.

It is the legislative policy that Staff engaged in a *risk-assessed role* must have the required Victorian clearance checks.

Staff must undergo the NDIS worker screening process prior to employment. Results are recorded in their personnel file.

Staff should guide children who require assistance to Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800 for support, as required.

Procedure

When to report an abusive situation

It is important to always search for the cause of a change in a participant's behaviour or unexplained physical symptoms. If a participant shows one or more of the possible signs of abuse it must be reported immediately, even though this does not automatically mean abuse has taken place.

Possible signs of abuse are detailed below:

- A participant shows a change in behaviour or mood that may indicate they are being abused.
- Someone is seen behaving inappropriately towards a participant
- A participant tells Staff another person is abusing them
- A person tells Staff that they're abusing a participant
- A participant or visitor advises Staff that they have observed abusive acts
- Someone observes an action or inaction that may be considered abusive
- A person suspects or has reason to believe a participant is being abused.

The Director or Operations Manager will then report the abuse to the appropriate child safety services.

Failure to report an abusive situation may result in a criminal offence.

How to report

The Director or Operations Manager will use their professional understanding and knowledge of child protection to determine when to contact the required reporting body.

To make a report, the Director or Operations Manager will contact the *Child Protection Intake Service* covering the local government area (LGA) where the child normally resides.

- During business hours Monday to Friday (8.45 am - 5.00 pm) call:
 - North Division intake: 1300 664 977
 - South Division intake: 1300 655 795
 - East Division intake: 1300 360 391
 - West Division intake - metropolitan: 1300 664 977
 - West Division intake - rural and regional: 1800 075 599
- Outside of business hours call:
 - After-Hours Child Protection Emergency Service: 13 12 78

Details to provide

The Director will provide the following information to the child abuse report line:

- Child's name, age, date of birth and address
- Description of injury, abuse and neglect (outline current and previous)

- Child's current situation
- Location of the child, parent or caregiver and alleged perpetrator
- When and how the manager found out about the abuse.

Child identification details and context

MATCHU PTY LTD will need to provide enough detail to identify the child or young person and give context to the report, including:

- Child's full name
- Date of birth or age
- Current address
- Contact number
- School/kindergarten/childcare centre
- Ethnicity, i.e. Cultural background, aboriginal kinship group, non-english speaking. Who are the parents? Do they all live in the same house? Are there siblings in the house?
- Alleged perpetrator's name, age, address, relationships to the child and current whereabouts
- Current whereabouts of the child of concern
- Details of when the next expected contact with the alleged perpetrator will occur
- Family court orders, apprehended violence orders and domestic violence orders, if in place.

Defining child maltreatment, abuse and neglect

Child abuse and neglect are related to any behaviour by parents, caregivers, other adults or older adolescents, that's outside the norms of conduct and entails a substantial risk of causing physical or emotional harm to a child or a young person. Such behaviours may be intentional or unintentional and can include acts of omission (i.e. neglect) and commission (i.e. abuse).

Physical abuse

Signs and symptoms: Bruising, lacerations, welts, rashes, broken or healing bones, burns, weight loss, facial swelling, missing teeth, pain or restricted movements, crying, acting fearful, agitation, drowsiness, hair loss or poor physical wellbeing.

Causes: Hitting, slapping, pushing, punching or burning, which involves an incident that's non-accidental, resulting in pain or injury.

Psychological and emotional abuse

Signs and symptoms: Loss of interest in self-care, helplessness, withdrawn, apathy, insomnia, fearfulness, reluctance to communicate openly, chooses not to maintain eye contact, paranoia and confusion.

Causes: Intimidation, humiliation, harassment, threatening behaviour, sleep deprivation, withholding affection, not allowing a person to maintain their decision-making powers which leads to a pattern when repeated over time.

Financial abuse

Signs and symptoms: Unpaid accounts, withholding funds, loss of jewellery and personal belongings, removal of cash from wallet/purse, person becomes agitated when discussing money, not providing money for outings and personal items or a person takes over the care of someone's money without their permission.

Causes: Misuse of a person's money, valuables or property, forced changes to legal documents (such as a will), denying access to or control of personal funds, stealing, fraud, forgery, embezzlement, misuse of power of attorney, removing decision-making powers of a person.

Sexual abuse

Signs and symptoms: Unexplained sexual transmitted disease, vaginal/anal bleeding, fearful of certain people or places, bruising to genital areas, inner thigh or around breasts, anxiety, torn or bloody underclothes, difficulty in walking or sitting, change in sleep patterns, repeating nightmares.

Causes: Rape (penetration and/or oral-genital contact), interest in older person's bodies, inappropriate comments and sexual references, inappropriate (possibly painful) administration of enemas or genital cleansing, indecent assault, sexual harassment which is mainly about violence and power over another person rather than sexual pleasure.

Neglect

Signs and symptoms: Poor hygiene or personal care, unkempt appearance, lack of personal items, absence of health aids, weight loss, agitation, inappropriate clothing, lack of food.

Cause: Intentional failure to provide basic life necessities.

Social abuse

Signs and symptoms: Sadness and grief due to people not visiting, anxiety after a certain person's visit, withdrawal, low self-esteem, appearing ashamed, passivity, listlessness.

Causes: Prevention of contact with friends or family, preventing access to social activities.

Continuity of support

Matchu Pty Ltd will also ensure that arrangements are in place to support continuity of supports for each child participant, for example:

- supporting a team case management approach, whereby if the child participant's lead therapist is absent, the child and their family may work with an alternative therapist

- where possible, advising the child participant and their family of planned therapist leave and planning ahead to ensure support during this time

In the event that changes or interruptions are unavoidable, Matchu Pty Ltd will ensure that this is:

- explained and agreed with the child participant (taking into account their capacity to understand and agree to alternative arrangements) and their family; and
- delivered in a way that is appropriate to the child participant's needs, preferences and goals.

Related documents

- Code of Conduct
- Participant notes
- Risk Assessment Form
- Risk Management Plan
- Violence, Abuse, Neglect, Exploitation and Discrimination Policy and Procedure
- Zero Tolerance Policy and Procedure

References

- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005
- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005
- The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989
- Victoria State Government Health & Human Services Mandatory Reporting website:
www.providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au
- Working with Children Act 2005