

Children and Young People Risk Management and Abuse Reporting Policy

1. Aim and Justification

This policy describes Relationships Australia Tasmania's (RA Tas) risk management strategies and reporting mechanisms which seek to safeguard children and young people from abuse or neglect (including sexual abuse).

According to the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) as many as one in three women and one in twelve men experience some form of sexual abuse as a child.¹ Furthermore, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has identified that there is not only opportunity for children to be abused in their own homes and social circles, but also in the organisations they spend time in.

This policy defines the roles and responsibilities of all our employees, volunteers, students, and contractors to protect children from abuse and neglect. It provides information on the appropriate actions which are to be taken when a child has been abused or has suffered neglect, or when there are reasonable grounds to believe this is likely to occur.

Through the implementation of this policy, we will meet relevant state and federal laws relating to safeguarding of children and young people.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all RA Tas Board members, employees, volunteers, students, and contractors and includes all forms of abuse and neglect.

3. Policy

Our commitment

RA Tas is committed to promoting and protecting the best interests of children and young people involved in its programs. We believe that all children and young people, regardless of their gender, race, religious beliefs, age, disability, sexual orientation, family, or social background, have the right to be heard, supported and protected from abuse and neglect.

All board members, employees, volunteers, students, and contractors have a responsibility to take reasonable action to ensure that any child or young person engaged in our services or programs is protected from abuse and neglect. Everyone connected with RA Tas has a responsibility to report any information about suspected child abuse or neglect in line with the state laws.

Expectations

RA Tas expects that employees, volunteers, students, and contractors:

- Make themselves aware of their obligations to report any concerns for children and young people in line with relevant state law including reports to relevant authorities and Strong Families Safe Kids;
- Become aware of their obligation to observe the *Code of Conduct* as it relates to child safety;
- Provide an environment that is supportive of all children's emotional and physical safety;

- Understand and implement strategies to detect and prevent child abuse and neglect,

RA Tas meets these expectations by ensuring that all concerns are responded and reported to the relevant child safety authorities and/or the Police.

Strategies

RA Tas monitors its programs, the physical, social, and online environments around which they are delivered to identify issues that may expose children or young people to abuse or neglect. We assess the likelihood and probable impact of these concerns and employ a range of preventative strategies to manage and minimise the risk of offending behaviour towards children and young people. These include developing and implementing:

- rigorous screening and selection processes to eliminate potential offenders and to identify people with the correct values to work with children;
- a code of conduct;
- a code of ethics;
- Practice and Behaviour Guidelines;
- training and supervision activities to develop staff skills;
- strategies to identify and respond to unprofessional relationships and grooming behaviours between children and young people and adults;
- programs to develop family strengths;
- child risk assessments;
- strategies to ensure children and young people have access to transparent and clear information regarding their rights and healthy relationships;
- procedures to reporting and acting upon risks or concerns.

We believe that the collective implementation of these strategies can significantly contribute to the safety of children and young people.

The implementation of this policy will be monitored and evaluated by our Chief Executive Officer and Senior Management Group.

A shared responsibility to report any concern

RA Tas board members, employees, volunteers, students, and contractors are expected to acknowledge their legal and moral obligation to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children or young people associated with the organisation.

Everyone working at RA Tas has a direct or indirect responsibility to ensure that children are protected from abuse and neglect. Everyone connected with RA Tas has a responsibility to report any information about suspected child abuse and neglect (including sexual abuse). This expectation applies regardless of whether the person has statutory mandatory reporting responsibilities or not.

RA Tas describes these responsibilities in the *Code of Conduct, Practice and Behaviour Guidelines* and *Reporting Issues of Significance Policy*.

Obligation to internally report

RA Tas expects that any employee, volunteer, student or contactor will report any allegation or suspected incident relating to the abuse (including the sexual abuse) of a child or young person. This expectation applies regardless of whether the person has statutory mandatory reporting responsibilities or not.

RA Tas describes these responsibilities in the *Code of Conduct, Practice and Behaviour Guidelines, Responding to Reportable Client Matters Policy* and *Reporting Issues of Significance Policy*. These policies and procedures comply with the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997. This Act provides a penalty of a fine for

mandatory reporters who do not report their suspicions of child abuse and neglect. RA Tas also view any failure to report as serious misconduct and grounds for disciplinary action.

All allegations of abuse are reported to the relevant agencies identified within local state legislation or to the police if the child or young person is at imminent risk of harm or abuse. The RA Tas CEO, or their delegate, will also make a report to the Australian Childhood Foundation if an allegation of child abuse is made against one of our employees or volunteers.

4. Definitions

Child abuse: For the purposes of this policy, child abuse constitutes any act committed against a child involving:

- physical abuse,
- sexual abuse (and grooming),
- emotional or psychological abuse,
- cumulative abuse and neglect.

See below for further descriptions.

Child sexual abuse: Child sexual abuse occurs when an adult or a person of authority (e.g. older) involves a child or young person in any sexual activity. Perpetrators of sexual abuse take advantage of their power, authority or position over the child or young person for their own benefit. It can include:

- making sexual comments, engaging them to participate in sexual conversations over the internet or on social media,
- kissing,
- touching their genitals or breasts,
- oral sex or intercourse with a child or young person.
- encouraging a child or young person to view pornographic magazines, websites and videos is also sexual abuse.
- engaging children or young people to participate in sexual conversations over the internet is also considered sexual abuse.

Cumulative harm: Refers to a series of acts or omissions that, when viewed separately may not indicate significant risk, but when viewed together suggest a pattern of significant harm.

Emotional or psychological abuse: Can occur where the behaviour of their parent or caregiver damages the confidence and self-esteem of the child or young person, resulting in serious emotional disturbance or psychological trauma. This can include a range of behaviours such as excessive criticism, withholding affection, exposure to domestic violence, intimidation or threatening behaviour.

Grooming: Grooming is when a perpetrator of abuse builds a relationship with a child or young person with a view to abusing them at some stage. There is no set pattern to groom a child or young person. For some perpetrators, there will be a lengthy period before the abuse begins. The child may be given special attention and, what starts as an apparently normal display of affection, such as cuddling, can develop into sexual touching or masturbation and then into more serious sexual behaviour. Grooming may also include the perpetrator building a relationship with a child's parent/caregiver as a trusted adult to gain access to the child. Other perpetrators

may draw a child or young person in and abuse them relatively quickly. Some abusers do not groom children but abuse them without forming a relationship at all. Grooming can take place in any setting where a relationship is formed, such as leisure, music, sports and religious activities, or in internet chatrooms, social media or by other technological channels.

Neglect:

Neglect is the persistent failure or deliberate denial to provide the child or young person with the basics of life. This includes the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, clean water, medical attention or supervision to the extent that the child or young person’s health and development is, or is likely to be, significantly harmed.

Categories of neglect include physical, medical, abandonment or desertion, emotional and educational neglect. The issue of neglect must be considered within the context of resources reasonably available.

Physical abuse:

Physical abuse occurs when a person subjects a child or young person to non-accidental physically aggressive acts. The abuser may inflict an injury intentionally or inadvertently as a result of physical punishment or the aggressive treatment of a child or young person. Physically abusive behavior includes (but is not limited to) shoving, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, punching, biting, burning, excessive and physically harmful over training, and kicking. It also includes giving children or young people harmful substances such as drugs, alcohol or poison. Certain types of punishment, whilst not causing injury can also be considered physical abuse if they place a child or young person at risk of being hurt.

Associated policies and procedures:

This policy is supported by the following RA Tas policies:

- Code of Conduct
- Code of Ethics
- Practice and Behaviour Guidelines
- Police Check and Working with Children Registration Policy and Procedures
- Reporting Issues of Significance Policy
- Reporting issues of Significance Procedure
- Responding to Reportable Client Matters Policy
- Responding to Reportable Client Matters Procedure

References:

The relevant legislation, standards and references that apply to this policy include: Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997

Approval and Endorsement:

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| Approved By: | Michael Kelly (Chief Executive Officer) |
| Endorsed By: | Board of Relationships Australia Tasmania |
| Date of Endorsement: | 23/12/2021 |
| Review Date: | 31/10/2022 |
