



Keeping us all safe

**A staff orientation to OSCAR
child protection policies**

(Update version 1.1 Aug 2019)

Thanks for checking out this resource

- *Instead of "going over the policy" these topics aim to encourage conversation and discussion; a more open climate where concerns can be talked about.*
- *Most sections are written so that you can just read through them aloud if you'd prefer.*
- *We have included the topics we think are most important and that staff need to know – feel free to adapt. You may find that you want to break the topics up into shorter sessions.*
- *In some sections you will need to refer to your own particular procedures for more guidance, e.g. applying sunscreen.*
- *We are working on a power point option. Please contact us if you're interested.*
- *This is a living document – we'd appreciate any feedback you have.*

Introduction

The purpose of this session is to outline just a few of the most important procedures in our Child Protection policy. The parts of the policy that we will talk about are:

- responding to concerns about child abuse and neglect
- what to do if a child discloses abuse
- supervision and conduct guidelines to keep staff and children safe

We won't discuss today what would happen if we actually reported a concern to the Police or Oranga Tamariki. If we do have any situations that need this follow through, then our experienced, senior staff will lead the process and no staff member will be acting alone.

Child abuse can be an upsetting topic, and an uncomfortable conversation to have. We aren't planning today to discuss or describe abuse graphically but you might still find that you're feeling a bit overwhelmed. It is quite OK to ask for a break or some private time and we are here to listen if you want to talk.

It is important that we recognise and help you with any concerns or difficult feelings that this topic may cause. Child abuse thrives in secrecy. To provide a safe environment we all need to be able to bring up our concerns and talk about them. It's a professional responsibility we have to each other and to the families who use our service.

What's in Our Child Protection Policy?

Principles

Under sections 15 and 16 of the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989, any person who believes that a child has been or is likely to be, harmed physically, emotionally or sexually or ill-treated, abused, neglected or deprived may report the matter to Oranga Tamariki or the Police and provided the report is made in good faith, no civil, criminal or disciplinary proceedings may be brought against them.

- The well-being and safety of children is a paramount concern at our OSCAR Programme.
- Our OSCAR Programme supports the roles of the Police and Oranga Tamariki and we will consult with them if we have concerns or we need advice.
- Our staff are expected to only act within their level of experience and training, and to consult with senior colleagues about any concerns.

Responding to concerns about child abuse and neglect

New Zealand has one of the highest rates of child abuse in the OECD. Child abuse includes sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and family violence. It occurs across all sectors of New Zealand society, it could happen here. It could be affecting children in our programme.

Examples of signs that could be concerning

- unexplained injuries, bruising, cuts or burns
- appearing dirty or and uncared for, or without appropriate clothing
- untreated, persistent medical issues e.g. skin disorders
- developmental delays such as poor speech, social skills or poor self-care
- behaviour that is 'out of character' for the child or inappropriate for their age
- comments from a child about their home life, or things that have happened to them etc.

You are not expected to reach any conclusions about whether abuse or neglect is occurring, But we do want you to raise concerns with us if you notice these kinds of things.

You might then be asked to make a written record of your observations, so the sooner you can bring this up, the better.

When initially raising concerns, you can do this privately with a senior staff member. This respects the privacy of the child: not all of a child's personal background needs to be known by all the staff.

Outside of our programme we expect all personal information about children and families to be kept completely private.

It might happen, once you become more aware of signs of abuse, that you start to notice and question yourself more about behaviour and other things you observe. Share any concerns you have with a senior colleague, so they can help you to decide if further action is needed.

Not every concern about a child will cause us to make a formal notification. Where we can see that a family is struggling or in need of more support we might approach them and offer help such as identifying someone within their family circle, or a person or group in the local community that could be approached for assistance.

The earlier that a family can get help, the better.

YOU MIGHT WORRY ABOUT “BEING WRONG”. BUT WHAT IF IT TURNED OUT YOU WERE RIGHT AND HADN’T TOLD ANYONE?

If a child discloses abuse

- Listen to the child – give them time to talk without interrupting
 - Don’t start questioning the child. Interviewing children must be left to people who are trained to do so – otherwise there is a risk that the child’s story will become unusable as evidence if there is any investigation
- If you want to encourage the child to keep talking, just use open-ended prompts e.g. “I am listening, go on...”

What else you can do:

- Reassure the child that telling someone was the right thing to do
- Tell the child that whatever has happened is not their fault and what has happened to them is not OK
- Tell them you will get help and that you are going have to talk to someone else – you can’t keep it a secret

If there is no immediate risk to the child, help them to re-engage in an appropriate activity, under supervision

Immediately notify a senior colleague – do not say anything to the child’s family at this stage. This will be the responsibility of senior staff.

We will ask you to report in writing, as accurately as possible, what the child said. We will support you – it is our responsibility to follow through and do all we can to make sure children in our programme are safe.

When an allegation of abuse or a concern is about a staff member

This needs to be reported directly to a senior staff member as soon as possible. It is not your responsibility to communicate this information to the staff member concerned.

Staff and child safety – supervision and conduct guidelines

Allegations of inappropriate behaviour, even when there has been no actual misconduct, can be extremely upsetting and undermine trust and safety in our programme. These guidelines aim to ensure children are well-supervised and to reduce the risk of actual or alleged inappropriate behaviour, which includes behaviour of an intimate and/or sexual nature.

Be aware of situations where you could be alone with children. Avoid these situations as much as possible.

Be aware of where children are at all times and regularly check spaces out of your direct line of sight e.g. play huts, storage areas, toilets, etc.

Move children on or use low-key reminders, so they know you are watching them. Sometimes a simple question like ‘hey, what’s up’ is enough to send a clear supervision message.

You are expected to supervise any visitors, tutors etc. to the centre and prevent situations where they are left alone with children.

It is also never ok to transport children in any private vehicle you are using, outside of programme hours. Where a child is at the centre after hours, our late collection policy will be followed and senior staff will manage the situation.

Physical contact with children.

In the OSCAR Code of Conduct it says: *“Staff will provide physical comfort or reassurance when needed by children, but exercise caution and restraint when initiating physical contact or displaying signs of affection.”*

Never assume that physical contact is acceptable to a child – always ask as a courtesy e.g. “can I help put sunscreen on your face?” If a child appears uncomfortable with physical contact, respect that and consider alternatives depending on the situation.

Be aware that some cultures may disapprove of physical contact between adults and children – particularly contact between males and females.

Even if children initiate it, do not routinely hug children as a greeting or goodbye – high 5’s or handshakes are a good substitute – served with a smile 😊

Sometimes children, especially young ones, will spontaneously hug and grab onto you – don’t be unfriendly or make them feel like they have done something wrong but do politely and gently unlatch yourself and give them a smile instead 😊

When children are upset or distressed it is appropriate to offer some comfort – hold their hand or sit beside them for a hug. Don’t let children climb on you or sit on your laps.

Piggy backing or carrying children is a potential hazard and usually not necessary. Do not do it, unless there is a good reason – e.g. to give assistance in certain first aid situations.

Where children are behaving in a way that poses physical danger it may be necessary, if it is safe for you to do so, to hold the child to prevent immediate harm: if possible, grip clothing rather than their body. Get assistance as soon as possible.

Personal Care

Children are encouraged to be as independent as possible in their personal care, including dressing, toileting, hygiene and sun screen.

There is usually no need to assist school aged children with toileting. If the situation arises, you should ensure that another staff member knows what is happening, while respecting the privacy of the child i.e. don't broadcast it by shouting across the room. Parents will also be informed if this situation arises.

(Amend to reflect your policy re sunscreen, if required)

When applying sunscreen most children will be encouraged to do as much as possible themselves – with staff supervision to ensure it is done properly..... you will be expected to.....

There may be other situations where more personal care or physical contact is needed e.g. helping children change at swimming pools, applying first aid: get guidance from other staff in these situations and as much as possible remain visible to other staff or children.

If you have any concerns or are uncomfortable with the personal care tasks you are asked to do, please raise this with a senior colleague as soon as possible.

Professional conduct and relationships with children

You are in a trusted role and so we expect you to act responsibly at all times. Any misuse or abuse of this trust has the potential to harm the people in our programme and those who rely on our service.

Positive, friendly relationships help children enjoy the programme and contribute to their social and emotional wellbeing. However, awareness and caution are needed when developing relationships with children, so as to keep these relationships fully professional. You are not their friend.

Bias and favouritism – real or perceived – can undermine positive relationships at the programme and 'special relationships' could contribute to this.

A sense of warmth and some degree of bonding or attachment may result from your day-to-day interactions with children – that’s normal when the focus is on fun. Anything further – such as affection, infatuation, friendship and social contact outside of the programme - is not appropriate. This includes contact on social media and any form of personal messaging or on-line contact.

Where staff and children already have a social connection outside the programme – friendship, family ties etc. we expect you to let us know. You will be asked to minimise these social connections during the programme by reducing your time interacting during the programme, not being assigned to groups together etc.

If you have concerns about any relationship in the programme, or how anyone is interacting, we encourage you to raise this confidentially with a senior colleague. Gossip or any form of personal criticism outside of the appropriate processes is unprofessional and may lead to disciplinary action.

Sexual abuse in OSCAR

It is an unfortunate fact that there have been incidents of sexual abuse involving staff and children in OSCAR services. In some instances this occurred during the programme. This is consistent with an established fact about child sexual abuse. Most of the time, the abuser is known to the child and their family.

Agencies who work in child protection have identified a set of behaviours known as “grooming”: these are behaviours carried out by potential abuser, aimed at manipulating children and the adults around those children, so that there is an opportunity for abuse to occur and a reduced likelihood of being caught. Grooming behaviours could occur over a long period e.g. a year or more.

Some examples of grooming behaviour to be aware of:

- Taking an ongoing personal interest in a child e.g. asking about personal information; turning up at events that the child is also attending; soliciting invitations to family events
- Affectionate physical behaviour with children – touching, stroking hair, play fighting
- Compliments or excessive praise towards a child, even when not really warranted
- Being alone with or having private conversations or interactions with a child
- Offering to lend personal assistance to family members, outside of programme time
- Giving favours, gifts or ‘special treats’ to a particular child

None of these on their own may mean there is actually grooming taking place but it is reasonable and professional to bring this to the attention of a senior colleague if you notice any of these occurring. We encourage you to be watchful and to take action, even if you aren’t sure exactly why you are feeling concerned.

We have to trust each other – the best way we can build and maintain that trust is to keep to a high standard of professional conduct and personal boundaries, and to be prepared to raise concerns if we have them. In this way, we create an environment that is less attractive to potential abusers and still fun, friendly, warm and caring for children.

Abusive behaviour between children

We have included this topic because it does include issues relevant to child protection but overlapping more with behaviour guidance policies. You may prefer to keep this section brief. We have a separate resource that is more in depth about verbal abuse.

Physical, sexual, verbal or emotional abuse or harassment is not tolerated at our programme.

Abusive or offensive language

In responding to abusive language, it is important to keep calm. Sometimes abusive language is motivated by the speaker wanting a reaction (e.g. outrage or maybe it was a poor attempt at humour). Even when someone has been hurt or deeply offended by certain language or words, it is best to remain calm and give a simple, clear verbal reprimand e.g. “That’s not OK – stop it now.”

To help children respond to abusive language and any form of bullying, we recommend the SPOT/WALK/TALK approach practiced in many schools under the “Positive Behaviour for Learning” (PB4L) system. (See OSCN resource: Verbal Abuse and Offensive Language: How Do We Stop it?)

Serious abusive incidents / sexual behaviour

Serious incidents should be reported immediately to a senior colleague and it may be decided to keep those involved separate until there has been a proper investigation of the incident.

If you observe children involved in physically inappropriate contact e.g. of a sexual or intimate nature, remain calm, ask them to stop immediately. If anyone seems upset, you may need to reassure them that you are there to help. Take notice of what they say but do not get into a lot of questions about what was happening.

It is normal for children to incorporate some sexual subjects and behaviour in their play, but it is advisable to discuss anything you observe with a senior colleague and to be aware of any other concerning signs such as the use of bullying or forceful coercion or sexual play between children of very different ages.

As soon as possible, report any serious abusive incident to a senior colleague. You may want to ask the children involved to come with you, so you can continue to supervise them. You will be asked to write an incident report – including who was involved and what was said. Take note of other staff and children who were present, as potential witnesses.

We will keep information about an incident as private as possible. Parents of the children involved will also be asked to keep details confidential to allow proper investigation and resolution. Please be sure to check with a senior colleague first before discussing incidents or children’s behaviour with parents.