



Playgroup Policy

Child Protection

Purpose of this requirement

To ensure that all children and young people practice their right to be emotionally and physically safe at all times. Every organisation that works with children has an obligation to protect children from exploitation and abuse. It is the responsibility of Mapoon Playgroup Staff to create and maintain protective environments for children.

Mapoon Playgroup will take every practicable step to ensure that all members feel safe within a setting of mutual respect, and that any allegations of child abuse are dealt with consistently and appropriately.

Applicability of this requirement

These policies and procedures concerning child protection have the following goals:

- To provide ways to minimise the risk of child abuse to youth members;
- To ensure that all allegations of child abuse or suspected child abuse are handled in a consistent and appropriate manner.

This policy provides guidance in the following specific areas:

- Understanding child abuse;
- Identifying child abuse;
- Responding to situations of suspected or known child abuse;
- Prevention.

Definition of Child Abuse

The Children's Protection Act 1993 categorises child abuse in four ways:

- Sexual abuse;
- Physical abuse;
- Emotional abuse;
- Neglect.

Responding to Suspected Child Abuse

A. Basic Principles

Everything must be done to ensure the ongoing safety of the child concerned along with any other child in the alleged perpetrator's circle. The child is the primary concern and ALL other concerns (including guilt or innocence of the alleged offender) are secondary. This does not mean that the alleged offender is to be considered guilty without due investigation. Under no circumstances must any child be left in a hazardous situation or in a potentially hazardous situation.

B. Reporting

The law states that certain people must report their concerns if they have reasonable grounds to suspect a child has been, or is being abused or is neglected. Certain members of the community are bound by law as mandated notifiers, however child protection is a community responsibility and any person can report suspected child abuse to the Child Abuse Report Line (131 478).

If the alleged offender is a member, volunteer or staff member of Mapoon Playgroup, the Association will immediately advise the alleged offender in writing that a report has been made that involves them and that he/she is suspended from all Playgroup activities until the matter is investigated by the appropriate authorities. This action is procedural

policy, and not an indication or implication of guilt or otherwise of any person reported upon. If an allegation is made against a staff member, that person will be stood-down until the matter is finalised.

It is important that no details of the report be communicated to the alleged offender. This must be left to the authorities.

If allegations are substantiated, the accused person will be immediately dismissed from the Association and action taken to ensure that he/she cannot be readmitted.

C. Responding to a Child Who Discloses Abuse

When a child under 18 years of age begins to share with you an experience of abuse the following guidelines should be followed:

- Listen carefully to the child;
- Reassure the child that you believe him/her. It is essential to understand that children rarely fabricate allegations of abuse and therefore all disclosures of abuse should be believed and actioned;
- Reassure the child that what happened is not the child's fault. Children are never responsible for violence or sexual misbehaviour inflicted on them by other people;
- Reassure the child that they have done the right thing in telling someone, and that you are pleased that the child has shared this with you. Perpetrators often threaten a victim in an attempt to ensure silence;
- Acknowledge that it is hard to talk about these issues;
- Do not press the child for details. It is not your role to conduct an investigation. Asking leading questions may in fact prejudice any subsequent investigations;
- Do not make promises that you cannot keep (e.g. confidentiality);
- Tell the child that certain adults who can protect them need to be informed so that the abuse can stop;
- As soon as possible after the conversation, phone the Child Abuse Report Line and submit a report to Mapoon Aboriginal Shire Council;
- Make notes of the conversation immediately whilst the facts are still fresh in your mind for reporting purposes.

D. Forming a Suspicion on Reasonable Grounds that Abuse or Neglect Has Occurred

It is important to realise that it is not essential to have absolute proof that abuse has occurred before following the notification procedures outlined in this policy.

All that is required is that you have formed a suspicion on reasonable grounds that abuse has occurred. Suspicion on reasonable grounds to notify child abuse may include the following:

- When a child tells you he or she has been abused. The report procedure must be followed as soon as possible after a child discloses the abuse to you. Rarely, if ever, do children lie about abuse. Every disclosure must be taken seriously. Do not confront a person named by a child, leave this to the authorities.
- When a child informs you that he or she knows someone who has been abused.

The report procedure should also be followed in this situation and if the child identifies the victim then that information can form part of the report. However, the child could actually be speaking of him/herself.

Adapted from South Australian Child Protection Council, 1994, even if the child does not name this "friend" a suspicion of their own abuse has been raised, and a report should be made. Do not confront a person named by a child as a person who has been abused, leave this to the authorities.

- If someone else who is in a position to know (perhaps a relative, friend, neighbour or sibling of the child) informs you that a child is suffering abuse. Any information received from a person who is in a position to provide reliable information should always be taken seriously and the notification procedures outlined in the policy should be followed. A report must be made, even though you might reasonably believe someone else has made a report.
- When you make observations of a particular child's behaviour and/or injuries.
- If a child's behaviour or appearance indicates that abuse or sexual misbehaviour may be occurring and/or displays some of the symptoms of abuse, then a suspicion on reasonable grounds has arisen and a report should be made.

It is important to recognise that one or two indicators alone do not necessarily mean that abuse is occurring. Try to identify a pattern of indicators emerging. If there is any doubt, the Child Abuse Report Line will provide advice on reporting.

E. Possible General Indicators of an Offender

- When the majority of a suspected abuser's relationships are with children. (Some abusers don't relate well to people of their own age);
- Is over friendly/familiar with children;
- Describes children as angelic or pure;
- Has low self-esteem, poor self-image;
- Possible sexual abuse as a child;
- May remove himself/herself mid-way through an activity to have time with children who may be in the toilets;
- Gives articles of his/her clothing to a child as gifts, e.g. a cap, a jacket, footy shirt etc. This is an attempt to demonstrate ownership of the child;
- Carries photos of children other than his/her own, often indicating that these children love him/her;
- Gives extreme affection to children, e.g. front-on close hugging, always touching or flirting;
- Flatters children and boosts their egos;
- Pays special attention to sad, isolated or lonely children and those in single parent families;
- Displays withdrawn, placid demeanour;
- Over emphasis upon morality – are legalistic and inflexible. Could well be a reflection of his/her own bad actions;
- Strong denial of offence or any intention to offend;
- Convincing in protests of innocence – has developed this as a defence mechanism. May be very outspoken about child sex offenders;
- Avoids screening processes, or attempts to do so;
- Attempts to engineer opportunities to be alone with a child, e.g., babysitting, targets single parents, child minding, etc.;
- Offers to take or takes child home, shopping or on an outing. Offers to collect child from school;
- Dislikes submission to authority, prefers to work alone, and is negative (or dismissive) when sexual abuse topics are raised;
- Spends considerable time with children;
- Voices opinion on sex education, suggesting that children are not taught properly.

F. Possible Domestic indicators of an Offender

- Shows improper behaviour;
- Showers with children;
- Expects an open door policy in the bathroom;
- Attempts to sit children on lap, even when child or adolescent resists.

If you have a reason to suspect a child in Queensland is experiencing harm, or is at risk of experiencing harm, you need to contact [Child Safety Services](#):

- **During normal business hours** - contact the [Regional Intake Service](#).
- **After hours and on weekends** - contact the Child Safety After Hours Service Centre on **1800 177 135** or (07) 3235 9999. The service operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

You can also report your concerns to Child Safety by completing an [online report form](#).

If you believe a child is in immediate danger or in a life-threatening situation, contact the Queensland Police Service immediately by dialling **000**.

Queensland Police Service has a number of child protection and investigation units across Queensland. To contact the Queensland Police Service, contact the [Police District Communication Centre](#) nearest you.

If you aren't sure who to call, or for assistance to locate your nearest child safety service centre, contact Child Safety Services' Enquiries Unit on **1800 811 810**. Child safety service centres have professionally trained child protection staff who are skilled in dealing with information about harm or risk of harm to children.

When you make a report to Child Safety Services or the Queensland Police Service, your details are kept confidential and your identity is strictly protected.

The [Child Protection Guide](#) supports professionals in making decisions about whether a child is at risk of becoming a child in need of protection, and whether a report should be made to Child Safety.

RESPONSIBILITIES

This requirement is to be implemented by: All Mapoon Playgroup Staff