



## Information sheet 6

### Safety for Workers Reporting Child Protection Concerns

WA Health has a range of Codes of Practices, Policies, Procedures, Operational Directives and Guidelines which address the issue of occupational health and safety. This information sheet complements these documents. It is the responsibility of all employees to familiarise themselves with the documents that apply to their work role/work area. Links to key documents are listed at the end of this Information Sheet.

WA Health Policy regarding the protection of children requires all WA Health employees to make a referral to the local Department for Child Protection and Family Support (CPFS) District Office whenever they have reasonable grounds for concern regarding the safety and wellbeing of a child because of abuse or neglect. In addition, as mandatory reporters, all doctors, nurses and midwives are legally obliged to make a report to CPFS whenever they have 'formed a reasonable belief' that a child has been sexually abused.

Making a referral or report to CPFS can give rise to significant and legitimate safety concerns for the individual worker. However, there are several things that the worker can do either prior to, or within the body of the referral or report, or after submitting a referral/report to CPFS, that can minimise the potential possible risk to workers as a result of reporting a child protection concern.

#### Prior to submitting a referral/report

- **Consulting with others**

This provides the opportunity to discuss any decision to make a referral or submit a mandatory report of child sexual abuse or notification of child abuse and neglect. It also provides the opportunity to talk with line managers to discuss any concerns you might have regarding possible ramifications for yourself. It is the responsibility of health managers to take such concerns seriously and to follow the Occupational Health and Safety Guidelines (see below).

- **Letting the family know that CPFS is going to be informed**

The WA Health Protection of Children Policy stipulates that parents should be notified when a notification/report is being made to CPFS. In most instances the worker will be able to do this safely. This open communication with parents enhances the likelihood that any issues the family may have with this action can be openly and honestly discussed and resolved, thereby negating the fear of possible retribution through being identified at a later date as the reporter.

However, on occasion the worker may decide, preferably after consultation, that it is advisable NOT to notify the family that a report is being made to CPFS due to safety concerns for the child, other children or family members, or safety concerns for the worker.

#### Alerting CPFS to concerns for worker safety when making a child protection concern notification or mandatory report of child sexual abuse

If safety concerns have been identified then CPFS should be informed and the reasons for them through a phone conversation prior to submitting the notification/report and then in the notification/report itself, detailing worker concerns and the content and outcome of the phone conversation with CPFS. If the reporter has decided not to inform the family that a notification/report is being made then this fact, and the reasons for this decision, should be documented within the report.

If the WA Health staff with whom the worker has consulted and shared their concerns, prior to the referral or report being made, are willing to be co-signatories to the notification or the report this can further assist to allay worker concerns.

### After submitting a referral or a mandatory report

If concerns for the safety of a worker only become apparent after you have submitted a report, or become apparent in spite of any action you have taken before submitting a report, you should:

- 1. Identify what the specific safety concern is and the reason for it.** For example. you have been informed by CPFS that, on investigation, the family mentioned their belief that you had been the reporter although, as per their practice CPFS did not confirm this in any way; or a family in your neighbourhood who is aware of your work role starts shouting 'dobber' at you every time they walk past your house.
- 2. Identify who you need to talk to so that your safety concerns can be acted on appropriately.** This will usually be your line manager or a senior manager. You can identify concerns via telephone or email contact but face-to-face discussion is usually the best method to ensure any appropriate action can be planned and put into place.
- 3. With the line manager/manager identify the strategies that can be put into place to ensure your safety.** These might include; contacting CPFS, ensuring the workplace has efficient security screens etc, organising escorts to and from the car park. Occasionally necessary strategies might reach the level of contacting the police and, in the most extreme of circumstances, considering work relocation, even if for just in the short term.

### Remember:

Your employer has a responsibility to ensure that you are safe both within work time, and outside work if any risk is associated with your work. CPFS is professionally and legally bound by Section 141 and Division 9A 124F of the *Children and Community Services Act 2004* not to reveal the identity of a reporter to anyone else – with some exclusions. If you become aware, or suspect, that this mandate has been broken, speak to your line manager immediately.

- **Prevention is better than anything else.** While it is not always possible to prevent possible risk, or prevent legitimate feelings related to concerns for safety of self or family as a result of taking action child protection, undertaking the process outlined above can reduce possible retribution, and fear of retribution.
- **Competant workers speak up.** Those who have safety concerns may sometimes choose not to let anyone else in their workplace know that they have submitted a report. While this is within your rights, it might not always be in your best interests as it might then become difficult to raise any safety concerns with others. If your employer does not know about any safety concerns you may have then they cannot do anything about them. It is good professional practice, supported by management and WA Health policies, to openly discuss your safety concerns. Discussing any such concerns does not mean that you will be seen as incompetent, inadequate or unnecessarily fearful; rather it means you are a competent worker who is taking legitimate and proactive steps to ensure that their safety as a worker is not compromised.

### Some Key WA Health Policies on worker safety:

- [Code of Practice; Occupational Safety and Health in the Western Australian Public Sector 2007](#)
- [OP 1821/04: Prevention of workplace aggression and violence](#)
- [Code of Practice; Violence, Aggression and Bullying at Work](#)

**Whenever a health professional has clear concerns of physical, emotional, sexual abuse and/or neglect happening to the child they are seeing, or any other child in the family, they have a responsibility to take action to ensure that protective measures are put in place.**

**Refer to *Guidelines for Protecting Children 2015* for further information and guidance.**