



Horsham Rural City
Council urban rural balance

Council Procedure

REPORTING A CHILD SAFETY CONCERN

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this procedure is for Council to make staff and the community aware of the processes associated with reporting a child safety concern.

The Horsham Rural City Council is required under legislation to effectively manage the risk of abuse occurring toward children, and report on any offences that occur. Effective management of child safety requires Council to commit to the **Reporting a Child Safety Concern Procedure**. This document should be read in conjunction with the **Child Safe Policy**.

2. SCOPE

This procedure applies to all Councillors, staff, volunteers any individual performing employment-related duties on behalf of Horsham Rural City Council.

3. DEFINITIONS

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Child - A person under the age of 18 who identifies as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Abuse - Any act committed against a child that involves:

- neglect or abuse of a physical, emotional, psychological or cultural nature
- Physical violence
- Sexual offences

Child/children - A person under the age of 18

Child Safety Officer - A council employee with a specific responsibility for responding to any issues associated with child safety

Child safe organisation - An organisation which takes deliberate steps to protect children from physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and cultural abuse, and neglect. Child safety is proactively embedded in all areas of the organisation.

Failure to Disclose - When an adult has a 'reasonable belief' that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child they have an obligation to report it to police, (unless exemptions apply). Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence.

Failure to Protect - Applies to people within organisations who knew of a risk of child sexual abuse by someone in the organisation and had the authority to reduce or remove the risk, but did not act to protect the child. This is a criminal offence.

Harm - Describes an event that is seen as possibly less detrimental than 'abuse' but is clearly not in a person's best interest of promoting their safety and wellbeing.

What is child abuse

Emotional/psychological	Occurs when a person engages in inappropriate behaviours, such as rejecting, ignoring, humiliating, isolating, threatening or verbally abusing a child, or allowing others to do so. Because this kind of abuse does not leave physical injuries, it is often hidden and underestimated.
Grooming	Is a criminal offence which targets communication by an adult, including online communication, with a child or their parents with the intent of committing child sexual abuse.
Neglect	Is failing to meet a child's basic needs, such as providing adequate food, drink, shelter, clothing, supervision, hygiene and medical attention.
Physical	Is intentionally causing, or threatening to cause, physical injury to a child, or inadvertently causing injury as a consequence of physical punishment or physically aggressive treatment of a child. The injury may take the form of bruises, cuts, burns or fractures.
Racial, cultural, religious abuse	Is conduct that demonstrates contempt, ridicule, hatred or negativity towards a child because of their race, culture or religion. It may be overt, such as direct racial vilification or discrimination, or covert, such as demonstrating a lack of cultural respect (attitude and values) and awareness (knowledge and understanding) or failing to provide positive images about another culture.
Sexual abuse	A child is sexually abused when any person uses their authority over the child to involve the child in sexual activity. Child sexual abuse involves a wide range of sexual activity including fondling genitals, masturbation, vaginal or anal penetration by a finger, penis or any other object, voyeurism and exhibitionism.
Sexual exploitation	Is considered a specific form of sexual abuse because children, by virtue of their age and development, are unable to give informed consent. It can include children being involved in sexually exploitive relationships, exposing a child to pornography, receiving money, goods, drug or favours in exchange for sex with one or more adults, or being exploited in more 'formal' forms of sex work.

4. INTRODUCTION

Horsham Rural City Council has zero tolerance to child abuse and is committed to promoting and protecting children from child abuse. Council takes all allegations of child abuse seriously and is committed to:

- Proving processes for reporting allegations of child abuse
- Ensuring an efficient and thorough investigation and /or referral where required
- Maintaining adequate record keeping and reports of child abuse
- Ensuring our staff know what to do and who to tell if they suspect or observe child abuse
- Reporting allegations of child abuse to the appropriate authorities

5. ACTIONS

It is the responsibility of all staff to report any child safety concerns as soon as practical. To ensure compliance with legislation and the protection of children, **any** adult who has a reasonable belief that a child has been or is at risk of abuse whether in their organisation or not, has an obligation to report in accordance with this policy.

5.1 Good Faith Reporting

Reports by staff should be made in good faith. The law generally protects those that report in good faith from legal repercussions and in some cases also prevents the disclosure of the name/identification of the person who has made a report.

5.2 Risk management issues

Where complaints are received on matters that have resulted in physical injury or pose such a threat, these are handled through Council's risk management system and will not be handled through the reporting a child safety concern policy.

5.3 Reporting

Individuals must report when they observe or suspect that a child is or has been the subject of abuse including physical violence, sexual abuse, serious emotional or psychological abuse and serious neglect.

A suspicion may exist if:

- A child tells of conduct that constitutes abuse or neglect
- A child displays indicators of abuse or neglect

Staff are also required to report general concerns such as:

- Physical environmental risks to children
- Breaches in the code of conduct (adults behaviour toward children)
- Observing inappropriate or uncomfortable interactions between adults and children

- Observing concerning changes in a child's behaviour

As per the child safety reporting flowchart (appendix 1), all child safety concerns should be reported to the child safety officer as soon as practicable.

If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse call 000.

5.4 Responding to Incident Disclosure

If a child or family discloses an incident of abuse to you:

- Stay calm and remain objective
- Explain that there is a process for dealing with the report
- Explain that the information will need to be shared with others including the police
- Keep a written record of the report
- Contact the Child Safety officer as soon as practicable

5.5 Reports concerning a Councillor or employee of HRCC

If the allegation involves a member of the organisation:

- Explain that there are processes for dealing with the complaint
- Contact the Child Safety officer as soon as practicable

The Child Safety officer will then:

- **Call 000 if they believe a child is at immediate risk of child abuse**
- accurately record the report in their own words and complete a child safety incident report (appendix 2)
- Alert the police and or child protection
- Alert the CE and other relevant personnel in the organisation
- Assist the child/family to access appropriate counselling and advocacy
- Inform the child/family of the steps that the organisation will take

5.6 Investigating

If required, the Police and Child Protection may decide to conduct an investigation. All staff, contractors and volunteers must fully comply with any such investigation.

Whether or not a criminal investigation is pursued by the police, the CE will consult with the Child Safety officers to determine if an internal investigation should take place.

The CE will:

- Await police clearance on any criminal matters before commencing any investigation
- Make every effort to maintain and ensure confidentiality during the investigation process
- coordinate the investigation with the relevant authorities

5.7 Responding

If the allegations involve a staff member, contractor or volunteer then the person concerned may be stood down (with pay, where applicable) until the investigation is complete, (as per the Dispute Resolution policy).

If the investigation concludes that there has been a breach of the Code of Conduct- Adults behaviour towards children, then any of the following actions may occur:

- Dismissal
- Cessation of involvement with HRCC
- Reports made to the relevant Authorities

At all stages the child/family should be aware of the processes under taken and the resulting actions.

6. COMMUNICATION

Website, customer service points of contact, Intranet, staff meetings.

7. RESPONSIBILITY

Policy Owner: Director Community Services

8. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

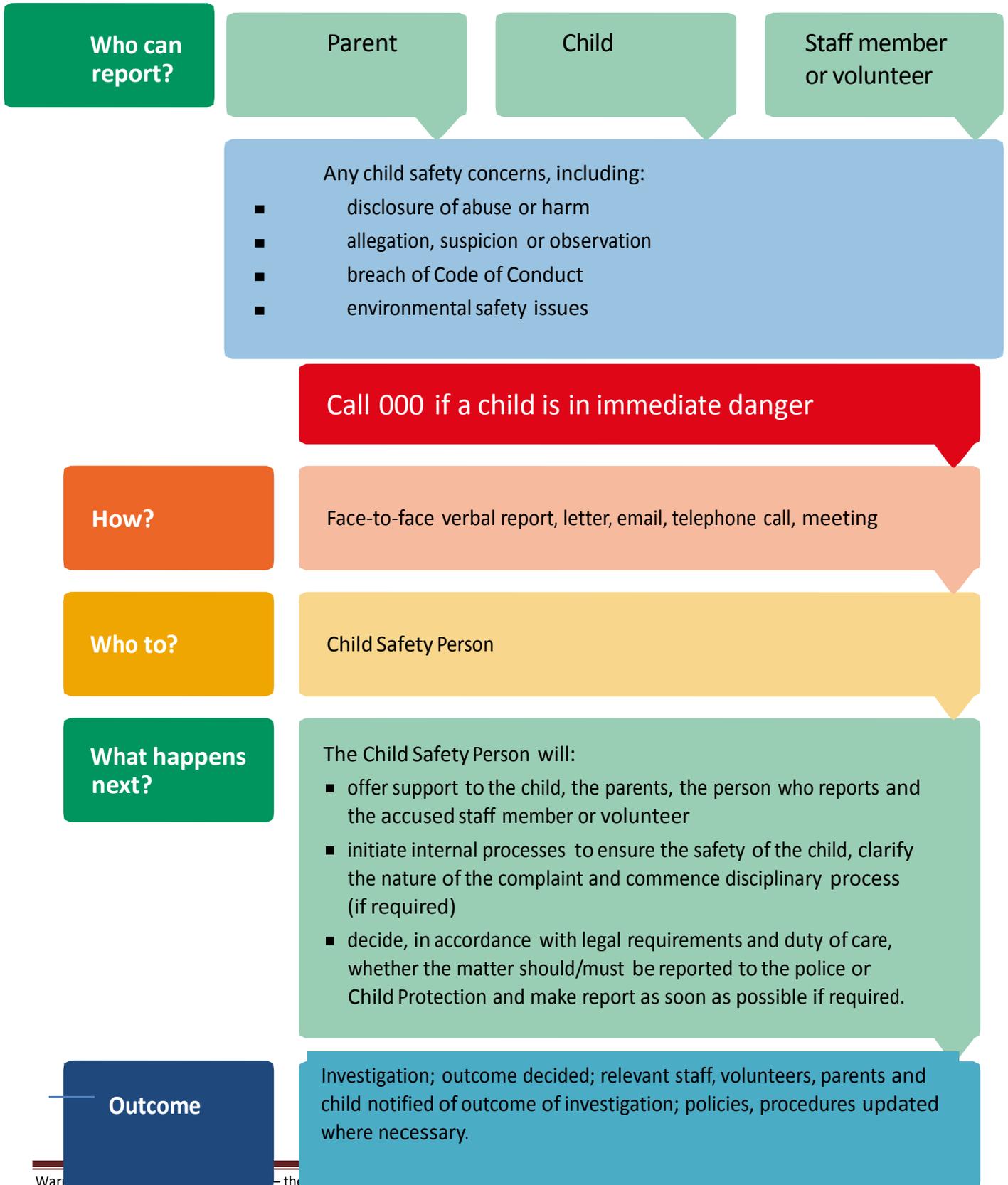
Document	Location
Code of Conduct- Adults Behaviour Towards Children	Intranet
Child Safe Policy	Intranet
Disputes Resolution Policy	Intranet
Councillors Code of Conduct	Intranet

9. DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version Number	Approval Date	Approval By	Amendment	Review Date
01	20 November 2017	Council	New Procedure	20 November 2020

Appendix 1

Flowchart: Child safety reporting process



Appendix 2

Child Safe Incident Report

Incident details

Date of incident:	
Time of incident:	
Location of incident:	
Name(s) of child/children involved:	
Name(s) of staff/volunteer involved:	

If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse phone 000.

Does the child identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?

(Mark with an 'X' as applicable)

No

Yes, Aboriginal

Yes, Torres Strait Islander

Please categorise the incident

Physical violence

Sexual offence

Serious emotional or psychological abuse

Serious neglect

Please describe the incident

When did it take place?	
Who was involved?	
What did you see?	

Other information	
--------------------------	--

Parent/carer/child use

Date of incident:	
Time of incident:	
Location of incident:	
Name(s) of child/children involved:	
Name(s) of staff/volunteer involved:	

Office use:

Date incident report received:	
Staff member managing incident:	
Follow-up date:	
Incident ref. number:	

Has the incident been reported?

Child protection	
Police	
Another third party (please specify):	

Incident reporter wishes to remain anonymous?

(Mark with an 'X' as applicable)

Yes No