

Child protection

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1. Keep Them Safe

"Expanding the role of non-government organisations (NGOs) in providing services to children and families is a critical component of Keep Them Safe" (keepingthemsafe.com.au)

All NCCH staff are considered mandatory reporters, by the NSW government, in regards to the safety, wellbeing and welfare of children. A mandatory reporter is a person who has a legal obligation to report all concerns regarding child welfare and to act on those concerns. Changes to the legislation governing child protection made in the *Children Legislation Amendment (Wood Inquiry Recommendations) Act 2009* expand an individual and organisations responsibility to include a more broad response when concerns are noted.

One of the notable changes is the definition and responsibilities related of 'risk of harm'. The Act places the responsibility to respond to 'Significant Risk of Harm' with the Department of Families and Community Services (FACS), and the responsibility to respond to 'Risk of Harm' with prescribed bodies, of which NCCH is one. This distinction is not always clear, determined by any factors, of which the 'online reporting guide' helps workers to determine whether to report (or not).

In most cases, those issues that are not considered significant risk of harm are not reported but still need to be addressed. This shift of reporting levels has been made with the intention to allow FACS resources to respond to those circumstances with immediate significant risk of harm and to ensure that child wellbeing is a shared responsibility with services collaborating, to address the 'risk of harm' factors.

NCCH takes its duty to children seriously and as such provides training and support and procedural instructions in these areas for all staff.

2. Our "Keep Them Safe" process

Observations and events may lead staff to believe a child or children are at risk of harm. This may be during a home visit or over a few home visits, during a phone call or a visit to the office. This could also be in the form of a report from a family member, neighbours or friends to the NCCH office.

The observations and events to look out for are varied and 'at risk' is often made up from combination of incidents. Here is a list of possible incidents that NCCH staff made take note of:

Physical Abuse and or Domestic Violence	Scratches, bruising, bite marks, torn clothing, pain when walking, other signs of DV
Damage to Property	Domestic violence - holes in walls from punching walls, holes from slamming doors open or closed, kicking holes in walls, broken windows
Comments	The way a child talks about someone that might be abusive (that they are scared of them, that they are being hurt, etc.); the way parents talk to each other or to the children (e.g. swearing, yelling, name calling, abusive comments, etc.); or reports from other people, reports from parents
Behaviours	Scared to talk, looking over shoulder, nervous, low self esteem, stalking behaviours
AOD abuse	Parents consistently being under the influence, evidence of excessive drug utensils in property
Mental health	Unmanaged mental health concerns, parent needing to go into care
At risk tenancy	Looming eviction
Housing presentation	No bedding for children or no beds, no toilet paper, unhygienic living conditions, rubbish not being removed, no food in house and or no evidence the kitchen is being used or cleaned.

3. Reporting our concerns

NCCH staff access the Online Reporting Guide: www.keepingthemsafe.nsw.gov.au and then follow the reporting guide questions until the end result.

If the Guide tells us to make a report to the hotline, then the report will always be made. Once any report is made, NCCH staff are required to document the events and to record a reference number and any other relevant information

If the Guide informs the staff members that a report is not necessary, the staff member is requested to discuss the matter with their immediate Manager (or to schedule a meeting to discuss the situation). Once again, the responsibility rests with NCCH staff to take all reasonable steps to minimise any risk of harm, even where the outcome of the online reporting guide is that NCCH should not make a report.

If it is decided by the Manager to make a report to the reporting hotline (when the reporting guide has not deemed it necessary to do so), approval to make the report must be received from one of the NCCH Privacy Officer. The role of Privacy Officer is to quality control what information is leaving our organisation. Any information that leaves our organisation about a tenant could be considered a breach of the privacy laws and as such this matter is taken very seriously.

4. Planning a course of action

Where appropriate, our staff are asked to agree on a course of action based on the following three principles.

Engagement (with family)	Information Exchange	Collaboration (Between other support services)
Rising concerns with parents if you feel safe to do so. Clarify specific factors of risk	Information exchange between other agencies (using section 16A of the Act).	Case conferences with all concerned agencies; schools, FACS, police, ADAHC, other community agencies
3 monthly house inspections – keeping up presence in home and building rapport.	Contact Child Well Being Units	Referrals to Family Referral Program, Brighter Futures, Domestic violence support groups, etc.
Setting goals with family to move children out of at risk situations	Keep records of all requests to and from NCCH	Joint visits to house with other agencies
Transparency with our processes and our obligations	Building a clear case	Keeping clear trails of information sharing between agencies, also setting up agency group emails.
Discussing referral options		Communicating clear responsibilities and limitations of services

5. Exchanges of information

The child protection reforms in NSW (“Keep Them Safe”) made some changes to how information regarding a child or young person at risk can be shared, allowing information to be exchanged more easily than under previous legislation.

Information can be requested from other organisations (who are “prescribed bodies”) to:

- make a decision or undertake an assessment or plan
- initiate or conduct an investigation
- provide a service, where there is a concern relating to the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a child or young person, or to
- manage any risk to the child or young person.

What information may be requested?

Depending on what information is requested, it may include relevant, factual information held on:

- a child or young person’s circumstances or history
- a parent or other family member
- people having a significant or relevant relationship with a child or young person
- the other agencies’ dealings with the child or young person, including past support or service arrangements.

Consent from the NCCH tenant is not necessary for the exchange of information under Section 16A of the Act. However, NCCH believe it is important that organisations providing a service to a child, young person or their parents inform them early on that information about them may be provided, or is being provided, to other organisations.

Keeping the client informed is part of best practice case management and helps to maximise client engagement.

Information about the right of NCCH to exchange information with other prescribed bodies under section 16A of the Act is included in the NCCH Privacy Statement and is provided to all new tenants of NCCH.

NCCH has the right to refuse to provide information to another prescribed body if it is believed it would prejudice an investigation of a possible breach of a law, care proceedings or a coronial inquest, endanger a person’s life, or is not in the public interest.

6. Staff Welfare

During the process of their work, NCCH staff can be exposed to people’s lives that include trauma and tragedy. Most of the time we are resilient in the face of this, but over time and with repeat exposure, we understand that the resilience of NCCH staff can be tested. This is often the case when children are involved.

NCCH recognises that this stress can adversely affect workers in many ways, one of them being vicarious trauma. This is why NCCH provides its entire staff with safety measures to address these possible stressors:

- A service that provides free counselling for our staff and/or family members when stressful situations are affecting their lives.
- The expectation for staff to debrief with line managers and supervisors around issues that have triggered or could trigger emotional responses (and for those managers to have adept skills in debriefing).
- Training and tools to help staff identify their workplace health and safety obligations
- Training and tools to help staff understand our *Keep Them Safe* processes

INFORMATION

Title	Child Protection
Section	Housing Services
National Regulatory Code Evidence Guideline	Performance Outcome 1: Tenant and Housing Services
National Community Housing Standard	Standard 1.2 Establishing and maintaining tenancies
Last review	12 June 2015
Next review	12 June 2017

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NCCH acknowledges the Bundjalung, Arakwal, Gumbaynggir and Yaegl peoples who are the traditional custodians of the land that comprises the Northern Rivers.