

Reporting Concerns about the Safety and Wellbeing of Children and Young People

All adults in our community have a responsibility to look out for children and keep them safe. An important early step if you're worried about a child is to contact the Advice and Referral Line. A staff member will be available to talk through your concerns and explore what can be done to help.

Mandatory Reporters

In Tasmania, mandatory reporting requirements are outlined in the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997*.

People who are legally obliged to report child abuse or neglect are sometimes called 'mandatory reporters' or 'prescribed persons'. They include medical practitioners, nurses, dentists, police officers, psychologists, probation officers, child welfare officers, school principals, ministers of religion, teachers, kindergarten teachers, people who manage child care services and people employed by or volunteering in government agencies or organisations funded by the Crown that provide health, welfare, education or care for children.

If you are a mandatory reporter and you believe, suspect or know that a child has been or is being abused or neglected you must contact the Advice and Referral Line as soon as possible. If you don't do this you could face penalties

When to Make a Report

As a mandatory reporter you need to contact the Advice and Referral Line as soon as possible if you know, believe or suspect that an unborn baby, child or young person:

- is being abused or neglected or is an affected child within the meaning of the *Family Violence Act 2004*; or
- may be killed, abused or neglected by a person who they live with; or
- if the baby isn't born yet, that he or she may need medical treatment or other intervention as a result of behaviour by the pregnant woman or another person.

You don't need to wait until you have evidence. Staff at the Advice and Referral Line will always want to hear from you if you're worried about a child's safety or wellbeing. You might be worried because:

- a child has told you something themselves;
- Another person has told you something;
- you've personally observed things; or
- you've come across information that makes you think a child might be unsafe.

What to Expect

A staff member will talk to you about the situation for the child and their family. This will include what you're worried about, anything that is going well for the child and their family, and what you think might help. The staff member will also:

- ask for your name and work details and whether or not you agree for this to be shared with the family.
- find out if you've already been doing some things to help the family and if the family know that you're concerned.
- assess the risk to the child based on what you've said and other information available to them.
- make a record of the conversation including the information you've given and any agreements you've made together
- talk to you about next steps to be taken

Your Confidentiality

People who call the Advice and Referral Line have a legal right to confidentiality. The staff member will record your details, but won't disclose your identity without your consent unless they need to consult with another person acting in the course of official duties under the Act (such as another Advice and Referral Line staff member or a Child Safety Officer); or if they've been ordered to by a court.

Staff will do their best to maintain your confidentiality if this is what you request. However, staff will need to talk to the family about what has been reported, and in many cases the family will guess where the information came from. The staff member can talk to you about this scenario, how it may impact you and the child and how you plan to respond.

Talking to the Family about Concerns

You can call the Advice and Referral Line without speaking to the family first. You should always do this if you think that raising your concerns with the family might increase risk to the child.

Some people also prefer not to raise their concerns with the family directly because they don't have an existing or ongoing relationship with the family or because they're worried about their personal safety.

However, in most cases talking to families about safety and wellbeing issues early and openly can be a way of gaining or maintaining their trust, reducing their anxiety and identifying solutions before things get more difficult.

To achieve change and build safety for children it helps staff from the Advice and Referral Line and the Child Safety Service to be able to talk openly with the family about who is worried and what they are noticing that makes them worried. This can help the family to acknowledge issues and accept support for themselves and their children.

How to make Contact

The Advice and Referral Line operates between the hours of 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday. For after-hours call 1800 000 123 at any time and remain on the line until your call is answered. If a child is at immediate risk and Police or medical assistance is required dial 000.

Phone: 1800 000 123

Email: DCT-SFSKAR@communities.tas.gov.au

Online: www.strongfamiliesafekids.tas.gov.au

Mail: Strong Families, Safe Kids Advice and Referral,

PO BOX 65,

HOBART, TASMANIA, 7001