



CHCPRT003

**Work collaboratively  
to maintain an  
environment safe  
for children and  
young people**

Release 4

**Learner guide**

Aspire Version 2.1



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**CHCPRT003 Work collaboratively to maintain an environment safe for children and young people,  
Release 4**



© 2018 One World for Children Pty Ltd  
407–411 Thompson Road  
NORTH GEELONG VIC 3215 AUSTRALIA  
Phone: (03) 5272 2714  
[www.owfc.com.au](http://www.owfc.com.au)

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© 2018 Aspire Training & Consulting  
Level 1, 464 St Kilda Road  
MELBOURNE VIC 3004 AUSTRALIA  
Phone: (03) 9820 1300

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## Before you begin

This learner guide is based on the unit of competency *CHCPRT003 Work collaboratively to maintain an environment safe for children and young people*, Release 4. Your trainer or training organisation must give you information about this unit of competency as part of your training program. You can access the unit of competency and assessment requirements at: [www.training.gov.au](http://www.training.gov.au)

## How to work through this learner guide

This learner guide contains a number of features that will assist you in your learning. Your trainer will advise which parts of the learner guide you need to read, and which practice tasks and learning checkpoints you need to complete.

Feature of the learner guide	How you can use each feature
<b>Learning content</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Read each topic in this learner guide. If you come across content that is confusing, make a note and discuss it with your trainer. Your trainer is in the best position to offer assistance. It is very important that you take on some of the responsibility for the learning you will undertake.</li> </ul>
<b>Examples</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ These highlight learning points and provide realistic examples of workplace situations.</li> </ul>
<b>Practice tasks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Practice tasks give you the opportunity to put your skills and knowledge into practice. Your trainer will tell you which practice tasks to complete.</li> </ul>
<b>Video clips</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Where QR codes appear, you can use smartphones and other devices to access video clips relating to the content. For information about how to download a QR reader app or accessing video on your device, please visit our website: <a href="http://www.aspirelr.com.au/help">www.aspirelr.com.au/help</a></li> </ul> 
<b>Summaries</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Key learning points are provided at the end of each topic.</li> </ul>
<b>Learning checkpoints</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ There are learning checkpoints at the end of each topic. Your trainer will tell you which learning checkpoints to complete. These checkpoints give you an opportunity to check your progress and apply the skills and knowledge you have learnt.</li> </ul>

## Important note for trainers and assessors

Aspire has developed this resource for *CHCPRT003 Work collaboratively to maintain an environment safe for children and young people* to suit learners undertaking this unit as an elective in Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care.

This resource has been written with an education and care service environment in mind, rather than addressing work placement in a child protection service, as stipulated by the assessment requirements for the unit of competency.

Trainers and assessors are advised they should systematically validate their assessment strategies to ensure the assessment:

- ▶ meets the requirements of the relevant training package or accredited course
- ▶ is conducted in accordance with the principles of assessment and the rules of evidence
- ▶ meets workplace and, where relevant, regulatory requirements.

Please contact Skills IQ (<https://www.skillsiq.com.au/>) to further discuss the training and assessment requirements for this unit.





## Topic 1

In this topic you will learn about:

- 1A Understanding and meeting child protection requirements**

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- 1B Recognising the impact of child abuse and neglect**

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## Implementing the principles of child protection

To implement appropriate work practices that are responsive to children and meet legislative requirements, you must be clear about your role, understand what abuse and neglect are, and be familiar with the system that supports children and families when child protection is required.

Your service's policies and procedures should clearly explain how to report child abuse and neglect, and how to maintain a high level of confidentiality. Your service must also support you through actions your supervisor takes when you report child abuse or neglect.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and *Belonging, being & becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*.

<b>National Quality Standard</b>	
	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
✓	Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety
	Quality Area 3: Physical environment
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements
✓	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children
	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership
<b>Early Years Learning Framework</b>	
<b>Principles</b>	
✓	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
✓	Partnerships
	High expectations and equity
	Respect for diversity
	Ongoing learning and reflective practice
<b>Practice</b>	
✓	Holistic approaches
✓	Responsiveness to children
	Learning through play
	Intentional teaching
	Learning environments
	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions
	Assessment for learning
<b>Outcomes</b>	
	Children have a strong sense of identity
	Children are connected to and contribute to their world
✓	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
	Children are confident and involved learners
	Children are effective communicators

# 1A Understanding and meeting child protection requirements

Each state and territory in Australia takes responsibility for child protection and family support. While each system has its own focus, there are guiding principles that are familiar to all. These principles are founded on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and have evolved to demonstrate the importance our community has placed on reducing child abuse and neglect, and supporting parents to provide healthy and safe environments for children.



Current statistics show that child abuse and neglect continue to be a problem. Children under one year are most likely to experience it and emotional abuse is the most widely reported type of abuse. Significantly, Indigenous children are almost eight times more likely to be abused, 10 times more likely to be on a care and protection order and 10 times more likely to be in out-of-home care.

## Identifying child protection principles

Guiding principles motivate the child protection system in Australia. The following table outlines the principles evident in all states and territories, a description of what each principle means and an example of how it is applied. Your state/territory will include all these principles, but may apply them in a different way and/or determine its own additional principles.

Principle	Description	Application
Best interest	<p>All actions must be taken with the best interests of the child as the foremost consideration. Policies are provided to guide how to make decisions in a way that ensures best interest is followed.</p> <p>Decisions about outcomes for children are based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ protection from harm</li> <li>▶ protection of the child's rights</li> <li>▶ promotion of the child's development</li> <li>▶ the family relationship and how it might be strengthened and assisted to promote and protect the child, and their cultural and spiritual connection with their identity and community.</li> </ul>	<p>Children will not be removed from their families or cultural community unless it is deemed to be the only option available to support the child's best interest.</p>

Principle	Description	Application
Early intervention	Prevention of abuse and neglect is a focus. Support services (linked or separate to child protection offices) are important.	Resources and support services should be provided to families before abuse and neglect occur. All services involved with a family should be aware of their role in identifying families at risk and assisting them to gain support before an abuse or neglect situation occurs.
The participation of children and young people in decision-making	Children's views are taken into consideration when making decisions about issues that affect their lives.	Children's rights need to be respected, including their right to participate in making decisions about their lives. To do this successfully, they need to be provided with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ all relevant information</li> <li>▶ the types of decisions to be made and why</li> <li>▶ positive approaches and support</li> <li>▶ communication that is appropriate for their age and ability.</li> </ul>
Out-of-home care	Out-of-home care should only be implemented if all other avenues have been exhausted. This does not apply if parents request out-of-home care.	
Culturally specific responses, including Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people	Actions taken to protect children consider the child's cultural identity and community, and attempt to maintain connection with these.	
After care support	Young people must be supported after leaving out-of-home care and entering their adult life independently. The age by which legislation provides after care support differs depending on the state/territory.	

## Understanding the child protection system in Australia

In Australia, the states and territories take responsibility for investigating and responding to child abuse and neglect issues. While this means that different systems apply across the country, each of these systems follows similar principles of investigation, substantiation, referral and case management.

Differences relate to the process and procedures for allocating priorities of notifications received. The Commonwealth Government takes responsibility for providing services for families, particularly those that target vulnerable families.

The *National framework for protecting Australia's children 2009–2020* was developed by the Commonwealth Government in cooperation with state and territory organisations and governments to reduce abuse and neglect.

The goals are for children to:

- ▶ live in safe families and communities
- ▶ have access to support and early intervention
- ▶ be supported and cared for following abuse or neglect
- ▶ be supported within their families and communities, particularly for Indigenous children
- ▶ receive adequate support
- ▶ never be subjected to sexual abuse or exploitation.

## Understanding legal requirements

Know your obligations under child protection legislation. As an educator, you have an ethical and moral duty to protect children. In some states and territories, it is mandatory for educators to report child abuse or neglect. A list of professions that must report child abuse or neglect is available at: <http://aspirelr.link/mandatory-reporting-child-abuse>. However, be aware that the current situation may change, so seek advice from your supervisor.

The following table lists the relevant child protection legislation and where to access it.

State/territory	Principal legislation	Access
Commonwealth	<i>Family Law Act 1975</i> (Cth)	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/family-law-act">http://aspirelr.link/family-law-act</a>
ACT	<i>Children and Young People Act 2008</i> (ACT)	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/children-and-young-people-act">http://aspirelr.link/children-and-young-people-act</a>
NSW	<i>Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998</i> (NSW)	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/children-and-young-persons-act">http://aspirelr.link/children-and-young-persons-act</a>
Northern Territory	<i>Care and Protection of Children Act 2007</i> (NT)	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/care-and-protection-of-children-act">http://aspirelr.link/care-and-protection-of-children-act</a>
Queensland	<i>Child Protection Act 1999</i> (Qld)	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/child-protection-act">http://aspirelr.link/child-protection-act</a>
South Australia	<i>Children's Protection Act 1993</i> (SA)	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/childrens-protection-act">http://aspirelr.link/childrens-protection-act</a>
Tasmania	<i>Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1997</i> (Tas.)	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/young-persons-families-act">http://aspirelr.link/young-persons-families-act</a>
Victoria	<i>Children, Youth and Families Act 2005</i> (Vic.)	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/youth-and-families-act">http://aspirelr.link/youth-and-families-act</a>
Western Australia	<i>Children and Community Services Act 2004</i> (WA)	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/children-community-services-act">http://aspirelr.link/children-community-services-act</a>
	<i>Family Court Act 1997</i> (WA)	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/family-court-act">http://aspirelr.link/family-court-act</a>

The following education and care services regulations and standards relate directly to child protection legislation.

Name of regulation/standard	Regulation/element	Description
Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011	Regulation 84: Awareness of child protection law	All staff members who work with children must be advised about the existence and application of current child protection laws and any obligations they may have under that law.
National Quality Standard	Element 2.2.3 Management, educators and staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities to identify and respond to every child at risk of abuse and neglect	Educators must attend training or professional development on child protection.

## Key agencies

Be familiar with the relevant child protection agencies in your state/territory. While each state and territory has individual names for its agencies and departments, the roles and responsibilities are very similar. Most have a child protection agency and a family support agency complemented by a range of support and referral services. Each government department oversees district offices or centres, which are the contact points for any notifications or investigations of suspected abuse or neglect, and any decisions made about the future of the child and family based on child protection principles.

Child protection websites in each state/territory provide similar information, such as:

- ▶ definitions of child abuse and neglect
- ▶ what child protection means
- ▶ key contacts in child protection
- ▶ who can report suspected abuse or neglect
- ▶ how to report suspected abuse or neglect
- ▶ how the risk of abuse or neglect is assessed
- ▶ information sheets for families.

The following table shows the agencies that handle reports of abuse and neglect in each state/territory, and contact lists for accessing district offices/centres. Access the website for the agencies in your state/territory and be familiar with what they offer. Ask your supervisor for assistance if there is anything you do not understand.

State/ territory	Agency/Department	Contact details
ACT	Child and Youth Protection Services	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/youth-protection-services">http://aspirelr.link/youth-protection-services</a>
New South Wales	Department of Families and Community Services	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/dep-families-community-services">http://aspirelr.link/dep-families-community-services</a>
	Child Protection Help Line	13 21 11
Northern Territory	Department of Children and Families	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/dep-children-and-families">http://aspirelr.link/dep-children-and-families</a>
		1800 700 250
Queensland	Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/dep-ccsds-qld">http://aspirelr.link/dep-ccsds-qld</a>
	Child Safety After Hours Service Centre (24 hours, 7 days per week)	1800 177 135
	Regional Intake Services (business hours only)	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/regional-intake-services">http://aspirelr.link/regional-intake-services</a>
South Australia	South Australia Department for Education and Child Development	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/child-safe-environments-sa">http://aspirelr.link/child-safe-environments-sa</a>
Tasmania	Department of Health and Human Services	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/dep-health-human-services">http://aspirelr.link/dep-health-human-services</a>
	Child Protection Services	1300 737 639 (if urgent)
		<a href="http://aspirelr.link/child-protection-tas">http://aspirelr.link/child-protection-tas</a>
Victoria	Department of Health and Human Services	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/dhs-vic">http://aspirelr.link/dhs-vic</a>
	Child Safe Standards	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/child-safe-standards-vic">http://aspirelr.link/child-safe-standards-vic</a>
	Child Protection Crisis Line (24 hours, 7 days a week)	13 12 78
	Child protection contacts – by local government area (business hours)	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/child-protection-contacts-vic">http://aspirelr.link/child-protection-contacts-vic</a>
Western Australia	Department for Child Protection and Family Support	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/dcp-wa">http://aspirelr.link/dcp-wa</a>
	District offices contact list	<a href="http://aspirelr.link/district-offices-contacts-wa">http://aspirelr.link/district-offices-contacts-wa</a>

## Supporting agencies

There are many supporting bodies that child protection services link to. Some of these are internal to the department and others act independently through referral. Police services are consistently part of all state/territory support systems.

In some departments, additional bodies have been set up as an entry point to reporting. These bodies consider the report being made, and then make a decision on the most appropriate action to take. For example, the Victorian system operates in this manner and includes:

- ▶ Child protection: for reports of a serious nature
- ▶ Child FIRST (Family Information, Referral and Support Team): a central referral and reporting point focused on working to the best interests of the family and child. Child FIRST teams operate within local council catchments.

Make sure you are familiar with the way your state/territory functions. Ask your supervisor if you are unsure. The relevant agency to contact may be mentioned in the service's child protection policies and procedures. You can find further information about support services in section 2A.

## Performing work requirements appropriately

All education and care services develop policies that reflect their state/territory's child protection legislation. You have a duty of care to follow the service's policies and procedures, and to take responsibility for the health and wellbeing of each child in the service. The daily work you are involved in is governed by this legislation and child protection principles, outlined in the following table.

Principle	Your role
Best interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Report suspected abuse and neglect early to enable early intervention and family support.</li> <li>▶ Accept responsibility for reporting actions if required.</li> </ul>
Early intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Recognise children and families at risk.</li> <li>▶ Support families prior to the occurrence of abuse or neglect.</li> <li>▶ Maintain a family-centred approach.</li> <li>▶ Develop positive relationships with families and support services.</li> </ul>
The participation of children and young people in decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Listen to children and act in their best interests.</li> </ul>
Out-of-home care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Respond respectfully and confidentially to children under court orders as well as their families and extended support systems.</li> </ul>
Culturally specific responses, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Respect children's rights and their relationships with their family, culture and community.</li> </ul>

## Meeting legal expectations

As an educator, you must report suspected abuse or neglect as a moral and ethical duty of care. When you report any suspicions, your duty of care in the matter is resolved. If you choose not to take action when you suspect abuse, your inaction could involve legal action at some point.

Mandatory reporting requirements vary in different states and territories in Australia, and laws are regularly challenged. If your job role is listed under the mandatory reporting law in your state/territory, you have a legal obligation to report suspected abuse or neglect, with hefty consequences if you choose to ignore this.



You can find details of your state/territory mandatory reporting obligations, including an overview of the jurisdictional expectations of what must be reported, at: <http://aspirelr.link/mandatory-reporting-child-abuse>

## Understanding the legal context

You need to know that the legal context of any child protection process is adequate and appropriate. For example, when you report suspected abuse or neglect, you need to be confident that your actions are confidential, and that the information will be acted on and treated with the utmost care. It is with this need in mind that legislation has been developed, and it has evolved based on the needs of families, the community and professionals working with children. For reporting procedures to be effective, they must be underpinned by:

- ▶ security
- ▶ clear access
- ▶ simple processes
- ▶ authority to act
- ▶ feedback mechanisms
- ▶ support networks.

## Meeting community expectations

As a professional educator responsible for the education and care of dependent children, you have the respect of the community. This puts you in a position where your actions are a model for the community, and part of the formation of the future. By involving yourself with families, developing strong relationships and demonstrating unbiased, respectful communication, you will be able to make a difference to those you support. You can be part of the early intervention process, recognising children and parents who need support and assisting them to gain this before they are at risk. You will also demonstrate that child abuse is unacceptable and must be acted on. When you support one family, you are effectively supporting their community.

**Example**

**Meeting child protection requirements**

Selma is an educator in NSW. She wants to find out more about her responsibilities as an educator when it comes to reporting child abuse or neglect. She has access to a service policy, but she wants to understand it further, so she does an online search to find some information.

She finds the following things:

- ▶ There are several fact sheets she can use to educate parents and others.
- ▶ Phone numbers and contacts are easy to find.
- ▶ The guide titled 'How to report' is simple to follow.
- ▶ A page titled 'Questions about reporting' helps answer some questions she has, including how community services assess reports and what happens after a report is made.

She finds out that she is mandated to report. An online mandatory reporter guide is accessible. It includes a decision tree, and information about support and definitions that can be followed if abuse or neglect is suspected. At the end of the guide it provides a 'final decision' section, providing details of what the person should do and why.

# Practice task 1

Read the case study, then answer the question that follows.

**Case study**

Sylvia, a colleague, tells you that she is concerned about a child she cares for. She thinks she should make a report of suspected abuse, but she is unclear about her work responsibilities.

What would you tell Sylvia? Include information about:

- ▶ Your state/territory legislation
- ▶ Sylvia's legal and ethical obligations
- ▶ How her actions influence the community, including the community outside of the service
- ▶ Which agency she would report to and what their roles and responsibilities are

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# 1B Recognising the impact of child abuse and neglect

To enable you to implement early intervention principles and work in the best interests of each child, you must first recognise the signs of abuse and neglect. Without this knowledge, your judgment is impeded and your actions may be delayed.

Abuse, neglect and maltreatment describe situations where a child may need protection.

## What is child abuse?

Child abuse is defined as something done or not done by an adult that endangers or impairs the child's emotional or physical health or development. Children are the most vulnerable members of our community. They do not have the power to stop abuse. Therefore, they rely on others to help them. As an educator, you have a responsibility to make sure children are safe and that their needs are met.

Child abuse is an action, behaviour or lack of action that results in the harm of a child. The following table describes different types of abuse and neglect.



### Emotional and psychological abuse

Emotional abuse refers to a situation where the child is repeatedly rejected or threatened in a way that is frightening and may affect the child's development. Emotional or psychological abuse may include:

- ▶ name-calling
- ▶ put-downs
- ▶ continual coldness.

A child may be harmed emotionally if they have a parent or carer who:

- ▶ is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for any problem
- ▶ openly rejects them.

There are similarities between emotional harm and neglect. Emotional harm may have occurred if a child:

- ▶ shows extremes in behaviour; for example, is overly compliant or demanding, or extremely passive or aggressive
- ▶ acts inappropriately; for example, like an adult or a younger child
- ▶ is delayed in physical or emotional development
- ▶ exhibits signs of depression or attempts suicide
- ▶ displays severe anxiety
- ▶ shows signs of low self-esteem
- ▶ finds it very difficult to learn
- ▶ is constantly blamed, belittled or berated by their parent or carer.

## Neglect

Neglect refers to a situation where the carer of a child fails to provide the basic necessities to ensure a child is not harmed, such as food, clothing, shelter, medical attention or supervision.

Signs of neglect may be apparent if a child:

- ▶ appears to lack medical or dental care
- ▶ lacks appropriate clothing
- ▶ shows a failure to thrive or is malnourished
- ▶ exhibits constant hunger, or begs for, steals or hides food
- ▶ is left alone at home for long periods (relevant to their age and maturity level)
- ▶ is consistently dirty and/or has severe body odour
- ▶ is extremely willing to please.

Neglect may have also occurred if the parent or carer:

- ▶ treats the child indifferently
- ▶ appears apathetic or depressed
- ▶ is irrational or demonstrates strange behaviour
- ▶ appears to abuse alcohol and/or drugs.

## Physical abuse

Physical injury may be the consequence of a physical punishment or physically aggressive treatment of a child. For example, physical abuse is forceful behaviour that results in injury, and may include being:

- ▶ pushed or thrown
- ▶ slapped, hit or punched
- ▶ burned; for example, with a cigarette
- ▶ kicked
- ▶ bitten
- ▶ choked
- ▶ tied down
- ▶ assaulted with a weapon
- ▶ shaken violently.

Harm may have occurred if a child has:

- ▶ injuries that do not match the story of how they occurred
- ▶ unexplained bruises, welts, bites, broken bones or burns
- ▶ injuries in the shape of an object; for example, a belt buckle or cord
- ▶ faded bruises or other noticeable marks after they have been absent from care.

Other signs include if a child:

- ▶ shrinks at the approach of adults
- ▶ reports an incident
- ▶ has not received medical help for an injury needing care
- ▶ demonstrates extremes in behaviour; such as being very aggressive, withdrawn or shy
- ▶ is afraid or overly upset about going home
- ▶ is fearful of a particular person
- ▶ demonstrates unusual or extreme dramatic play
- ▶ is described in a negative way by their parent/carer
- ▶ seems to be subjected to harsh discipline at home.

## Sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse refers to a situation in which a person involves a child in sexual activity. Physical force is sometimes used. Child sexual abuse may include:

- ▶ fondling the child's genitals
- ▶ masturbation
- ▶ oral sex
- ▶ vaginal or anal penetration
- ▶ exposing the child to pornography.

You should consider that sexual abuse may have occurred if a child:

- ▶ has difficulty walking or sitting
- ▶ urinates frequently
- ▶ suddenly refuses to change in front of others
- ▶ refuses to participate in normal physical activities
- ▶ demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual knowledge or behaviour for their age
- ▶ becomes pregnant
- ▶ contracts a sexually transmitted infection (STI)
- ▶ reports sexual abuse
- ▶ has pain, swelling or itching of the genital area.

## Effects of child abuse and neglect

The impact of child abuse and neglect on children is individual; not all children are affected the same way. Positive and negative life experiences can impact a child's vulnerability or resilience. When a child experiences severe abuse at frequent intervals, the outcome is more serious. Chronic abuse is related to greater maladjustment and negative outcomes.

The most commonly noticed effects are outlined in the following table.

<b>Failure to thrive</b>	The child's physical needs are not met, so the child does not develop as they should.
<b>Attachment difficulties</b>	The child may experience isolation and an inability to form close relationships with peers and others.
<b>Emotional deregulation</b>	The child may not understand emotional expression and may experience difficulty expressing healthy feelings of their own.
<b>Psychological disorders</b>	The child may experience post-traumatic stress disorder, depression or anxiety.
<b>Cognitive impairment</b>	Brain development may be below expectation, influencing language, physical, and cognitive function and development.

## Notifying authorities about child abuse or neglect

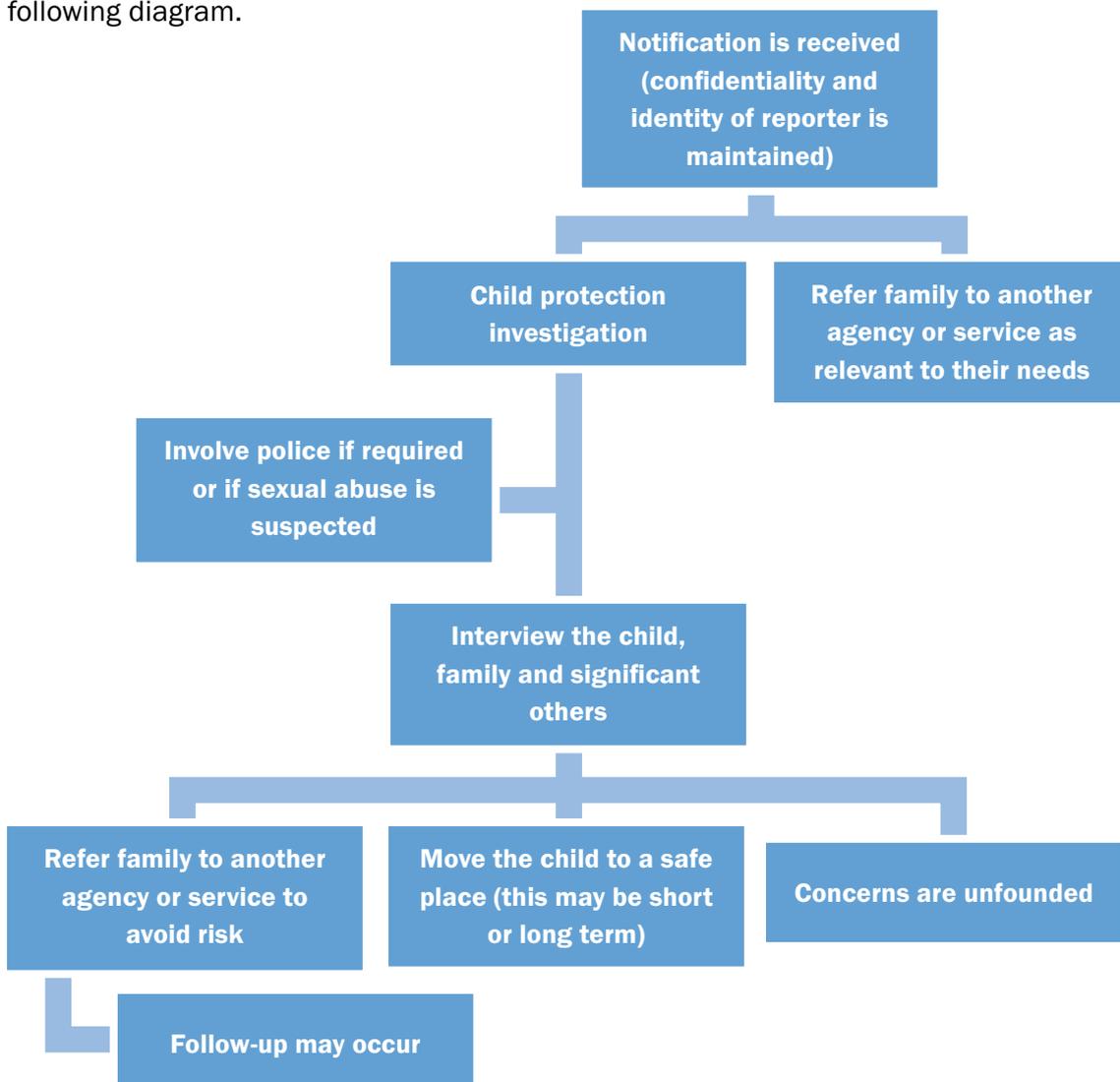
Each child's situation is unique and must be managed independently. However, there are some basic guidelines to follow that are effective and suitable when you suspect abuse.

If you suspect abuse has occurred, record your observations in a clear and objective manner. Follow your organisation's procedures for the preferred method of recording information. Remember that any person can make a report, regardless of their role or responsibilities. You are legally able to share information about suspected abuse with your supervisor and the child protection agency you are reporting to. You cannot be sued for reporting information in an effort to protect a child.

State/territory reporting processes vary slightly. Some require phone contact; for others, online or email notification is acceptable. There may also be a difference depending on the severity of the report. Your service procedures and the contact pages for each agency assist you to identify the correct contact person or agency. Once a notification has been made, the appropriate agency will guide your actions and investigate the claim.

## Investigating and assessing child abuse and neglect

Australian states and territories have similar processes once they have been notified of a suspected abuse situation. An investigation, in general, will operate as shown in the following diagram.



The purpose of an investigation and assessment is to recognise the impact of the child abuse/neglect. The investigation process involves the following steps:

- ▶ Investigate concerns.
- ▶ Assess the child's immediate safety.
- ▶ Assess whether the child has been harmed.
- ▶ Identify whether the child needs protection.
- ▶ Decide if ongoing intervention is required.

The assessment process includes:

- ▶ seeing and talking to the child
- ▶ discussing concerns with the parents
- ▶ arranging medical appointments if required.

Once all information has been collected and reviewed, a decision is made about what is to occur in the best interests of the child and who needs to be involved to make this happen.

If you are contacted to make a statement about a child's situation, ask the person for identification. If the contact is via phone, ask for the return business phone number and call the person back to ensure they are genuinely part of the child protection team.

## Practice task 2

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

### Case study

Jenny becomes aware that Sandra, 18 months old, has difficulty chewing solid foods, and seems underweight for her age, listless and frail. Sandra always grabs at foods and eats hurriedly, collecting as much food as she can. She prefers soft foods because she has difficulty chewing. When Jenny speaks to Sandra's mother about her concerns, the mother refuses to discuss the foods she provides to Sandra at home. Jenny attempts to gain more information and provide support about the nutritional needs of an 18-month-old, but Sandra's mother becomes defensive and tells Jenny that it is Jenny's responsibility to feed Sandra when she is in the service, and that what they do at home is none of her business.

Jenny is concerned that Sandra is not being provided adequate food, so she follows her service procedures and makes a report to her local child protection agency, hoping to ensure Sandra's situation will be investigated, and that Sandra's mum can gain support.

The agency investigates and finds that Sandra is only being offered powdered milk in a bottle at home, with no solid food provided at all.

They also discover that the heating and cooling appliances in the home are not functioning properly, and that Sandra does not wear clothes at home, apart from a nappy. This occurs during both summer and winter.

1. List **two** signs that Jenny identified that could indicate that Sandra is at risk of child abuse.

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2. Identify and briefly describe the type of abuse that could be occurring in this situation.

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3. List **two** effects that this type of abuse may have on Sandra's development.

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## Summary

- ▶ Each state and territory in Australia takes responsibility for child protection and family support, although each service differs slightly.
- ▶ Guiding principles motivate the child protection system in Australia.
- ▶ The *National framework for protecting Australia's children 2009–2020* has been developed with the goal of substantially reducing abuse and neglect.
- ▶ It is important for you to know your obligations under child protection legislation. As an educator, you have an ethical and moral duty to protect children. You are also mandated to report child abuse or neglect in some states and territories.
- ▶ Your service's child protection policy should reflect the legislation of your state/territory and outline processes in your service that match the legislative requirements you must adhere to.
- ▶ Abuse, neglect and maltreatment describe situations in which a child may need protection. Child abuse is defined as something done or not done by an adult that endangers or impairs the child's emotional or physical health or development.
- ▶ The impact of child abuse and neglect on children is individual. Not all children are affected the same way. Positive or negative life experiences can impact a child's vulnerability or resilience.
- ▶ If you suspect abuse, record your observations in a clear and objective manner. Follow your organisation's procedures, which may involve notifying the relevant agency.

# Learning checkpoint 1

## Implementing the principles of child protection

### Part A

Research the child protection system in your state/territory and answer the following questions.

1. Read the child protection policy and procedures for your service. Using dot points, list **three** aspects it covers.

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2. Write down the name of the key child protection legislation in your state/territory.

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3. Write down **two** principles that underpin your state/territory legislation. For each principle, explain why you think it is important to the success of child protection work.

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4. List any training or professional development that has been provided to educators in your service about child abuse and neglect. Describe how recognising the impact of child abuse and neglect helps educators understand the process of investigation and assessment of child abuse.

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## Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

### Case study

Rosalee, four years old, has been learning to ride her two-wheel bike. When she comes to Gavin's family day care home, he notices that she has dark bruises on her legs. Gavin asks her about them, and she tells him they are from learning to ride her bike. The next day, Gavin notices that one of the marks on Rosalee's legs is more like a welt than a bruise and is shaped in a strip. Rosalee seems to continue playing as normal, but later in the day when she is trying to do handstands, her skirt flips up and Gavin sees she has a dark red welt across her lower back. Gavin asks Rosalee about the mark and she tells him she fell.

Gavin decides to call his supervisor. He explains what he has seen and his supervisor offers to come over to support him while he makes a report. Since Gavin works in the Northern Territory, he calls the Department of Children and Families and makes a report.

1. Did Gavin do the correct thing when he called his supervisor or was this breaching confidentiality?

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2. What did Gavin recognise as possible symptoms of abuse or neglect?

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3. If there are details in the case study that are different to what you would do, note these and then explain why. This might include information that is different in your service policy, who you would contact or how you would make a report.

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## Topic 2

In this topic you will learn about:

- 2A Collaborative approach to child protection**
- 2B Supporting the needs, rights and interests of the child**
- 2C Applying effective safe work and self-management strategies**

## Applying protocols and guidelines for collaborative practice

A service's protocols and child protection procedures provide guidelines for working collaboratively with those agencies you notify about child abuse and neglect issues, and referral bodies that support at-risk families. If you develop relationships with each family and work collaboratively with all those in the community, you will have a greater opportunity to intercept issues and risk situations before they become a cause for concern.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and *Belonging, being & becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*.

<b>National Quality Standard</b>	
	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
✓	Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety
	Quality Area 3: Physical environment
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements
	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children
✓	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership
<b>Early Years Learning Framework</b>	
<b>Principles</b>	
✓	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
✓	Partnerships
	High expectations and equity
	Respect for diversity
	Ongoing learning and reflective practice
<b>Practice</b>	
✓	Holistic approaches
✓	Responsiveness to children
	Learning through play
	Intentional teaching
	Learning environments
	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions
	Assessment for learning
<b>Outcomes</b>	
	Children have a strong sense of identity
	Children are connected to and contribute to their world
✓	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
	Children are confident and involved learners
	Children are effective communicators

# 2A Collaborative approach to child protection

A collaborative approach to child protection takes into account at-risk and abused children, as well as those in situations where education, support and/or knowledge can be used as a preventative measure.

## Acknowledging challenges in child protection work

Working in accordance with your service policies and procedures in relation to child protection can be very demanding. When children are found to be in harm's way, or if parents and carers are perpetrators of the harm, you may become stressed and concerned about the decisions you may have to make relating to a child's safety. No one wants to find evidence of harm and have to deal with the outcomes of abuse; however, all instances must be addressed. As a professional educator, you may be in the position of having to report suspected abuse.

Current approaches to child protection work focus on collaboration. In this way, everyone is working towards the same goal: to provide children with a safe and happy environment and to identify evidence of suspected abuse or neglect before the situation escalates. Such collaboration can help to reduce the challenges and demands of your job.

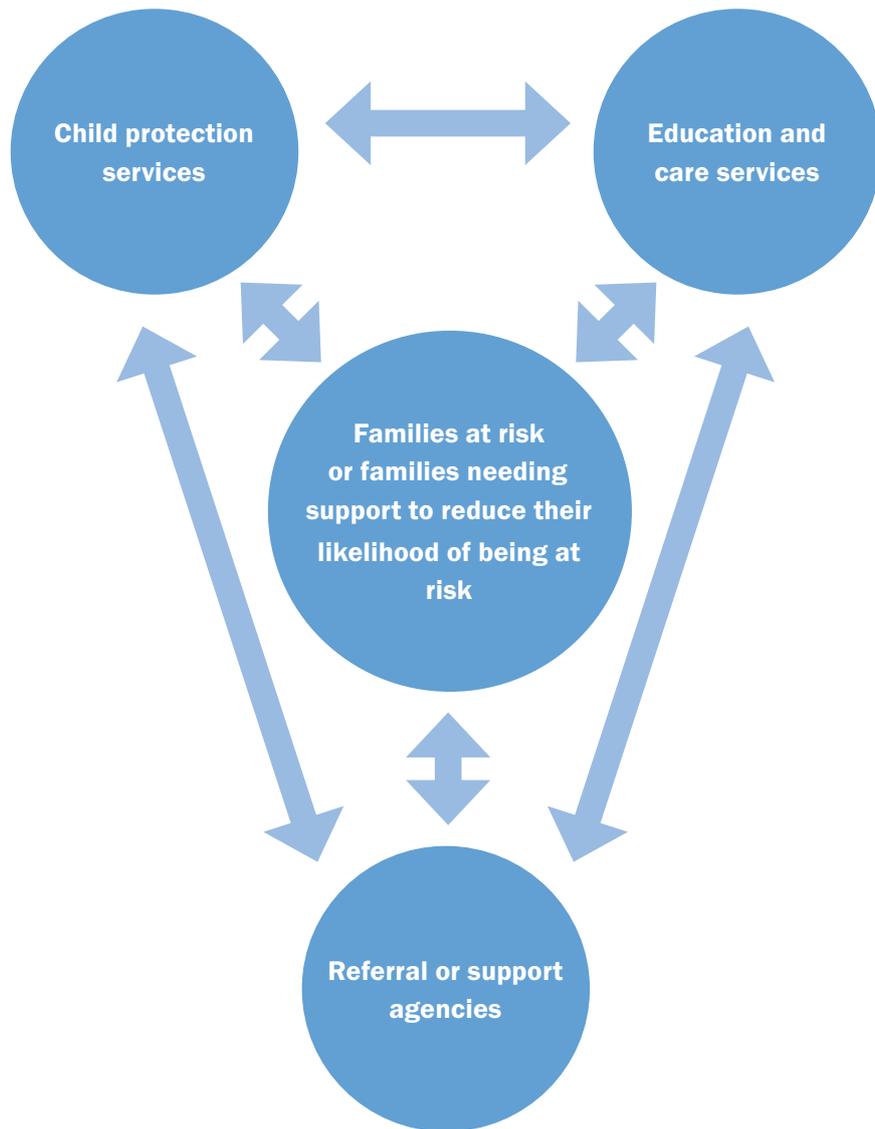
To work effectively, you must learn about the language, protocols and procedures relating to child protection and family support services so you can understand what is happening, support others to understand the situation and provide required information to staff from other services. Collaborating with other services in an established child protection framework may be part of your job role. Make sure you know who your service collaborates with, the services and support other agencies provide, and the protocols, procedures and guidelines you must follow when contacting them.

## Collaborative work practices

Building stronger families cannot be achieved by a solitary agency. Child protection agencies and departments require the collaboration of many support services, referral bodies, government offices, and education and care services industry bodies.

Collaborative relationships should be developed between child protection services, education and care services, families, and referral and support agencies, as outlined in the following flow chart.





A collaborative practice framework in the child protection industry means that a less reactive approach to child abuse and neglect can be applied.

Collaboration ensures that protection services and professionals are focused on developing consistent outcomes that respond appropriately to individual child and family circumstances; that is, they are dedicated to provide immediate action to:

- ▶ ensure children's safety
- ▶ prevent recurrence of harm
- ▶ strengthen family functions
- ▶ facilitate and monitor a network of support for families.



## Understanding the range of support services available

When parents or those responsible for children are not providing adequate care, the community and government have a responsibility to respond.

- ▶ The community responds through police, hospitals, maternal and child health services, preschools, education and care services, and general practitioners, which are universal and available to all families. Other services are more targeted and provide more intensive programs for specific situations, such as financial or emotional issues, or parenting education.
- ▶ Government departments, agencies and services respond through child protection offices.

A collaborative approach involving a range of services such as these benefits families because multiple needs can be catered for within linked services. All services can share information and learn from a family's feedback or issues, ensuring a consistent approach.

All personnel involved in child protection must ensure:

- ▶ they respond to situations quickly
- ▶ information is shared between agencies appropriately and provided to the right people at the right time
- ▶ there is a high level of interpersonal communication
- ▶ case work is recorded diligently.

Services may develop methods of information sharing that highlight a family's need for support early, helping avoid the child being at risk. You should update your knowledge about services and agencies regularly.

You may be involved in collecting and providing information about relevant services to families, such as contact details, what the service provides, eligibility and benefits. Some families have difficulty researching information or find it difficult to fill out forms. By supporting families in these tasks, you can make it easier for them to access services and identify which services match their needs and meet their accessibility requirements.

The following table provides some examples of support agencies. Your service may have developed a database or brochure listing relevant agencies within its local area.

Type of support	Example
In-home family support	Doncare Community Services is a family support program offering home help and other services.
Financial counselling	Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) offers a financial counselling hotline.
Gambling addiction	Gambling Helpline provides support for people with gambling addiction.
Respite care	Activ provides children's respite.
Family counselling	Relationships Australia provides family counselling, dispute resolution and education programs.

Type of support	Example
Drug and alcohol services	Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre provides services to help people misusing drugs and alcohol.
Health services	SA Health provides health services.
Mental health services	Open Minds provides lifestyle, living, employment and health support for those with mental health and wellbeing issues.
Disability services	Integrated Disability Action Inc. supports and represents people with disabilities, family members, carers and guardians.
Housing services	The Department of Health and Human Services provides low-cost housing alternatives; for example, Housing Tasmania.
Police	The police investigate abuse and enforce court orders.

## Collaboration guidelines

Here are some guidelines you may be expected to follow:

- ▶ Notify your supervisor if you suspect abuse or neglect, including documenting what you have seen or heard.
- ▶ Contact the child protection agency that is identified in your service policy to discuss abuse and neglect concerns, including children and families at risk.
- ▶ Use preferred methods for making contact; some services prefer telephone contact, while others ask for email to be used for initiating discussion. There may also be referral forms and other documents that link to legislation or legal duty of care requirements
- ▶ Accept responsibility at the level appropriate to your role in the service. If you are operating independently, you will lead collaboration. If you are working in a large service, you may be required to pass on collaborative activities to senior personnel.
- ▶ Share all information with families to ensure they are clear about policies, requirements, legislation, and the role they need to play in accessing services and improving their situation.

## Interagency agreements

Most child protection services run independently and you will be able to access them and/or become involved with them at times of need or during professional development opportunities. Sometimes your service may develop a partnership that is ongoing and has a role in the day-to-day operation of your service. When this occurs, there may be a need for an interagency agreement or a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to ensure that roles, responsibilities and commitments are clear, consistency of practices is maintained, and differences are resolved via agreed methods.

Some examples of MOUs in place are described in the following table.

State	Department	Partner	Purpose
Victoria	Department of Human Services	Royal Children’s Hospital	The purpose of the partnership is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ ensure that both services respect their roles and the manner in which they must work together to support children at risk</li> <li>▶ be clear about key points of contact and communication to help with a smooth information exchange and coordinated approach.</li> </ul>
Western Australia	Department of Education	Department for Child Protection and Family Support	The purpose of the partnership is to ensure that children at risk are provided with adequate educational access, opportunities and outcomes.
New South Wales	Community Services	Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC)	The purpose of the partnership is to ensure that children with disabilities and who are at risk are provided with adequate services as provided by ADHC.

**Example** **Collaborative service structure**

Henrietta works in a family day care service in a low socioeconomic area. Many of the children live in poor conditions and sometimes it is obvious that their families are struggling to make ends meet or are emotionally exhausted. This places children at a high risk of abuse or neglect.

Due to the local employment options, shift work is common, which makes family day care an attractive option as the family day care educators can adapt to the irregular hours.

To support the families, Henrietta collaborates with a number of services and agencies to provide financial support, emotional support and education to families using her service. The collaboration is so much part of the service structure that parents within the area assume it is part of the normal opportunities that education and care services offer. This natural partnership ensures that families are supported through difficult times.

## Practice task 3

1. Ask your supervisor about any collaborative practice that occurs in your service. What does this collaboration support?

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2. Find a service in your area that could support the following family issues (include their contact details):

a. Financial issues

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b. Emotional issues

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c. Parenting education

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3. Check your service's child protection policy and list any information about how the service collaborates with external services, including child protection services/agencies.

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## 2B Supporting the needs, rights and interests of the child

When you work collaboratively with other services, your knowledge of children's needs and interests and respect for their rights helps you to ensure the support they receive is positive and relevant. You may be contacted by a support service that you collaborate with and asked to provide information about a child to help them provide appropriate support. For example, knowing that a child may at first be teary and upset but becomes calmer when given drawing materials, assists other agencies to plan activities and support to meet the child's interests.



Be prepared to document and pass on information that summarises a child's needs, rights and interests.

### Supporting a child's needs

Psychology theorist Abraham Maslow identified a hierarchy of needs, indicating basic needs that form a foundation for success before progressing to satisfying other needs. Once basic physical needs are met (food, rest, sleep and body functions), emotional needs are tied in with all other levels. These include safety, security, love, self-esteem, respect, attention and appreciation. An emotionally cared for and confident child can attempt to be all they can be.

Maslow's theory can help you to recognise priorities in caring for children by demonstrating expectations that match the child's immediate needs, especially if the child has experienced abuse or neglect. For example, if a child feels insecure and unsafe (Maslow's second-level needs), they will not feel loved and cared for (third-level needs). They also may not participate fully in the experiences you plan and may not develop secure relationships with those in the service. In addition, the child's developmental progress may be affected as they are focused on being safe and secure, rather than being involved and challenged.

Children may not understand their feelings; they may not know that feelings are normal or may deal with their feelings in inappropriate ways. A child who is experiencing abuse or neglect may exhibit emotional outbursts. Remain calm and respond promptly and honestly when children tell you about their feelings so they feel respected and safe expressing their feelings and emotions in appropriate ways. In this way you start building positive relationships with children, showing them that you care and will listen to their communications.



Child-focused practice means that educators and carers always keep the needs of the child as the focus of their service delivery. Actions should be designed to meet the child's needs as a first priority, as outlined in the following table.

Action	Examples
Develop routines and timetables that are based on the individual needs of the child.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide meals when children are hungry.</li> <li>▶ Settle children to sleep when they are tired.</li> </ul>
Match activities to the child's needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Put up posters, develop dramatic play situations and set up discussions that focus on specific situations to make the child feel comfortable about the situation.</li> <li>▶ These situations may include dental care, basic hygiene, expressing feelings and interacting with support people such as the police.</li> </ul>
Communicate with families to determine family needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Ask questions about what the family has done over the weekend.</li> <li>▶ Ask if parents need help with an issue they are facing.</li> <li>▶ Provide information about a service you think might be useful.</li> </ul>
Adjust policies and procedures to meet the needs of individual families if required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Respond to health needs such as how to manage a child's disability, or the additional support required if a child with diabetes requires insulin injections.</li> </ul>
Adapt plans to address family structure or cultural differences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Include language from the family background.</li> <li>▶ Add cultural items to play areas.</li> <li>▶ Show how all families are different.</li> </ul>
Respond to children according to their economic or social and cultural needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide support materials such as a change of clothing or a warm jumper.</li> </ul>
Understand that children's capabilities differ and adjust plans accordingly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ One child may be able to climb on high A-frames and balance beams; another might require a small ladder and a solid ground-level beam.</li> </ul>
Balance interactions with children by offering opportunities for small groups and individual time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Read stories to the whole group or on a cushion with a single child.</li> </ul>

## Supporting a child's rights

Your responsibilities to support children's rights are based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The following table outlines some common rights of children and families, and how to apply them. If you prioritise experiences of a child when they are in an at-risk or abuse situation, you will be providing for these rights.

Children and family rights	Example
Privacy	Children’s contact details must remain private. If the child is at risk or under a court order, this information must also remain private.
Confidentiality	Children’s medical records must be kept in a locked cabinet, with access limited to only authorised personnel.
Dignity	A child who has a welt or burn should not be displayed to a number of adults to gain their opinion on reporting options.
Informed choice	<p>Parents must be fully informed about an issue and be given the opportunity to resolve it. If a child is vulnerable or at risk, the parent should be supported.</p> <p>Children must be given information and be part of the decision-making process.</p>
Notification of abuse or neglect	Parents must be informed about the reporting process and referred to the right people for resolution.
Expressing ideas and opinions	Children should be given adequate opportunities to express their ideas and opinions.
Agreed standard of care	Children should receive services to meet the standards described when enrolling and have these backed up by continued high-quality responses from educators.
Access to services	All children should be provided with access to a service regardless of their race, culture or religion. This includes support services as well as education and care services.

## Supporting a child’s interests

By carefully observing, listening to, talking with and paying close attention to what children are saying and doing, you learn about their interests, emerging interests and preferences. By collecting and using information about the children based on your observations and interactions, you are showing that you acknowledge, respect and value the child and their family.

If the child has emotional or psychological issues relating to abuse or neglect, it is crucial that you provide positive activities that focus on their interests, natural abilities, strengths, skills and knowledge. You need to provide an environment that demonstrates acceptance of these areas of focus. As with all children, this acceptance allows the child to feel a sense of achievement, acceptance and belonging, and that the environment is safe. This will help to reduce stress and create a sense of trust that enables the child to develop relationships that are supportive and productive.

Including children in decision-making where possible is an important aspect of providing a child-focused service. Listen to the children’s views. Allow them to make real choices regarding food, activities and routines. This may be implemented by asking them:

- ▶ how much they would like to eat
- ▶ which activities they would like to participate in
- ▶ whether they would like to be alone or part of a group.

The more information you have, the better you are able to provide appropriate activities and the more details you can provide to support agencies. In some cases, making sure a child is engaged in activities that interest them is a greater priority than ensuring they are learning key aspects of educational worth, such as numbers, letters, colours and shapes. Their feelings of belonging and safety must be in place before they will be able to succeed in mentally challenging areas. For most children, educational learning comes through exploring activities they enjoy.

**Example**

**Supporting a child’s needs, rights and interests**

Kimberly, an educator, is aware of Olson’s history of sexual abuse. Olson has been cared for in different out-of-home care situations and is emotionally unstable. To ensure that he can work happily without feeling frustrated or that he is not challenged, Kimberly uses many open-ended play materials. Kimberly finds that by having open-ended play, Olson is more likely to communicate with her, share his ideas and feelings, and express himself.

The relationship Kimberly develops with Olson enables her to prioritise the following key areas:

- ▶ His needs: Olson’s personal ability level is respected and provided for, giving him a positive view of himself.
- ▶ His rights: The relationship between Kimberly and Olson enables a greater awareness of issues at home or in the service; Olson is comfortable offering his opinions and is more likely to notify Kimberly if he is at risk or has experienced harm.
- ▶ His interests: Kimberly’s observations of Olson and her view of how he participates with others enables her to meet his needs through both interest- and strength-based approaches.

When Kimberly collaborates with a support agency, she is in a strong position to advise the agency on how best to proceed with their interaction with Olson. Kimberly understands what Olson’s needs and interests are, and can ensure that his individual rights are respected.

## Practice task 4

If you were contacted by a support service you collaborate with and asked to provide information about a child, what could you tell them about the child’s needs, rights and interests that would ensure the child’s experience with the service was fulfilling?

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## 2C Applying effective safe work and self-management strategies

Policies from your service and organisations you collaborate with focus on ensuring the health and safety of those in the workplace, including educators, children and their families. A healthy, safe workplace ensures that:

- ▶ educators are aware of and work in accordance with their roles and responsibilities
- ▶ children feel they are protected
- ▶ families are confident that their children are safe while attending the service.



Maintaining confidentiality is one way you apply safe work practices.

### Addressing children's basic rights to safety

The *National framework for protecting Australia's children 2009–2020* addresses workplace safety when supporting abused or neglected children.

Supporting outcome 1: 'Children live in safe and supportive families and communities', suggests that all services the child and their family interacts with can make a difference by implementing family- and child-focused policies and practices. There needs to be education and engagement in the community so that everyone can work toward an appropriate understanding of children's needs, particularly their basic rights to safety.

Supporting outcome 1 also mentions the need to:

- ▶ strengthen the capacity of families to support children
- ▶ educate and engage the community about abuse and neglect, and how to protect children
- ▶ develop and implement effective methods for involving children in decisions affecting their lives.

You can read the framework here: <http://aspirelr.link/national-framework-protect-children>

### Following guidelines for working safely

When working with abused or neglected children, you may be faced with uncommon or unusual situations. For example, some children may be under court orders, be cared for outside of their home or be cared for by a relative.

Court orders may include a family court order, a family violence-related order, a child protection order or a bail order. Copies of these orders should be filed securely and educators should be aware of their content. Any order should be updated regularly as they may change over time.

Parents, their partners or other family members may feel your service is the only place they can access the child, and may not be aware that you must follow court orders as stringently as any other venue caring for the child.

Your organisational policies and the guidelines provided by a child protection service help you to be clear about how to manage the child's safety. However, unexpected issues occasionally arise, as demonstrated in the following examples:

- ▶ An unauthorised person may attempt to collect a child. If this occurs, the authorised guardian of the child should be notified immediately and action should be taken to stop the child from leaving your service.
- ▶ A person who is authorised to have contact with their child may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol. If this occurs, you may need to ensure that other appropriate care is provided for the child.

You have a duty of care to all children, so you must attempt to maintain each child's safety, including those not involved in a particular issue. If difficulties arise, the police or the child protection authority should be contacted immediately.

## Assisting with emergency drills

Regulation 97 of the Education and Care Services National Regulations and Element 2.2.2 of the NQS both state that your service should implement emergency drills every three months. These drills must include regular practice in responding to intruders using a lockdown procedure. Make sure you are aware of your role and responsibilities during emergency procedures, such as keeping the children calm and safely escorting them to an agreed assembly point.

## Implementing self-management strategies

Self-management is an important strategy to master if you are to work with others successfully. Self-management includes the ability to show respect for and acceptance of other people. It involves the ability to be in control of your own emotions, as well as your beliefs, values and attitudes.

When working with children and families where abuse or neglect is involved, you must not judge people based on your own background or prejudices. Try to be open-minded, accept families at their level of capability and help them to improve their parenting practices or to understand that the current situation is unacceptable for their child. Demonstrating a caring and accepting attitude helps you to develop a positive relationship with families. This will make them more likely to accept your suggestions of support strategies or collaboration with additional services.

Self-management is crucial when considering a situation that may indicate abuse. Although you should be vigilant and prepared to report and support abuse and neglect if it is found to be occurring, do not assume that every bump, bruise or outburst means that a child is at risk. Collect as much information as you can and speak to your supervisor before taking any action.

Strong self-management skills also allow you to become resilient in the face of difficult situations. They should not prevent you from expressing your emotions or feelings, but should allow you to work through situations and manage stress appropriately.

# Practice task 5

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

## Case study

Lilly, an educator, is aware that Regina, four years, is enrolled at the service due to her history of abuse. Lilly knows that Regina has spent some time in the care of her grandparents and is now living with her single father. There is a family court order and a family violence order in place stating that Regina's mother is not an authorised guardian and is not to come within 100 metres of the premises while Regina or her father are within.

To ensure the workplace is safe, Lilly is involved in regular emergency drills, including practising a lockdown procedure. A lockdown will occur if an unknown or unauthorised person attempts to enter the service inappropriately.

Lilly has overheard other educators in the service talking about Regina's mother and how she is addicted to drugs, and saying that Regina's father is an alcoholic. Lilly displays self-management by ignoring these rumours and negative attitudes. She focuses on developing a strong bond with Regina and her father so that she can support them when needed.

1. What are **two** specific actions Lily could do to demonstrate her self-management skills when communicating and supporting Regina's father?

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2. Find the emergency management procedures in your service for lockdown. Identify what role you would take if Regina's mother attempted to enter the service. Ask your supervisor to help you with any actions you are unsure of, then note the things you would be responsible for if Regina's mother comes to the service and wants to enter the premises.

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## Summary

- ▶ Working with children who are suspected of being abused or neglected can be very demanding and stressful, especially if you have to make decisions about their situation.
- ▶ Current approaches to child protection are based on collaboration.
- ▶ To work effectively, educators must learn about the language, protocols and procedures relating to child protection and family support services so they understand what is happening, support others to understand, and provide required information to staff from other services.
- ▶ When you prioritise experiences of children, you ensure that you respond to their needs, interests and rights in a timely and understanding manner.
- ▶ Your responsibilities to protect children's rights are based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- ▶ You may be contacted by a support service that you collaborate with and asked to provide information about a child to help them provide appropriate support.
- ▶ Your service policies and the guidelines provided by child protection services should explain how to manage the child's safety while they are in the service.
- ▶ Self-management is an important strategy to master if you are to work with others successfully. It includes the ability to show respect for and acceptance of other people, and to be in control of your own emotions, beliefs, values and attitudes.

# Learning checkpoint 2

## Applying protocols and guidelines for collaborative practice

### Part A

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

#### Case study

Cindy, five years, sometimes cries with pain while holding her ear and the side of her face. The pain has been occurring on and off for around a month now. You have spoken to Cindy's mother about the problem and she has told you she has taken Cindy to the doctor, but that it wasn't an ear infection. You think that Cindy's pain might be related to a dental issue as sometimes she has difficulty eating and you can see one of her teeth seems to be a little decayed.

You mention this to Cindy's mum, but she says that she is a single mother who qualifies for parenting payment, but cannot afford a dentist because of her low income. She tells you that dental care is not covered by Medicare and that Cindy has never been to a dentist.

1. Research information about the Australian Government Department of Human Services Child Dental Benefits Schedule and answer the following questions. Information can be found at: <http://aspirelr.link/child-dental-benefits>

- a. Why does Cindy qualify for dental benefits?

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- b. What benefits are available under the scheme for Cindy?

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- c. What would Cindy's mother have to do to claim the scheme benefits?

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- d. Find a dentist in your area that Cindy could attend. Ensure the dentist specialises in child dentistry and bulk bills. Provide the name, address and phone number.

- 2. What is one thing you could do to support the needs, rights and interests of Cindy as a priority, so that her dental experience will be as positive as possible? How would this action make a difference to Cindy?

- 3. Cindy's mother did not take Cindy to the dentist. After one month, Cindy is having increased pain. Answer the following questions, keeping in mind that as a duty of care to Cindy, you must take care of her health. If you do not act, you will not be working safely.

- a. Who might you collaborate with to attempt to resolve the challenge of medical neglect? Include their name and contact details.

- b. Would your relationship with Cindy's mother change at this point? Explain how you would use self-management strategies.

4. List the policies of a service that guide you in supporting Cindy and her mother, and briefly describe what they tell you to do.

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**Part B**

List **four** strategies you can use to ensure you remain free of stress while working in the challenging environment of child protection.

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## Topic 3

In this topic you will learn about:

**3A Supporting families to address identified risks**

**3B Developing effective relationships with agencies**

## Working collaboratively with children and families

There are often particular circumstances that make a family vulnerable to harm. These risk factors increase a family's need for support. Some of these vulnerabilities may arise due to a family's cultural and linguistic background, while others may arise due to difficulties they experience as part of their everyday stress.

To provide adequate support for a family, you need to collaborate with support services and agencies, and work closely with them to form a strong bond with the family.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and *Belonging, being & becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*.

<b>National Quality Standard</b>	
	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
✓	Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety
	Quality Area 3: Physical environment
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements
	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children
✓	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
✓	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership
<b>Early Years Learning Framework</b>	
<b>Principles</b>	
✓	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
✓	Partnerships
	High expectations and equity
	Respect for diversity
	Ongoing learning and reflective practice
<b>Practice</b>	
✓	Holistic approaches
✓	Responsiveness to children
	Learning through play
	Intentional teaching
	Learning environments
	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions
	Assessment for learning
<b>Outcomes</b>	
	Children have a strong sense of identity
	Children are connected to and contribute to their world
✓	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
	Children are confident and involved learners
	Children are effective communicators

# 3A Supporting families to address identified risks

All children are vulnerable to abuse or neglect because of:

- ▶ their dependence on adults
- ▶ their inability to protect themselves
- ▶ the number of different people and environments they are subjected to
- ▶ different perspectives adults have of children's rights.

Work collaboratively with the families of the children in your service to provide support and guidance.



## Identifying risk factors

Risk factors are the situations occurring around the child that make them more vulnerable to abuse or neglect. You may become aware of some of these vulnerabilities when a child enrolls in your service, as you get to know the child or as you notice how a child and parent react to each other. Your service may also receive court orders or other details about the child.

As you observe children, develop relationships with families and listen to what the child tells you, you may notice signs that things are not as they should be. Information may also come from comments that you hear from others involved with the child.

Risk factors may be more evident in relation to:

- ▶ Indigenous infants and children
- ▶ children with health-related needs
- ▶ children at risk due to their socioeconomic or family context
- ▶ children at risk due to cultural or linguistic factors.

## Indigenous infants and children

Research indicates that past events have impacted Indigenous families, posing problems to the current generations through parental issues. Many parents who were part of the stolen generations (when children were forcibly removed from Indigenous populations in the 1950s) experience trauma that impacts their own family lives.

## Children with health-related needs

Children with disabilities often have prolonged dependency and communication problems, and may be particularly vulnerable to abuse or neglect. Children with medical needs, particularly acute or chronic health needs and terminal illness, may be in family situations in which emotional or financial support is not adequate, or parents are under constant financial strain due to the cost of treatments.

Children may have Munchausen syndrome, which means they fake an illness to gain attention and sympathy. Children may also develop Munchausen syndrome by proxy; that is, the illness is fabricated or induced by their carer. In this case, children may become unwell or be prevented from attending education and care due to the actions of their carers. These symptoms may be mild, or may cause severe harm or even death. The child is put at risk not only by the carer's actions, but sometimes by the unnecessary treatment they receive. Carers that fabricate the child's illness may themselves have a mental illness that requires treatment. They may be in need of attention or sympathy, or may gain satisfaction from deceiving others. Many times the perpetrator was abused themselves and the residual effects of this unresolved harm cause this psychiatric outcome.

## Children at risk due to their social or family context

Children may be at risk because of various family situations, outlined in the following table.

Situation	Result
Children in out-of-home care	Children in out-of-home care may experience dysfunction over a long period of time. They are frequently placed out of the home due to trauma and often experience emotional and behavioural problems or developmental delay based on abuse or neglect they have experienced.
Family violence	Children in a situation of family violence may be emotionally and psychologically traumatised, whether or not they are experiencing physical harm. Witnessing this type of event may have lasting influence throughout their life.
Parents with a drug or alcohol problem	Parents with a drug or alcohol problem are less likely to seek support for their children and are less likely to access support in their parenting strategies. A parent affected by drugs or alcohol may believe there is nothing wrong, be isolated, lack access to services or attempt to cover up issues to avoid being identified as a drug or alcohol user.
Parent with a mental illness	Children of parents with a mental illness may be at risk due to the psychiatric conditions involved in the parent's illness. A parent with a mental illness may not understand their role as a parent, may be impulsive or may not have the ability to meet a child's needs. A parent experiencing psychosis may hurt their child due to their state of mind, or they may be confused about their role or the child's needs and intentions.
Parent with an intellectual disability	Children of parents who have an intellectual disability may have little understanding of what is required to care for and nurture a child. They may also have difficulty completing some tasks that are required.
Isolated families	Families that are isolated often do not have support people and may feel overly stressed. Isolation may occur due to cultural or linguistic diversity, being away from others in their social group or extended family, or due to homelessness or other unexpected outcomes.

## Children at risk due to cultural and linguistic issues

Your work as an educator brings you into contact with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who have their own values and beliefs about child rearing. Some people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may choose to use methods or make decisions that are considered abusive to children under Australian legislation, such as smacking as basic punishment, being punished for not showing signs of learning, or withholding affectionate physical contact. They may also have different standards when it comes to health, hygiene and nutrition, such as implementing toilet learning practices from birth.

Some people you come into contact with may demonstrate the following practices or family norms:

- ▶ large numbers of people living in one household, and families sleeping in one bed
- ▶ elders or particular relatives having control over all family decisions
- ▶ particular gender expectations
- ▶ discouragement of independence
- ▶ use of alternative medical practices, such as homeopathy
- ▶ rules for language use; for example, the children may not be allowed to speak their home language in public or they may not be allowed to speak English at home
- ▶ punished for saying words incorrectly; this might also include stuttering.

Many of these practices and norms will not affect you or the children you care for and educate. However, if you have concerns about a practice or a child's wellbeing, talk to your supervisor and gain their opinion. You or your supervisor may contact your child protection agency/department and ask them to clarify the issue rather than leaving it until you gather more information. The agency/department will advise you of what process to follow.

It is always useful to research the particular cultures of the children attending your service so you can better understand their families' traditions and beliefs.

## Supporting parents to address risks

It is part of an educator's role to support families to address any identified or potential risks. You need to be familiar with the support services available and how they can help parents in situations that may pose a risk to their children. The best outcomes occur when services intervene early, and when services collaborate to provide a shared, holistic approach.

Refer to the table in section 2A that lists a range of support services provided by government agencies and community services. These include drug and alcohol services, family counselling, mental health services, counselling for gambling addiction, and housing support. Be aware of the level of your authority and know whether you can make contact with a support agency on behalf of a family or if you must advise your supervisor first. Many of these services may assist you and the family by preparing a service support plan. If this is the case, you need to make sure all educators are aware of the plan and that everyone understands the support framework being provided and their role in the support.



A service support plan may consider:

- ▶ the issues and dynamics of the service and how these impact on its ability to support vulnerable families and children at risk
- ▶ educator needs
- ▶ resources available
- ▶ team goals
- ▶ progress and future directions.

One program that educators should be aware of is the Australian Government's Child Care Safety Net that will assist childcare service providers to better care for children with additional needs. A key component of the Child Care Safety Net is the Inclusion Support Programme (ISP). You can access more information at: <http://aspirelr.link/inclusion-support-programme>

If a family demonstrates cultural practices that you believe may negatively influence the opportunities of a child, but does not form an abuse or neglect concern, you may choose to provide the family with different options they may not have considered. For example, if a family has been using a harsh 'naughty corner' technique for behaviour management that includes physical punishment, you may suggest a less humiliating time away technique where the child has control over where they go and when they are ready to return and participate safely.

Obviously, if the child is not being harmed, your approach will need to be a support role. This may not be as easy as it seems. When approaching parents to introduce new or alternative methods, be aware that you should take the role of an ally. Parents may easily feel you are being condescending or judgmental unless you work alongside them. For those parents whose first language is not English, an interpreter may be needed. If the parent shows that they are not interested, accept their choice.

Sometimes it is best to approach the education and sharing role you would like to apply to one family by addressing all families. You may include information or support ideas in a newsletter or share the idea with all parents verbally.

If parents become aggressive when you interact with them, it is appropriate for you to follow service policies and procedures for ensuring all children and staff are safe. This may include implementing a lockdown procedure or contacting the police.

Your communication skills should enable you to manage conflicts, provide appropriate support and continue healthy relationships.

### **Tips for communicating and responding appropriately to children and families:**

- ▶ Always remain calm and professional.
- ▶ Speak clearly and in a language the child and family understand. Don't use jargon or technical words.
- ▶ Seek someone who can speak the family's preferred language if necessary.
- ▶ Don't talk down to others. Treat people as equals.
- ▶ Understand language protocols of different cultures; address people correctly and use appropriate interpersonal communication.

## Providing referrals

When you identify that a family may benefit from support provided by an agency or if they ask you specifically for help, be prepared and know the protocols you must follow. Some services can only be accessed through a referral made by a child support agency/department or another service. Others are accessible through your service. Always follow appropriate practice, such as gaining the parent's permission and then contacting the service to make arrangements. This permission may be through a signed document, a discussion on the phone or by meeting face to face.

Ensure you are aware of your service's policies and procedures for referral.

## Practice task 6

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

### Case study

Jaylee is an Indigenous parent of three children. She is currently an inmate at a correctional centre where she is serving a one-year sentence for drug-related crimes. Jaylee's children are being cared for by their grandparents while Jaylee completes her sentence. Jaylee has been diagnosed with depression and has used drugs in the past to deal with her problems.

Magda, an educator working with Jaylee's children, is aware of Jaylee's situation and suggests that the grandparents organise for the children to be involved in a child/parent activity day within the correctional centre. The child/parent activity day is organised by a program called SHINE for Kids.

Magda accesses the referral form from: <http://aspirelr.link/shine-referral-form>

She helps the grandparents fill out the referral form, which asks for details about:

- ▶ the child and their relationship with the inmate
- ▶ the reason for the referral
- ▶ the current carer's details
- ▶ the name of the service and person making the referral.

Jaylee is later released from the correctional centre and takes custody of her children. She is living near the service.

1. The family might be classed as vulnerable to abuse. What are the risk factors?

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2. Identify a support service in your area that you could refer Jaylee to if she needed support for one or more of the risk factors you identified. Include:
- ▶ details of the service: the name, contact and how someone can be referred to it
  - ▶ why you think this service is appropriate, particularly in relation to Jaylee's Indigenous heritage.

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# 3B Developing effective relationships with agencies

When educators and organisations develop sound working relationships with agencies and support services, they are able to provide more consistent and ongoing care to families. Being aware of the available support services, and knowing what they can offer and how they operate helps educators refer families when the need arises.



Collaboration ensures that protection services and professionals:

- ▶ focus on providing immediate action to families and children
- ▶ work together to coordinate a support network, ensure children's safety and prevent harm recurring.

In addition to child protection agencies and support services, you may need to work with personnel such as doctors, nurses, police, teachers, colleagues and other educators.

The level of liaison and consultation you have with these agencies and personnel depends on your job role. In some cases, you may need to notify a child protection agency about suspected abuse; you may be the contact point between your service and a support agency for a particular situation; or you may be an advocate for a family. In most cases you need the parent's permission before contacting a support agency. Always follow your service's policies, procedures and protocols.

Whatever the situation, to liaise and consult successfully you need to:

- ▶ be prepared
- ▶ know the appropriate agency or department that provides the service required
- ▶ understand the type of services they provide so you know what is appropriate
- ▶ know the protocols and guidelines for contact and/or referral
- ▶ make an appointment if appropriate
- ▶ know the contact person to speak with
- ▶ introduce yourself and provide your contact details and the name of your organisation
- ▶ be fully aware of the situation you are reporting or seeking support for
- ▶ complete any forms that are required.

In addition to these administrative requirements, you need to use a range of interpersonal and written skills. This ensures a situation is conveyed clearly and succinctly, and that you do not waste people's time by providing insufficient, incorrect or too much information. Be professional at all times. Always listen to what the other person is saying, respect privacy and confidentiality, value other people's viewpoints and take notes so you have a record of the consultation or contact.

Your role may require you to be in contact with a support agency over a number of occasions to give supplementary information, provide progress reports or make further referrals. Developing an effective working relationship with other professionals means that information is readily shared, time is used effectively, and that the focus is on the family and children.

**Example**

**Liaising with a support agency**

Janet works with the Long family, who display factors that put their two children at risk of abuse. One of their children has a disability and the other one has severe allergies. Both children attend Janet’s education and care service.

The health of these children has put a strain on the family. Janet has spoken to the family about these stress issues and they have agreed they need help. Janet speaks to her supervisor. They agree that they are unsure whether this is a child protection issue, so they speak to the local child protection agency.

The agency takes the Long family’s details and information about their situation and completes an initial assessment. Following the assessment, the agency provides advice to Janet and the Long family, and refers the parents to an appropriate support agency.

With their permission, Janet continues to be an advocate for these parents. She shares details about the children when the child protection agency completes regular follow-up, and talks to the parents about how they are progressing. When the child protection agency contacts Janet for any reason, she ensures she makes a suitable time to talk with them; this means her conversations are focused, useful and confidential. She continues to take notes that she can provide to the agency, which include details of any positive progress as well as concerns.

## Practice task 7

Read the case study, then answer the question that follows.

### Case study

Mr and Mrs Paulo have a child with Down syndrome who needs additional care from a respite support agency. They are not confident in making the first contact with a respite care support agency, particularly as they feel they sometimes misunderstand some English terms. They ask you if you would contact the respite care agency for them and organise a consultation. They would like you to be involved as an advocate, supporting their progress and helping to ensure their child’s wellbeing is prioritised.

When you contact the respite care agency you need to explain why you are ringing. You also need to introduce yourself and ensure the agency understands your ongoing role. The agency will want to speak to the parents to ensure they agree to you making contact on their behalf, and to gain a clear understanding of who they are and what they need. It is important for you to explain to the agency how they should contact you if needed.

Describe what you would say to the respite care agency contact person.

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## Summary

- ▶ Risk factors are situations occurring around the child that make them more vulnerable to abuse or neglect. This may include:
  - family violence
  - isolation
  - a parent with a drug or alcohol problem
  - a parent with a mental illness
  - financial difficulties
  - cultural background.
- ▶ When parents or those responsible for children are not providing adequate care, the community and government have a responsibility to respond.
- ▶ Your work as an educator brings you into contact with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. These people all have their own values and beliefs about child rearing, and also have their own personal journey and experiences as children.
- ▶ Some families that demonstrate practices that may negatively influence the opportunities of a child may benefit from you providing information or services about other suitable options.
- ▶ Some services can only be accessed through a referral made by a child support agency/department or another service. Always follow appropriate practice such as gaining the parent's permission and then contacting the service to make arrangements.
- ▶ Most services will have individual codes of confidentiality. Collaboration may enable you to become an advocate for a family and assist in achieving positive outcomes.

# Learning checkpoint 3

## Working collaboratively with children and families

### Part A

Research information about services that can provide support for families with a range of risk factors that make them vulnerable to abuse and neglect. A community directory or resources at your service may help.

Identify an agency in your area that can support families experiencing these risks, and how they might support the families.

You may wish to present your information in a table similar to the following. For each of the risk factors, provide the name and contact number or email address for the agency and how they might support the family.

Vulnerability risk factor	Local agency contact	How this agency might support the family
Indigenous infants and children		
Children with a disability		
Children with medical needs		
Children in a situation of family violence		
Children of parents with a drug or alcohol problem		
Children of parents with a mental illness and children with Munchausen syndrome by proxy		
Families that are isolated due to cultural and linguistic diversity		

## Part B

The Australian Government's Child Care Safety Net assists childcare service providers to better cater for and include children with additional needs. This program includes the Inclusion Support Programme (ISP) and administers Inclusion Agencies (IAs) in each state and territory (NSW and ACT combined). It employs a number of inclusion professionals who assist eligible organisations to build their capacity and capability to provide and embed inclusive practice in their delivery of early learning and care programs.

Find out the following information through research. You may refer to the following site: <http://aspirelr.link/inclusion-support-programme>

1. What services do IAs provide and who is eligible to access their services?

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2. How do IAs support children in families that are vulnerable to risk of harm, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?

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3. What actions need to be taken to refer a family to these services?

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4. List **five** skills and pieces of knowledge you would need when contacting a support service such as this.

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