

Safeguarding Guideline to Prevent Physical and Sexual Abuse

Identifying, recording and reporting behaviours of concern and responding to disclosures



This guide is about what you need to do when you hear or see anything that could be a sign that a perpetrator is in your organisation.



Our focus here is on monitoring the risk that a perpetrator is present. This is about being vigilant and recording any behaviours and events of concern—even if you're unsure whether they mean anything.

This is how you discover patterns.



This is different from the action you need to take immediately if you see or hear evidence of an act of sexual abuse, or you believe someone is in danger. In that case, you need to report it to the police.



We know that the difference between a behaviour of concern and evidence of abuse can be hard to tell. Perpetrators exploit that ambiguity. That's why you need to be vigilant, listen, ask questions, and record anything concerning.



WHAT ARE BEHAVIOURS OF CONCERN THAT YOU NEED TO WATCH FOR?

Watch for what someone in your care is saying or doing, or marks on their body. For example, they

- tell you about a sexual experience (or draw it, or use any other mode of expression) that is unusual in some way
- talk about sexual activity they shouldn't know about
- behave in sexually inappropriate ways
- have bruises or other marks on their body that can't be explained
- withdraw from their usual activities and ways of interacting.

You also need to watch for behaviours of concern in carers, staff, volunteers, or anyone in contact with the person in your care. For example, they

- insist on physical contact, even when it's not wanted
- single someone out for special attention or try to establish an 'emotional' connection
- seem to want to have special influence over a vulnerable person
- don't give the vulnerable person their privacy or let them make their own decisions
- try to separate them from their friends, family or other social relationships
- Unnecessary supervision for showering or dressing

TAKING ACTION



BE READY

You need to know as soon as possible if a perpetrator is in your organisation so you can minimise or prevent harm. To do this, you need to have:

- a workforce, board and community who know the signs of sexual abuse and know what action they need to take in the range of circumstances they may face
- a well-trained and skilled safeguarding officer who knows what information needs to be collected about behaviours of concern and also when they need to report to the police
- a process for capturing information about behaviours, events, incidents or reasons for concern
- a process that describes what you need to do in the case where you've reported an incident to the police
- a register that stores that information securely.



KNOW THE SIGNS

Everyone who works in and for your organisation needs to know the facts about sexual abuse, how perpetrators behave, and what it does to victims.

People in your care also need to know their rights and the kind of experience they should have and what they shouldn't accept from others.

Their families and the wider community also need to know.

This is essential. Without a factual understanding of sexual abuse, people will be unlikely to recognise when it is happening. Without a frank attitude to the risk, they will be less likely to share what they've observed or experienced—even if they know that something is wrong.



Put the interests and needs of the person in your care first



APPOINT A SAFEGUARDING OFFICER

You must designate someone in your organisation to be the safeguarding officer. Train them so they are knowledgeable about the behaviours of perpetrators, signs of sexual abuse, laws, and your organisation's obligations.

They need to know how to ask questions without prejudicing possible investigation by the police. Make sure they are skilled at listening and able to exercise judgement in situations of uncertainty.

This is a serious responsibility. Make sure your directors and executive leaders support them loudly in that role and also that they have the training and resources they need.



DESIGN A PROCESS FOR COLLECTING INFORMATION

Anyone who works in or for your organisation—whether they're a director, member of staff, volunteer, or contractor—needs to know what to do if they see, hear, or hear about behaviours of concern.

Your process needs to:

- identify by name and role who they can report to about what they've seen or heard
- tell people about their options under whistleblowing legislation
- collect all the necessary details about the disclosure, behaviour, incident or other reason for concern
- be confidential
- be simple to follow
- put the interests of the people in your care first.

Make sure your safeguarding officer knows your obligations and support them when they need to make a difficult call.

Confidentiality and the dignity of the people in your care matters. Directors, staff, volunteers and contractors must not discuss a disclosure, behaviour, incidents or their concerns with anyone except the people required by law to know and act.



Even if you're not sure, put it in writing and put it in the register



LISTEN AND WRITE IT DOWN BUT DON'T INVESTIGATE

If someone discloses something to you, speaks in a concerning way, or making a complaint about behaviour or a breach of policy, you'll need to listen carefully.

Note the *who, what, when, where* and *how* of the behaviour of concern or the breach of policy.

If you need to ask questions, make sure it's only to elicit the answers to those questions. It is not up to you to investigate or determine what exactly happened.

Your role is to collect information. Once you have it, put it in the register at the next opportunity.

If a person in your care is disclosing abuse then we recommend that you find a private place, with one person to listen and the other person to take notes.

Remember that adults in your care have a right to decide what happens to them. Respect that right but also balance it against your obligation to report abuse. In any case, you still need to collect the information and enter it into your register.

In the case of children, you are obliged to report sexual abuse to the police.



CREATE A REGISTER

The register lists each disclosure, report, complaint or any expression of concern. It should

- identify the person in your care you are concerned about
- identify the people who saw, heard, or heard about a behaviour of concern, a breach of policy or a disclosure
- detail the cause of concern, breach or disclosure
- record what action was taken and by whom.

De-identified information should be reported quarterly to the board, or when necessary, so that they know the level of risk in your organisation.

The only time this information may be shared in any way that identifies a person—whether that's the person in your care, the reporter, the complainant, or the potential perpetrator—is when a matter needs to be reported to the police.



Know the signs that you could have a perpetrator in your organisation, and the measures you have put in place to detect and respond to potential abuse.



WHISTLE BLOWER LEGISLATION

Whistle blower legislation is designed to give people a way to report incidents or concerns when it's not possible to get action in the organisation—for example, the person you suspect of abuse is the person you would need to report to.

You may be required to have whistle-blower policy—this depends on the legislation in your state. Whether or not you are obliged to have a policy, we recommend that your directors state their position as a board and communicate it to staff, volunteers and your community.

If your organisation is investigated because of a whistle-blower report, then you must cooperate.



To learn more about Ansvar Safeguarding resources, please scan the QR code.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Call us on **1300 650 540**
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