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## Topic 1

In this topic you will learn about:

- 1A** Understanding children's rights
- 1B** Identifying signs and symptoms of abuse
- 1C** Suspecting abuse

## Supporting the protection of children and young people

To protect children, you must be aware of certain indicators of concern. You need to be able to understand children's rights and related legislation, and consider how your work practices could be improved to enable you to respond to harmful situations in the most appropriate manner.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and both national learning frameworks.

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	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership
Early Years Learning Framework	My Time, Our Place
Principles	
✓	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
	Partnerships
	High expectations and equity
	Respect for diversity
	Ongoing learning and reflective practice
Practice	
	Holistic approaches
	Responsiveness to children
	Learning through play
	Intentional teaching
	Learning environments
	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions
	Assessment for learning
	Holistic approaches
	Collaboration with children
	Learning through play
	Intentionality
	Environments
	Cultural competence
	Continuity and transitions
	Evaluation for wellbeing and learning
Outcomes	
	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

Action	Examples
Understand that children's capabilities differ and adjust plans accordingly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Offer play opportunities that suit children's level of physical development, attention span and skills.</li> </ul>
Balance interactions with children by offering group activities and one-on-one time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Schedule group stories and take time to read stories on a cushion with a single child.</li> </ul>

## Include children in decision-making

Include children in decision-making where possible. This involves listening to children's views and allowing them to make choices regarding food, activities and routines. You could ask them:

- ▶ how much they would like to eat
- ▶ which activities they would like to participate in
- ▶ whether they would like to play alone or join in with a group.

You could also involve them in planning a special event such as an excursion or cultural day, or an ongoing project such as a vegie patch or a mural.

## Duty of care

Duty of care is the obligation to ensure that reasonable action is taken to minimise the risk of harm to anyone likely to be affected by a person's actions. This obligation applies to employers, workers and all those they are educating and caring for.

If a child is injured while in the care of someone other than their parents or legal guardians, that person can be held responsible. An individual or the organisation may be sued for negligence.

Harm to a child may be:

- ▶ physical, such as an injury
- ▶ psychological
- ▶ emotional or social
- ▶ financial.

### Steps to prove negligence:

- 1 The person or organisation owed a duty of care to the child.
- 2 The person or organisation responsible for the child did not provide the degree of care that was reasonable in the situation.
- 3 The child suffered damage or harm.
- 4 There is a link between these three things (that is, that the breach of duty of care caused the damage or harm).

# 1B Identifying signs and symptoms of abuse

Child abuse is physically and emotionally damaging. The initial and long-term consequences of abuse may affect the child, the family, your organisation and the community as a whole. Early identification and effective intervention can lessen the long-term effects of abuse and promote recovery.



## What is abuse?

Abuse, neglect and maltreatment describe situations where a child may need protection. Child abuse can be defined as either an action or inaction (failure to act) 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.

## Indicators of harm

Knowing what signs to be aware of can help you identify children or young people who may be at risk of harm. When monitoring children and young people during everyday practice, you need to watch out for behaviours as well physical signs and symptoms. You may notice behaviours that are uncharacteristic for a particular child or for children of a particular age or developmental stage. These behaviours may be the only signs you can identify.

### Risk of harm indicators include:

- ▶ a child appearing frightened of their parents or carers
- ▶ a child acting in a way that is inappropriate for their age and development
- ▶ a parent persistently avoiding child health services, or treatment of their child's illness or injury
- ▶ a parent having unrealistic expectations of their child
- ▶ complaints by the child or someone else that the child is often being criticised or is not provided with emotional warmth
- ▶ parents who are missing or appear drunk or affected by drugs.

<b>Emotional harm</b>	<p>Emotional harm refers to a situation in which a child is repeatedly rejected or threatened in a way that is frightening. This may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ name calling</li> <li>▶ put downs</li> <li>▶ continual coldness.</li> </ul> <p>Emotional harm may affect a child's development. There are similarities between emotional harm and neglect.</p> <p>Emotional harm may have occurred if a child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ shows extremes in behaviour; for example, is overly compliant or demanding, extremely passive or aggressive</li> <li>▶ acts inappropriately above or below their age or developmental stage</li> <li>▶ is delayed in physical or emotional development</li> <li>▶ exhibits signs of depression, or talks about or attempts suicide</li> <li>▶ displays severe anxiety</li> <li>▶ shows signs of low self-esteem</li> <li>▶ finds it very difficult to learn</li> <li>▶ is constantly blamed, belittled or berated by their parent or carer</li> <li>▶ has a parent or carer who is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for any problem</li> <li>▶ is rejected by the parent or carer.</li> </ul>
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## Identifying vulnerability to abuse

The following factors indicate that a child may be vulnerable to abuse.

<b>Community and societal factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ High crime rate</li> <li>▶ Poor access to social services</li> <li>▶ High poverty rate</li> <li>▶ High unemployment rate</li> </ul>
<b>Parental factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Having a history of physical or sexual abuse as a child</li> <li>▶ Being a teen parent</li> <li>▶ Being a single parent</li> <li>▶ Being emotionally immature</li> <li>▶ Having poor coping skills</li> <li>▶ Having low self-esteem</li> <li>▶ Having a history of substance abuse</li> <li>▶ Having a known history of abusing children</li> <li>▶ Lack of support, particularly from extended family</li> <li>▶ Experiencing domestic violence</li> <li>▶ Lack of parenting skills</li> <li>▶ Lack of preparation for the stress of a new baby</li> <li>▶ Experiencing depression or another mental illness</li> </ul>
<b>Child factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Born premature</li> <li>▶ Having a low birth weight</li> <li>▶ Having a disability (mental or physical)</li> </ul>



# 1C Suspecting abuse

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 that abuse may be occurring, it is recommended that you:

- ▶ make notes, develop records and collect evidence
- ▶ continue to observe the child (if an immediate report isn't necessary)
- ▶ consult relevant colleagues (usually your supervisor or a senior staff member)
- ▶ develop action plans based on your organisational policies and procedures
- ▶ talk to other agencies about assisting families
- ▶ talk to the child
- ▶ talk to the child's parents (if they are not suspected of being involved in the abuse).



A child may also tell you about abuse or neglect. If this occurs, abide by the following guidelines.

Guideline	Description
1. Listen to and believe the child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Show through your words and actions that you are listening carefully, and encourage the child to talk without pushing them.</li> <li>▶ Use reflective listening techniques.</li> <li>▶ Ask open, non-leading questions such as, 'Can you tell me how you are feeling today?' or 'Is something bothering you, Tom? You don't seem to be as happy as you were yesterday'.</li> </ul>
2. Be supportive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Let the child know that they have done the right thing in telling you and that they are not to blame for what has happened.</li> <li>▶ Do not make any unrealistic promises like, 'Everything's going to be okay' or, 'Daddy won't go to jail'.</li> </ul>
3. Don't overreact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Stay calm; this helps the child feel safe and may encourage them to tell you more, especially if you reassure them and refrain from talking negatively about the abuser.</li> </ul>
4. Record what the child says	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Use as many of the child's actual words as possible and describe any signs of abuse or neglect that you observe.</li> </ul>

An open and non-leading question is one that encourages and allows the person answering the question to tell you their thoughts.

# Learning checkpoint 1

## Supporting the protection of children and young people

### Part A

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

#### Case study

Marcus is usually a happy and busy five-year-old who participates in a range of activities and interacts with many different children in small groups. He has attended your service for more than a year and you know him very well. Marcus's mum is a single parent and has recently started to go out socialising, often leaving Marcus with relatives and friends.

Today when Marcus arrives at your service he is crying. Marcus's uncle smells of alcohol and he doesn't talk to you or any of the educators.

Marcus tells you that he stayed at his uncle's house overnight while his mum went out. He stops crying after his uncle leaves, but chooses to sit in the book corner alone and yells at the other children to go away if they come near him.

1. What uncharacteristic behaviours or indicators does Marcus display that could be linked with abuse?

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2. Identify which form/s of abuse these uncharacteristic behaviours or indicators could be linked to.

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3. What open and non-leading questions could you ask Marcus to help determine if he is being harmed?

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4. What circumstances indicate that Marcus is vulnerable to abuse?

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## Topic 2

In this topic you will learn about:

### 2A Reporting abuse

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## Reporting risk of harm

Once you have identified situations in which harm may be occurring, you need to record this information in an appropriate way. Your organisation will have procedures relating to this, as will any agency you report to. The relevant agency you report to will then assess the best interests of the child and will decide whether to involve you further.

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Outcomes	
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Information to include in a report	Details	Your example
Reason for reporting	The reason why the report is being made	
Risk of harm	Assessment of immediate danger to the child	
Description	Description of the injury or behaviour that has been observed	
Child's whereabouts	The current whereabouts of the child	
Other services	Your knowledge of other services involved with the family	
Family information	Any other relevant information about the family	
Cultural characteristics	Any specific cultural or other details that will help to care for the child – for example, cultural origins, interpreter or disability needs	

## Summary

- ▶ If you suspect a child is being harmed or is at risk of harm, it is essential to keep accurate and objective records.
- ▶ All instances of possible harm should be recorded.
- ▶ Be prepared to report possible situations of harm as part of your advocacy role.
- ▶ All educators have a duty to report harm if they identify it or have reasonable grounds for concern.
- ▶ Child protection agencies can provide support by giving you specific guidelines for reporting child abuse.
- ▶ All organisations must have policies and procedures in place to ensure that children are protected and that reports meet legal and ethical guidelines.

# 3B Applying a code of ethics

A code of ethics is a written set of guidelines that those in professional roles can use to protect the rights of children and young people. Educators can use guidelines to help them:

- ▶ understand which behaviours by adults must not be supported
- ▶ maintain standards of practice
- ▶ protect children who are powerless and vulnerable
- ▶ make decisions when faced with ethical dilemmas.



## Ethical dilemmas

An ethical dilemma is a situation in which there is a conflict with your moral responsibilities. Usually there are two or more possible solutions, but it is not easy to decide which way to go.

### You may be faced with an ethical dilemma in the following situations:

- ▶ You believe there is something wrong in a situation.
- ▶ Each choice of action has a negative or difficult consequence.
- ▶ The issue is not resolved using legal guidelines.
- ▶ The issue affects people, relationships and/or people's rights.

The following ethical dilemmas are common in education and care services, and can be major sources of stress:

- ▶ A parent asks you to keep her child awake all day so he sleeps better at night. You know the child gets really tired and grumpy after lunchtime and really needs a nap.
- ▶ You hear your supervisor making hurtful remarks to children when parents are not around.

Always seek supervisor support for any issues that you are unsure about.

The ethical dilemmas outlined above relate to the difficulty you would have in making a decision out of two choices. In the first example, you may feel that it is in the best interests of the child to have a nap after lunch, yet this is going against the mother's wishes. In the second example, you know that the comments are upsetting the children and staff, but you don't feel confident about confronting your supervisor.

A code of ethics does not provide the answers to ethical dilemmas, but it does provide useful guidelines for appropriate behaviour. You may find that in many situations there are no clear right or wrong answers.

# 3C Maintaining professional boundaries

You will get to know the children and parents who visit your service, and develop close relationships with them. When friendship, caring and affection are involved, some educators find it difficult to clarify and maintain professional boundaries. As an educator, you must be clear about what is appropriate in terms of:

- ▶ how you share information
- ▶ what information you share and receive
- ▶ how you interact with others.

You must find a balance between becoming over-involved and under-involved with children and their family members. This middle ground, known as the zone of helpfulness, ensures your relationship is flexible and exists within the expected boundaries.



The following table describes how to work in accordance with professional boundaries.

Information and actions	In relation to adults	In relation to children
<b>Self-disclosure about personal problems or issues</b>	<p>Parents may wish to share their personal problems or issues with you to enable you to best support their child and family. They may view you as a responsible person they can confide in.</p> <p>You should keep your personal problems and issues to yourself. Never enlist a family member of a child to become your support person. If you need someone to talk to, approach your supervisor, a trusted person outside of your work, or make an appointment with a counselling service.</p>	<p>If children share their personal problems and issues with you, they most likely want you to help them solve the situation or listen to them.</p> <p>Children don't need to know about your problems or personal details as this may cause them to become stressed or fearful. They may even take responsibility for your feelings.</p>



## Practice task 7

1. Read the following situations and identify whether these actions are within professional boundaries, or if they are inappropriate and you need to stop them from happening. Explain your responses.
  - a. A parent arrives in the morning and tells you that they have been made redundant and they need to sell their car. You start to tell them how your dad was made redundant last year and go on to reveal all the details of his situation and how difficult it was.  


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  - b. A child is very physical in expressing their affection for others and at times uses inappropriate actions to let others know that they care. Today you are reading a story and the child comes to sit beside you. The child starts rubbing your arm, then your back, and then starts rubbing your stomach.  


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  - c. A child tells you that they are worried about their brother as he was smoking cigarettes yesterday. You tell the child that maybe it was just one time and that when you were his age you did the same thing.  


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  - d. A child tells you that their parents are fighting a lot. You listen and ask about how the child is feeling.  


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  - e. You get on well with a family in the service and one day they invite you to a barbecue. You go, and over time you make close friends with the family and see them on weekends and after work.  
 After some months you find out that one of the family members has told another person some negative information about you. You have an argument with this person and they start to tell other parents that you are an unfit educator.  


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  - f. You walk into the nappy change area and a staff member is touching a child's genitals. She says to you, 'He is different from my son'.  


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