
Child Protection Service

Summary

- Child Protection protects children and young people from harm caused by abuse or neglect within the family.
 - Community-based family support services may be able to help families having difficulties.
 - A report to Child Protection needs to occur when the risk to children is significant.
 - Some professionals are legally obliged to report to the Child Protection Service if they encounter abuse in the course of their work.
 - Anyone who is concerned about a child's welfare can voluntarily make a child abuse report to Child Protection or a referral to a family support agency.
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Child protection protects children and young people from harm caused by abuse or neglect within the family. Anyone can make a report to Victorian Child Protection if they believe a child is in need of protection. Suspected abuse may be physical, emotional or sexual, or may involve neglect.

The responsibility for making sure that children are safe is shared by the family, the general community, community agencies, and professionals working with children, police and government. Early identification and effective intervention can reduce the initial and long-term effects of child abuse, and promote recovery of the children and families involved.

For immediate assistance call **13 12 78**.

The Child Protection system

There are a range of services in our community that aim to support families and protect children. These can be categorised into three levels, which are:

- **Universal (primary) services** – are offered to everyone in the community. They include antenatal services (pregnancy counselling and advice), maternal and child health services, and preschool education. These services aim to provide support and help to prevent abuse and neglect.
- **Secondary services** – identify and reduce the personal and social stresses on parents that may lead to family breakdown or child abuse. Services include in-home family help, financial or family counselling, respite care, and various parenting and self-help groups.
- **Tertiary (statutory) services** – are for children who are or may be at risk of significant harm, and for whom intervention is needed for their ongoing safety. These services include statutory Child Protection and Out-of-Home-Care for children who are unable to live at home. Generally, where families are experiencing difficulties, it is more appropriate that less intrusive community-based professionals and agencies attempt to help. A report to Child Protection occurs when children and young people are considered to be at risk of significant harm.

The role of Child Protection

Child Protection is part of the Victorian Department of Human Services. Child Protection provides child-centred, family-focused services to protect children and young people from significant harm resulting from abuse or neglect within the family.

It also aims to make sure that children and young people receive services to deal with the impact of abuse and neglect on their wellbeing and development.

Child Protection:

- receives reports from people who believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection
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- provides advice to people who report such concerns
- investigates matters where it is believed that a child has been abused or is at risk of significant harm
- refers children and families to services, which help to provide for the ongoing safety and wellbeing of the children
- takes matters before the children's court if the child's safety cannot be assured within the family
- supervises children on legal orders granted by the children's court.

Legally mandated reporters

The *Children Youth and Families Act (2005)* Section 182(1) states that certain professionals must report to the Child Protection Service when, in the course of their work, they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical or sexual abuse.

These professions are:

- primary school principals and teachers
- secondary school principals and teachers
- registered nurses
- registered medical practitioners (doctors)
- police.

Voluntary (non-mandated) notification

Anyone can make a report to Child Protection if they believe a child is in need of protection. Suspected abuse may be:

- physical
- emotional
- sexual
- neglect.

The person making the report is not expected to prove the abuse. The law also protects the identity of the person making the report. Making the decision to report can be a difficult decision. However, where a child's parents appear unwilling or unable to care for and protect them, some other responsible adult needs to make sure that the child's situation is assessed and the necessary action is taken to protect them.

Contacting Child Protection

To make a report of child abuse, contact your regional Child Protection office as soon as possible. If you are making a report, please use the Intake Unit phone number. The **Where to get help** section below has a listing of Child Protection contact numbers for all areas.

During business hours, ring the number covering the local government area (LGA) where the child lives. If you know the suburb or postcode, **you can find the nearest LGA here**. For Child Protection after hours, phone **13 12 78**.

Child Protection Intake Workers are skilled in assessing the risks to children. When you phone, they will talk with you about your concerns and ask a series of questions. The answers to these questions will help them to gain a clear understanding of the situation and to make an assessment of what action may need to be taken.

How Child Protection responds to a report

After you have reported your concerns, Child Protection will decide whether the child or young person is in a situation that falls within the legal definition of 'a child in need of protection'. If the report does not require Child Protection's further action, a child protection worker may speak with you about other options including referrals to other organisations that may help the family.

If the report requires further action, a decision will be made regarding the urgency of the situation. Where a case is assessed as urgent, contact with the family will occur within 48 hours. If a case is considered non-urgent, the investigative process may take up to 14 days.

In cases where physical or sexual abuse has been alleged, the police will need to be involved in the investigation.

Where to get help

- Child protection (after hours) Tel. **13 12 78**
- Child Protection (business hours: 8.45am - 5.00pm Monday - Friday)

During business hours, ring the number covering the local government area (LGA) where the child lives.

North Division Intake - 1300 664 977

North Division has one child protection intake located at Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Preston covering the following areas and LGAs:

Banyule, Buloke, Darebin, Campaspe, Central Goldfield, Gannawarra, Greater Bendigo, Hume, Loddon, Macedon Ranges, Mildura, Moreland, Mount Alexander, Nillumbik, Swan Hill, Whittlesea, Yarra.

South Division Intake - 1300 655 795

South Division has one child protection intake located at DHHS Dandenong, and covers the following areas and LGAs:

Bass Coast, Baw Baw, Bayside, Cardinia, Casey, East Gippsland, Frankston, Glen Eira, Greater Dandenong, Kingston, Latrobe, Mornington Peninsula, Port Phillip, South Gippsland, Stonnington, Wellington.

East Division Intake - 1300 360 391

East Division has one child protection intake located at DHHS Box Hill covering the following areas and LGAs:

Alpine, Benalla, Boroondara, Greater Shepparton, Indigo, Knox, Manningham, Mansfield, Maroondah, Mitchell, Moira, Monash, Murrindindi, Strathbogie, Towong, Wangaratta, Whitehorse, Wodonga, Yarra Ranges.

West Division Intake - Rural and regional only - 1800 075 599

West Division has one child protection intake located at DHHS Geelong covering the following rural and regional areas and LGAs:

Ararat, Ballarat, Colac-Otway, Corangamite, Glenelg, Golden Plains, Greater Geelong, Hepburn, Hindmarsh, Horsham, Moorabool, Moyne, Northern Grampians, Pyrenees, Queenscliffe, Southern Grampians, Surf Coast, Warrnambool West Wimmera, Yarriambiack.

West Division Intake - metropolitan only - 1300 664 977

West Division Metro area reports are managed by North Division Intake located at DHHS Preston for the following areas and LGAs:

Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Melton, Moonee Valley, Wyndham.

After hours Child Protection Emergency Service - 13 12 78

- (5.00pm - 9.00am Monday - Friday, 24 hours on weekends and public holidays)

A statewide after hours emergency service that receives new reports, as well as concerns for existing child protection clients who are considered to be at immediate risk and require urgent after hours service.

Interstate websites and contact numbers

Australian Capital Territory (ACT) - 1300 556 729

New South Wales (NSW) - 13 21 11

Northern Territory (NT) - 1800 700 250

Queensland (QLD) - (07) 3235 9999

South Australia (SA) - 13 14 78

Tasmania (TAS) - 1300 737 639

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DHHS - Child protection

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