



## Providing a Protective Environment Policy

**Policy Number:** 29

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### Rationale and Policy Considerations

The education and care service understands it has a duty of care to ensure that all persons are provided with a high level of safety and protection during the hours of the service's operation. All educators will be fully informed about their responsibilities to implement and adhere to the service's child protection policies and procedures.

Child abuse includes physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Educators should be supported and trained in the nature of child abuse, and develop an awareness of how and why abuse occurs. Where state/territory requirements for mandatory reporting of suspected incidences of child abuse or neglect exist, the service will again provide training to all educators on how to adhere to these requirements.

The service believes that the best way to ensure children's protection at the service is to establish an environment that minimises risks and sets out clear safeguards and policies for educators and educators to follow.

### Most relevant policies and procedures

- Grievances and Complaints Management
- Guiding Children's Behaviour
- Interactions with Children
- Maintaining a Safe Environment
- Supervision

### Scope

This policy is written for educators and visitors of Lifestreamers Early Learning.

### Policy Statement

The service aims to create an environment that minimises the risk of children being harmed in any way whilst in the care of the service, and to protect educators from the possibility that allegations of child maltreatment could be falsely made against them, as a result of their work at the service. Child abuse thrives in secrecy, therefore to prevent child abuse, the service will develop and maintain a transparent, open and fully aware culture where educators and children have a clear understanding of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.

The service believes it has a responsibility to all children attending the service to defend their right to care and protection. To support this right, the service will follow any procedures recommended by state child protection authorities, when dealing with any allegations of abuse or neglect of children, and will ensure that all educators undergo appropriate professional development in this area. The service will also document any evidence of neglect or abuse which may have occurred outside of the service and follow procedures to ensure the child is protected from harm, again following appropriate state laws and guidelines.

The service believes it also has a responsibility to its employees to defend their right to confidentiality unless allegations of abuse against them are substantiated.

To this end, all educators are required to have a current Working with Children card and are to attend child protection training at intervals of no more than 2 years. As part of the induction of new educator's process, they are given this

information and are expected to follow our policies at all times. Educators will also be encouraged to attend the Protective Behaviours workshops for strategies on how to educate children.

## **Policy Principles**

### **What is Child Protection?**

Child Protection refers to keeping children safe from abuse and neglect.

### **Definitions of Abuse**

- Physical abuse – The use of physical force that results in or has likelihood of resulting in injury to the child.
- Sexual abuse – Unwanted sexual activity, threats, grooming, touching without consent.
- Emotional and psychological abuse – Non-physical behaviours towards another person that belittles, threatens and isolates.
- Neglect – Failure to provide adequate and proper care, support, supervision and safety needs.

### **The Premises**

- The service will ensure clear observation of child occupied areas through the following means:
  - Reviewing overall educator supervision within the service to ensure all child occupied areas can be viewed by more than one educator at all times.
  - Ensuring furniture/equipment is positioned in a way that all areas are visible.
  - Visitors/trades people will be screened when entering the service to ensure they have a valid reason to be on site.
- Families and educators will be educated in regard to not allowing unauthorised access to others, as they enter or leave the premises.
- Ensuring validity of visitors
  - All visitors will be required to sign in and out.
  - Unauthorised people will be asked to provide photo identification.
  - Where the visitor is unable to provide appropriate ID the service may ask them to make an appointment and return at a later date. This will be dependent on the particular circumstances at the time, i.e. a parent/guardian who has popped in to see what the service is like with a view to enrolling their child, will not be turned away, provided that someone is available to show them around the service at that time. If the educator is at all unsure about the person, they will be asked to return at a later date.
  - Appointments will only be made with people who have a valid reason for being in the service.
  - All people who perform duties at the service, (paid or unpaid), will be required to present a working with children card, before being allowed on the premises. (i.e. student assessor; trades persons; volunteers; students, educators etc.)

### **Recruitment of educators**

- The service will ensure all educators working with children provide a current working with children card.
- All information obtained through criminal record screening will be treated in strict confidence and only used to determine suitability for employment by the service.
- Within the educator recruitment process the applicant's knowledge and experience of child protection issues will be determined.
- Prior to any appointment or offer of employment, the applicant's referees will be contacted to determine:
  - details of the applicants previous employment
  - any history regarding child protection issues
  - the applicant's reliability and consistency in implementing duty of care practices
  - the applicant's supervision skills
- The applicant's employment record will be carefully checked in regard to the reasons for breaks in service, the reasons for any change of employment, and to ensure that the references provided are linked to recent employment.

- All new educators will be oriented to the service's child protection policies and procedures and educator code of conduct. Whenever possible new educators will have a period of time to work alongside current educators to familiarise themselves with the children, families, other educators and service procedures, prior to taking up their new responsibilities in a full capacity.
- All educators are provided with clear duty statements that describe the daily tasks and responsibilities of their position, and identify lines of reporting and who they are responsible to.

### **Supervision of Children**

- Children will be supervised at a level appropriate to the age and needs of the children, the program, time of day and associated risks and in accordance with the Education and Care Services National Regulations.
- Supervision of children away from the main play areas (i.e. bathrooms, toilets, nappy change areas, cubbies, tunnels, quiet areas, sleep areas etc.) is carefully monitored.
- At times of the day when numbers of educators is at a minimum (i.e. early morning or late afternoon) educators will be aware of the risks this creates, and will ensure they know the whereabouts of each other, and the children within the service. Strategies will be implemented to ensure that any visitors to the service at these times are vetted prior to entry.
- Rosters are planned to ensure appropriate supervision of children is maintained and educators on non-contact duties are replaced in order to ensure appropriate educator-child ratios are maintained in accordance with the requirements of the Education and Care Services National Regulations.
- Higher levels of supervision will be needed when older and younger children are playing together. Educators will be aware that children have had different life experiences and are at different developmental stages.
- Individual children will only be released from the service to authorised people.
- Educators will undertake appropriate consultation and referral regarding children's inappropriate behaviour with family cooperation and approval. (e.g. Inclusion Support Agencies; Child Psychologist etc.)

### **Supervision and support of educators**

- Child protection issues are discussed regularly at educator meetings. Educators are encouraged to share any observations or concerns in regard to child and educators protection risks. Resolutions are sought to eliminate risks, and management is advised of the issues and current strategies to resolve them.
- The service's educator Individual Development Plan addresses educator performance in relation to child protection.
- Educators will support each other to limit the time they are left alone with children.
- Visitors or trades people will not be left alone with children at any time.
- Volunteers and students must be supervised by an educator whenever they are educating or caring for children.
- Casual relief educators will be rostered on to a middle shift where possible, to ensure someone is working with them at all times. When this is not possible strategies will be implemented to minimise times when the relief person is working alone with any group of children.
- Educators will not leave the service alone with individual children except in emergencies and in accordance with other service policies.
- Grievances will be dealt with in accordance with the service's educator grievance procedure.
- Any allegations of child abuse or neglect made against an educator will be treated with strict confidentiality whilst taking immediate action to protect children at risk in consultation with the relevant child protection authority.

### **Educators Training**

- The service requires all educators to complete mandatory child safety training. This training must be completed within 14 days of commencing employment and refreshed every two years. In addition, staff are required to

complete the Mandatory Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse in WA training every two years. Training sessions will alternate between Child Safety and Mandatory Reporting. These training will include:

- what are appropriate and inappropriate behaviours in relationships with children;
  - the nature of child abuse and why some children are victimised;
  - signs and symptoms of child maltreatment;
  - how to respond if a child discloses sexual abuse;
  - how to observe and record children's behaviour;
  - process of reporting child maltreatment to relevant child protection and regulatory authorities;
  - child protection authority's role in child protection issues.
- A guide to recognising signs of abuse or neglect will be made available to all educators who have attended child protection training, and will be regularly discussed at educator meetings, to remind educators of the possible signs of child abuse, and the procedures they should follow if a child in their care displays behaviour or physical signs that could indicate abuse has taken place.
  - The service will ensure that both management and educators are knowledgeable about current legislation and reporting requirements related to child protection and maltreatment and that a system for the reporting and recording of suspicious incidents is in place.
  - The service will access current information from the relevant state/territory child protection authority, about the procedures to be taken in relation to allegations of child abuse or neglect. Employer and employee responsibilities in relation to allegations of child abuse are included in educator handbooks. These responsibilities are highlighted to new educators at their induction.
  - All educators are regularly reminded about the service's policies, procedures, and confidentiality requirements in regard to child protection and issues are discussed at educators meetings.

#### **Children's Education and Empowerment**

- Educators will foster children's self-esteem and positive self-image through their interactions and relationships with children.
- The service's guiding and supporting children's behaviour policy will be followed to positively guide children's appropriate behaviour.
- Educators will encourage children to be assertive (i.e. learn when to stand up for themselves and say no when appropriate), and to communicate their needs and concerns. This may be done through role play, storytelling, puppets etc.
- Educators will role model assertive behaviour and language.
- Educators will build relationships with all children based on trust, and will empower children to discuss what is 'safe' and who may be a 'safe' person to talk to.
- Children are naturally curious about their bodies and will occasionally explore and compare while interacting through everyday play experiences. These behaviours are a normal part of a child's development. Educators will inform parents/guardians of the particular occurrence and environment in which the behaviour was displayed, during their normal daily communication exchange with the parent.

#### **Information for families**

- The service will make available to all families information on establishing a protective environment, and the Protective Behaviours Program.
- Educators will be available to discuss any issues with parents/guardians/families.
- The service will keep families up to date with any changes and seek their input.
- The service's policy on establishing a protective environment will be made available to families on the website.

#### **Reporting Concerns**

- The service will develop a procedure that outlines how an individual can complain about an issue relating to child protection or report an allegation of abuse; and how the service will manage complaints and/or allegations of misconduct against an educator, volunteer or service user.
- All concerns will be acted upon in a confidential and uniform manner.
- Mandatory reporting requirements in line with child protection law will be adhered to. The service will develop a procedure for documenting and reporting allegations of child abuse or neglect.
- All educators have a duty of care to report any concerns about a child they suspect is being maltreated, whether outside or within the service. Allegations made within the service will be reported to Department of Child Protection within one working day. All allegations and concerns will be recorded along with any advice given by officers of DCP. At all times, information will be treated in strict confidence and general discussion will not be permitted in order to protect the rights and privacy of all concerned.

### Procedures

When a child discloses information to you or you suspect they have been abused outside the centre,

- Ensure child is safe from immediate harm, comfortable and happy
- Notify a senior educator
- Document concerns and/or incident
- Contact Mandatory Reporting Service on 1800708704 or lodge a written report via Mandatory Reporting website at [www.wa.gov.au/mandatoryreporting](http://www.wa.gov.au/mandatoryreporting) within 24 hours. It is important to record; when you reported, name of duty officer and any advice or information that was given (use abuse allegation form).
- If you report over the phone, you will also need to do a written report within 24 hours
- Contact CSO for support
- Educators are not to ask questions or force any information from the child, their parents or any others involved.
- Records are to be correctly maintained at all times and confidentiality procedures strictly adhered to.

When an allegation is made within the centre,

- Ensure child is safe from immediate harm, comfortable and happy
- Notify a senior educators member
- Do not investigate
- Contact Mandatory Reporting Service on 1800708704 or lodge a written report via Mandatory Reporting website at [www.wa.gov.au/mandatoryreporting](http://www.wa.gov.au/mandatoryreporting) within 24 hours. It is important to record; when you reported, name of duty officer and any advice or information that was given (use abuse allegation form)
- Contact CSO for support
- Document concerns and/or incident
- Maintain confidentiality
- Ensure safety of all children – develop a service safety plan
- Seek industrial and legal advice
- Support the child and his/her parents
- Develop a media response plan

### Written Records

A confidential concerns file will be used to record all information which will be maintained at all times.

### Documenting

- Visual observations accompanied by a diagram if applicable (no photos)
- Verbal statements by:
  - The child
  - Family members
  - Visitors
  - Educators
  - Professional Bodies

### Confidentiality

All information will be regarded as highly confidential. No general discussions will occur. All written records will be stored securely. This information may be required if legal action arises.

### **The Use of Electronic Media and Devices with Children**

- The use of electronic media and devices are permitted as part of the educational program, where it is deemed age and developmentally appropriate.
- As per the recommendations outlined in the [Australia's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines](#), educators will limit or prevent screen time for children. Educators are to consider the recommendations for sedentary screen time for children, volume, screen size and environment. Screen viewing will not be planned for children under 2.5 years old.
- Educators are to support children and their involvement in the use of safe technology.
- Quiet, relaxing, and soothing music or white noise is to be utilised at sleep/rest time where appropriate. Volume of music or white noise is to be considered.
- Educators are to ensure that all electronic devices are put away when not in use. Charging cables and power cables are to be kept out of reach of children and stored safely.
- Management will ensure that all electrical devices are tagged and checked by an electrician annually.
- Music played in common areas are to be played at an appropriate volume and support a calming environment. Radio stations and personal music are not permitted. Online streaming services where uncensored content and advertisements may play should not be used.
- Internet use should only be used when it links to the educational program and enhances children's learning. Educators and children are encouraged to be co-researchers when using the internet.
- No child will browse the internet alone and an educator will always be actively supervising children when using the internet to monitor the potential risk of inappropriate content and spontaneous 'pop ups'.
- Only child safe websites are to be viewed and accessed. (You Tube Kids)
- All websites and online content should be previewed by educators to verify their content, minimising the risk for children to view or engage with inappropriate images or videos. When using online content, the site should be accessed and ads played before allowing children to view the desired content.
- Educators, students, and volunteers are to use service electronic devices for business purposes only.
- The use of personal devices including but not limited to smartphones, iPad and laptops are prohibited whilst working with children. The messaging, phone calls and WIFI function of personal devices are not to be operational during work hours.
- Educators should consider appropriate times when using tablets or devices to document children's learning and routines. The use of electronic devices should not interfere with effective supervision practices and relationships with children.

### **The Use of Photography and Videography within the Service and on Excursions**

- Service phones and iPads and other photographic devices are to be used for photographing children, events, environments and documentation. Children's rights will always be respected when photos and videos are being taken of them and their environment.
- Individual Child Enrolment Forms will provide authority for children's image to be captured, upon enrolment. Where necessary, the service is to ensure they detail what the photos will be used for and families will sign a permission form before any filming is to take place in the service.
- Images for the purpose of marketing will only be used after permission has been authorised on the enrolment form.
- Personal devices will not be used to take photos, videos, or audio of the children whilst in the care of the service.
- Personal electronic devices that can take photos or record images will not be carried or worn while providing education and care to children, except for authorised essential purposes. Authorised essential purposes may include the following:

- communication in an emergency situation involving a lost child, injury to child or educators, or other serious incident, or in the case of a lockdown or evacuation of the service premises
- personal health requirements, e.g., heart or blood sugar level monitoring
- disability, e.g., where a personal electronic device is an essential means of communication for an educator or other educators member
- family necessity, e.g., a worker with an ill or dying family member
- technology failure, e.g., when a temporary outage of service-issued electronic devices has occurred
- local emergency event occurring, to receive emergency notifications through government warning systems, for example, bushfire evacuation text notification.
- Excursions for the sole purpose of emergencies
- Prior to the use of personal devices, approval by the management team must be provided and documented on the Personal Electronic Devices Authorisation form.
- Parents and visitors are not permitted to take photographs, audio, or video within the service during opening hours, regardless of if the child is the only person in the image/recording, without prior permission from the management team.
- Digital protection of children during family events remains the responsibility of the parent/guardian.
- Families not wishing their child to be photographed should avoid activities such as Christmas performances, where the children are on display together as a group and families are permitted to video and take photos.
- Students are not permitted to take photos of children for the purpose of their placement. Alternate forms of evidence will need to be utilised.
- When engaging an external contractor such as a photographer, photos or videos may only be taken with written consent by a parent or authorised person listed on the child enrolment form.
- Where external contractors are engaged for the purpose of photography or videography, a Working with Children Check must be sighted and verified by the Responsible Person.
- Unsupervised access to children or one-to-one photo sessions are not allowed at the service.

#### **Electronic Media/Social Media**

- The service management will oversee employee practices in relation to the use of electronic media.
- The use of educators, students and volunteer's personal mobile phones or devices will be prohibited in children's environments, without written consent on the Personal Electronic Devices Authorisation form completed by management.
- The use of Facebook, Instagram or any such online community sites/pages, where there is a negative reference that involves the service, its educators, families and/or children in any way will not be tolerated. The service Grievance and Complaints Management Policy will be followed should this occur.
- Educators, students, volunteers, and families are to be respectful when using social media sites. Service management encourage educators, students, and volunteers to always remain professional on social media sites and maintain confidentiality.
- Educators must not ask families to be friends on Facebook or social media but can accept requests. Asking or accepting requests from children is not permitted. Educators are to maintain professional relationships with other educators and families of the service.
- Information about educators, children, parents/guardians/caregivers and Lifestreamers Early Learning (including photos or videos) must not be posted on an educator's personal web space, or any social networking site (e.g. blogs, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), any public networking or file sharing site (e.g. You Tube) or any other type of internet websites without permission.

#### **Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV)**

- CCTV currently is installed in Area 2 and the Seminar Room and is used solely for the purpose of ensuring the safety and security of children, families, educators and the premises.

- CCTV footage will be stored securely and accessed only by authorised personnel.
- CCTV footage is stored for three months
- Footage will not be shared externally unless required by law, regulatory authorities, or in response to a serious incident.
- Families and educators will be informed of the presence and purpose of CCTV.
- CCTV will not be used in private areas such as bathrooms or nappy changing spaces.

#### **Storage and Retention of Images and Videos**

- Images and videos of children will be stored securely at the service on password protected devices.
- The use of service approved devices will be monitored by the management and not be taken off premise without first being cleared of images or videos. Where images are printed offsite (i.e. Office works, Kmart etc.) images should be uploaded on a thumb drive in the service and directly retrieved from the printing premise and returned directly to the service.
- Personal storage and file transfer media (such as SD cards, USB drives, hard drives, and cloud storage) should not be used by any person while providing education and care and working directly with children. Any exceptions must be authorised in writing by the Nominated Supervisor.
- Where service issued devices used to store images, videos of child, family or educator's sensitive data are no longer fit for purpose, they must be cleared and discarded.
- The service will regularly review their access and storage of digital images and videos - service review form to identify any risks or actions required to ensure the safe storage and retention of images and videos.
- Photos will be deleted off service issued devices after they have been used for their intended purpose.
- Management will monitor service issued devices and permanently delete images or videos of children that are no longer required.
- All service issued devices will be password protected
- Service issued devices will be locked away over weekends and holidays

#### **Use of Playground App or Other Educational Platforms**

- The use of the Playground App will be professional and appropriate by all educators
- Playground App is used to communicate with families, children and educators professionally and appropriately about children's participation in the educational program, service events, transitions and routines.

#### **Related Legislation and Documents**

- **Education and Care Services National Law (WA) Act 2012**
- **Education and Care Services National Regulations:**
- **National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care (Nov 2010) –**
  
- **Early Years Learning Framework for Australia**
- **State/territory laws relating to child protection**

#### **Document History**

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