

Child Protection Policy for Malatest International

Summary

Ensuring the wellbeing and safety of children, including prevention of child abuse or maltreatment, is a paramount goal of Malatest International. We are committed to child protection and recognise the important roles and responsibilities of our staff in the protection of children. We recognise there is increasing awareness that abuse and neglect of children can and does happen, we are determined to make a positive difference to this issue in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

This policy provides us a strong foundation to ensure the safety of vulnerable children, and guidance to staff on how to identify and respond to concerns about the wellbeing of a child, including possible abuse or neglect.

The process for responding to a concern about a child is on page 7 (Appendix 1) of this policy. The interests of the child will be the paramount consideration when any action is taken in response to suspected abuse or neglect. This organisation commits to support the statutory agencies (Oranga Tamariki and the New Zealand Police (the Police)) to investigate abuse and will report suspected cases and concerns to these agencies as per the process in this policy.

Our Designated Person for Child Protection, Dr Lana Perese, will be responsible for the maintenance and annual review of this policy, in addition to carrying out the responsibilities outlined in this policy. Staff will not assume responsibility beyond the level of their experience and training. Our organisation commits to ensure staff have access to the training they need. This policy was authored by Dr Lana Perese on 29/04/2021. A digital copy can be found on our website at www.malatest-intl.com. The policy is due to be updated on 29/04/2024. It is consistent with the Children's Act 2014, Oranga Tamariki and Police guidelines and will be updated when new guidance is issued.

Purpose, scope and principles

Our child protection policy supports our staff to respond appropriately to potential child protection concerns, including suspected abuse or neglect. It is our organisation's commitment to protect children from abuse and to recognise the important roles all of our staff have in protecting children.

This policy provides a broad framework and expectations to protect children, including (but not limited to) staff behaviours in response to actual or suspected child abuse and neglect. It applies to all staff, including volunteers and part-time or temporary roles and contractors. It is intended to protect all children that staff may encounter, including siblings, the children of adults accessing services and any other children encountered by staff as they provide their service.

In addition to guiding staff to make referrals of suspected child abuse and neglect to the statutory agencies – i.e., Oranga Tamariki and the Police – this policy will also help our staff to identify and respond to the needs of the many vulnerable children whose wellbeing is of concern.

We recognise that in many of these cases, the involvement of statutory agencies would be inappropriate and potentially harmful to families/whānau. Throughout New Zealand statutory and non-statutory agencies provide a network of mutually supportive services, and it is important for our organisation to work with these to respond to the needs of vulnerable children and families/whānau in a manner proportionate to the level of need and risk.

Malatest International operates under the following principles for child protection:

- 1) The safety and wellbeing of the children we encounter are our primary concern, we seek to ensure the child is at the centre of all decision-making when responding to suspected abuse or neglect
- 2) We recognise the importance of family/whānau and their perspectives on the decision-making for their child/tamariki, we intend to honour this unless this would result in an increased risk to the child
- 3) We foster a workplace culture where staff feel safe and confident to report concerns of child abuse and neglect, and to challenge poor practice
- 4) All staff at Malatest international are aware they can report suspected child abuse and neglect to Oranga Tamariki – Ministry of Children or the Police.

Malatest International reflects its principles through the following commitments:

- 1) To work together to ensure the best possible outcomes for all children in Aotearoa, New Zealand and to work towards the continuous improvement in child protection practices
- 2) To recognise the culture of the family/whānau, the rights and importance of family/whānau to participate in decision making about their children/tamariki
- 3) To develop and maintain links with iwi, Pasifika and other cultural and community groups to ensure that important cultural concepts (e.g., whakamanawa, whakapapa, te reo Māori, tikanga, kaitiakitanga, wairuatanga) are integrated, as appropriate, into practice
- 4) A commitment to our staff being able to identify the signs and symptoms of potential abuse and neglect, and the ability to take appropriate action in response and to do so promptly
- 5) Maintain open and transparent lines of communication between the clients/service users we work with, including sharing concerns about child safety issues with the family/whānau unless this would result in an escalation of risk

- 6) To support all staff to work in accordance with the policy, to work with partner agencies and community organisations to ensure child protection policies are consistent and of high quality and to always comply with relevant legislative responsibilities
- 7) A commitment to meet all existing statutory and contractual obligations, including matters relating to employment.

Definitions

- Child – any child or young person aged under 18 years and who is not married or in a civil union.
- Child protection – activities carried out to ensure that children are safe in cases where there is suspected abuse or neglect or are at risk of abuse or neglect.
- Designated person for child protection – the manager/supervisor or designated person responsible for providing advice and support to staff where they have a concern about an individual child or who want advice about child protection policy.
- Disclosure – information given to a staff member by a child, parent or caregiver or a third party in relation to abuse or neglect.
- Oranga Tamariki – a relatively new government agency dedicated to supporting any child in New Zealand whose wellbeing is at significant risk of harm now, or in the future. The agency believes that in the right environment, with the right people surrounding and nurturing them, any child can, and should flourish.
- New Zealand Police – the agency responsible for responding to situations where a child is in immediate danger and for working with Oranga Tamariki in child protection work and investigating cases of abuse or neglect where an offence may have occurred.
- Physical abuse – any acts that may result in physical harm of a child or young person. It can be, but is not limited to: bruising, cutting, hitting, beating, biting, burning, causing abrasions, strangulation, suffocation, drowning, poisoning and fabricated or induced illness.
- Sexual abuse – any acts that involve forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not they are aware of what is happening. Sexual abuse can be, but is not limited to:
 - Contact abuse: touching breasts, genital/anal fondling, masturbation, oral sex, penetrative or non-penetrative contact with the anus or genitals, encouraging the child to perform such acts on the perpetrator or another, involvement of the child in activities for the purposes of pornography or prostitution.
 - Non-contact abuse: exhibitionism, voyeurism, exposure to pornographic or sexual imagery, inappropriate photography or depictions of sexual or suggestive behaviours or comments.
- Emotional abuse – any act or omission that results in adverse or impaired psychological, social, intellectual and emotional functioning or development. This can include:

- Patterns of isolation, degradation, constant criticism or negative comparison to others. Isolating, corrupting, exploiting or terrorising a child can also be emotional abuse.
- Exposure to family/whānau or intimate partner violence.
- Neglect – neglect is the most common form of abuse and although the effects may not be as obvious as physical abuse, it is just as serious. Neglect can be:
 - Physical (not providing the necessities of life like a warm place, food and clothing).
 - Emotional (not providing comfort, attention and love).
 - Neglectful supervision (leaving children without someone safe looking after them).
 - Medical neglect (not taking care of health needs).
 - Educational neglect (allowing chronic truancy, failure to enrol in education or inattention to education needs)

Training

We are committed to maintaining and increasing staff awareness of how to prevent, recognise and respond to abuse through appropriate training. As part of their induction, new staff are made aware of the policy on child protection. All staff dealing directly with young people and their families/whānau will be prepared to offer referrals and/or advice on accessing support agencies such as Victims support and others such as those listed in Appendix 2 if they encounter situations of trauma or other problems.

Identifying child abuse and neglect

Our approach to identifying abuse or neglect is guided by the following principles:

- We understand that every situation is different and it's important to consider all available information about the child and their environment before reaching conclusions. For example, behavioural concerns may be the result of life events, such as divorce, accidental injury, the arrival of a new sibling etc.
- We understand when we are concerned a child is showing signs of potential abuse or neglect we should talk to someone, either a colleague, manager/supervisor or the Designated Person for Child Protection – we shouldn't act alone.
- While there are different definitions of abuse, the important thing is for us to consider overall wellbeing and the risk of harm to the child. It is not so important to be able to categorise the type of abuse or neglect.
- It is normal for us to feel uncertain, however, the important thing is that we should be able to recognise when something is wrong, especially if we notice a pattern forming or several signs that make us concerned.

- Exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV) is a form of child abuse. There is a high rate of co-occurrence between IPV and the physical abuse of children.

We recognise the signs of potential abuse:

- Physical signs (e.g., unexplained injuries, burns, fractures, unusual or excessive itching, genital injuries, sexually transmitted diseases).
- Developmental delays (e.g., small for their age, cognitive delays, falling behind in school, poor speech and social skills).
- Emotional abuse/neglect (e.g., sleep problems, low self-esteem, obsessive behaviour, inability to cope in social situations, sadness/loneliness and evidence of self-harm).
- Behavioural concerns (e.g., age inappropriate sexual interest or play, fear of a certain person or place, eating disorders/substance abuse, disengagement/neediness, aggression).
- The child talking about things that indicate abuse (sometimes called an allegation or disclosure).

We are aware of the signs of potential neglect:

- Physical signs (e.g., looking rough and uncared for, dirty, without appropriate clothing, underweight).
- Developmental delays (e.g., small for their age, cognitive delays, falling behind in school, poor speech and social skills).
- Emotional abuse/neglect (e.g., sleep problems, low self-esteem, obsessive behaviour, inability to cope in social situations, sadness/loneliness and evidence of self-harm).
- Behavioural concerns (e.g., disengagement/ neediness, eating disorders/substance abuse, aggression).
- Neglectful supervision (e.g., out and about unsupervised, left alone, no safe home to return to).
- Medical neglect (e.g., persistent nappy rash or skin disorders or other untreated medical issues).

Every situation is different and staff will consider all available information about the child and their environment before reaching conclusions. For example, behavioural concerns may be the result of life events, such as divorce, accidental injury, the arrival of a new sibling etc.

This organisation will always act on the recommendations of statutory agencies, including Oranga Tamariki and the Police. We will only inform families/whānau about suspected or actual abuse after we have discussed this with these agencies.

When we respond to suspected child abuse or any concerning behaviour we write down our observations, impressions and communications in a confidential register. This is kept separate from our other records and access will be strictly controlled.

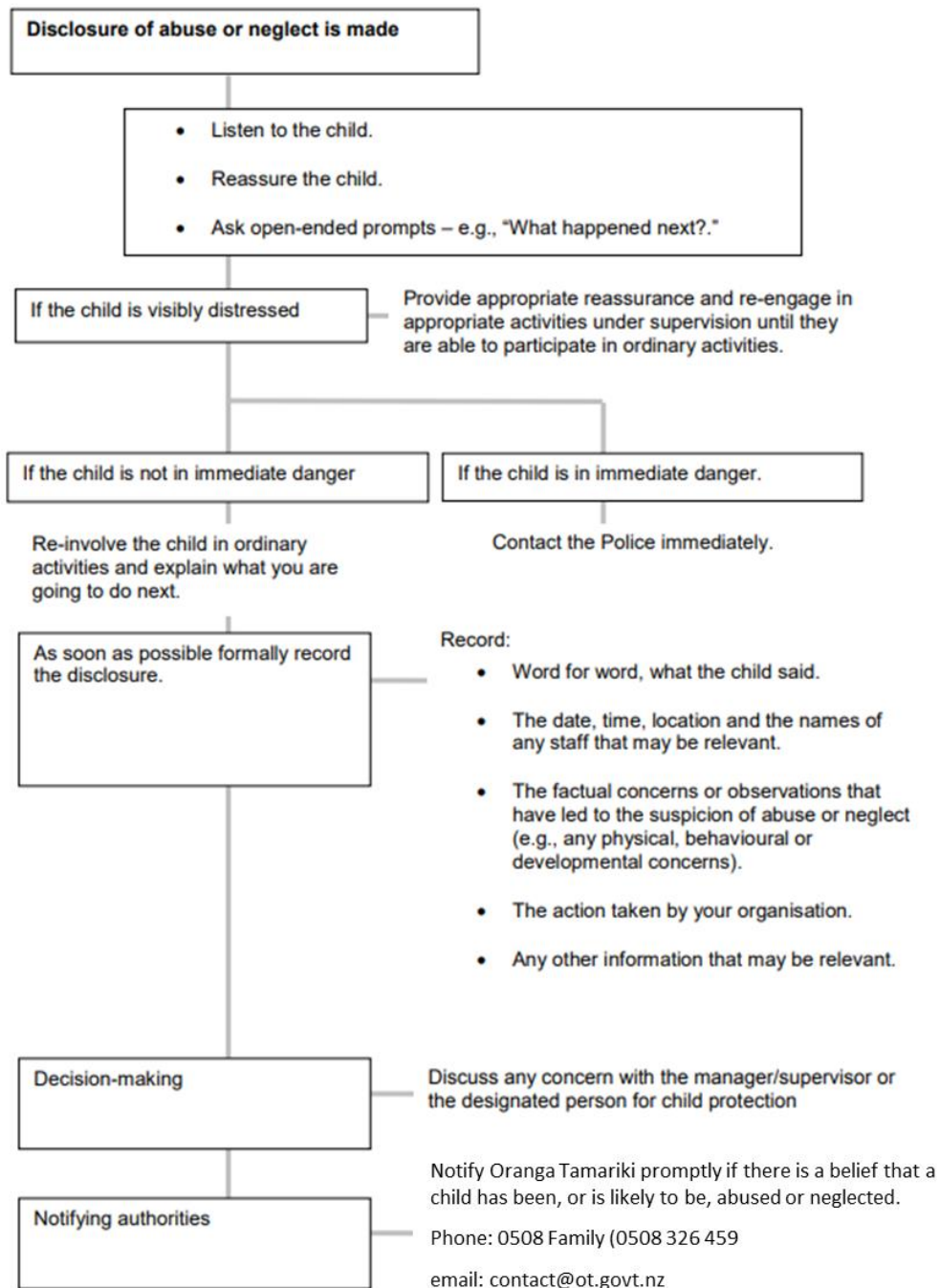
Staff involved in cases of suspected child abuse are entitled to have support. We will maintain knowledge of such individuals, agencies and organisations in the community that provide support.

Confidentiality and information sharing

We will seek advice from Oranga Tamariki and/or the Police before identifying information about an allegation is shared with anyone, other than the service manager or designated person. Staff should be aware that:

- Under sections 15 and 16 of the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989 any person who believes that a child has been or is likely to be, harmed physically, emotionally or sexually or ill-treated, abused, neglected or deprived may report the matter to Oranga Tamariki or the Police and provided the report is made in good faith, no civil, criminal or disciplinary proceedings may be brought against them.
- When collecting personal information about individuals, it is important to be aware of the requirements of the privacy principles – i.e., the need to collect the information directly from the individual concerned and when doing so to be transparent about: the purposes for collecting the information and how it will be used; who can see the information; where it is held; what is compulsory/voluntary information; and that people have a right to request access to and correction of their information.
- Staff may, however, disclose information under the Privacy Act/Health Information Privacy Code where there is good reason to do so – such as where there is a serious risk to individual health and safety (see privacy principle 11/Code rule 11). Disclosure about ill-treatment or neglect of a child/young person may also be made to the Police or Oranga Tamariki under sections 15 and 16 of the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989.

Appendix 1: Our process for responding to a concern about a child



Appendix 2: Potential support agencies for referral

- **Youthline** 0800 376 633, free text 234, webchat at www.youthline.co.nz 10am – 10pm
- **1737** You can text or freephone 24 hours a day Free counselling service
- **What's UP** 0800 942 8787 Advice & counselling support for 5 – 18 year olds; Mon-Fri midday -11pm Sat/Sun 3pm-10pm, webchat at www.whatsup.co.nz 3pm – 10pm
- **OUTLine NZ** 0800 688 5463 confidential, free, all-ages rainbow affirming support line
- **Safe to talk – Kōrero mai ka ora** 0800 044 334, text 4334 or online chat to someone for confidential advice for sexual harm issues www.safetotalk.nz
- **Healthline** 0800 611 116 General health advice and information from a registered nurse
- **Lifeline** 0800 543 354 or Text 'Help' to 4357 Counselling advice and support
- **Aunty Dee** www.auntydee.co.nz A free online tool for anyone who needs some help working through a problem or problems It doesn't matter what the problem is, you can use Aunty Dee to help you work it through
- **The Lowdown** thelowdown.co.nz 0800 111 757, text 5626 Free 24/7 helpline (text, email and webchat) "Whatever's going on you'll find ideas and people who can help you"