

Responding to Child Abuse Reports & Allegations Policy

Version	Description of Changes	Author of Changes	Date Approved	Next Review Date
1.0	Creation of policy	Courtney Kennedy	16.02.2019	16.02.2021
2.0	Board review 04.10.2020	Ante Golem		
2.1	Local format update and signed approval 17.12.20	Steph Grondal	24.08.2021	24.08.2023
2.2	Review July 2023: No changes required	Gov SC	Board: 23.10.2023	23.10.2025

Policy Scope

This policy applies to all employees, volunteers, tutors and board members of Ronald McDonald House Charities Western Australia (RMHC WA).

This policy must be read as an addendum to the MLG approved Suspected Child Abuse Report Policy (as amended from time to time). Where there is any conflict between this policy and the Suspected Child Abuse Report Policy, the latter will prevail.

Policy Purpose

Source: Local: Governance

The Board and Staff of RMHC WA are committed to ensuring the safety of all children and young people to whom we provide services or who participate in our programs.

We have developed this policy on how to respond to child abuse reports and allegations as a guide to all our people in meeting their responsibilities in this area. Our Personnel are required to identify, report and respond to any concerns about, or incidents of, child abuse or neglect towards children or young people to whom we provide services. Our Personnel are required to respond to abuse or neglect perpetrated by Personnel within our organisation or by other persons.

Policy Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, the following definitions apply:

Involved Personnel / Personnel are defined as:

- All persons (including volunteers and tutors) with direct contact with children, their supervisors and Managers
- All RMHC WA Managers and Executive Managers

- Anyone involved in dealing with reports or allegations of child abuse or with access to children's or young people's records
- The RMHC WA Board of Directors and Chief Executive Officer

Policy Principles

All Involved Personnel within our organisation are required to meet the requirements of our policy on responding to child abuse reports and allegations.

No one within our organisation is exempt from meeting the standards and requirements set out in this policy.

Safeguarding Children and Young People Training

All Involved Personnel, must complete the online Learning Hub module entitled "Safeguarding Children and Young People" within their first two working shifts.

Defining abuse and neglect

Our organisation is committed to safeguarding the children and young people in our care from abuse in any form, including:

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse spans a range of contact and non-contact behaviour.

Non-contact behaviour includes:

- Making sexual comments (directly, in letters, by telephone, text messages or email)
- Voyeurism – including commenting on physical attractiveness
- Exposing a child to pornography
- Nudity – an abuser exposing parts of their body, or the child's body.

Contact behaviour includes:

- Fondling or kissing
- Sexual penetration
- Exploiting a child through prostitution

Physical abuse

Physical abuse occurs when a parent or caregiver subjects a child to non-accidental, physically aggressive acts. The abuser may inflict an injury intentionally, or inadvertently as a result of physical punishment or the aggressive treatment of a child. Physically abusive behaviour includes (but is not limited to) shoving, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, punching, biting, burning and kicking.

Emotional or psychological abuse

Emotional or psychological abuse occurs when a caregiver or parent repeatedly rejects or threatens a child. Often there is a pattern of emotional or psychological abuse, rather than a single incident. Such abuse may involve humiliating, terrorising, name-calling, belittlement, inappropriate symbolic acts or continual coldness from the caregiver or parent, to the extent that results in damage to the child's physical, intellectual or emotional wellbeing and development.

Neglect

Neglect occurs when a parent or caregiver fails to provide a child with the basic necessities of life. Such neglect includes the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical attention or supervision to the extent that the child's health and development is, or is likely to be, harmed.

Witnessing family violence

Witnessing family violence is a specific form of emotional or psychological abuse. Family violence is defined as violence between members of a family or extended family or those fulfilling the role of family in a child or young person's life. Exposure to family violence places children and young people at increased risk of physical injury and harm and has an impact on their wellbeing and development.

Responsibilities

Our Personnel are required to report any instance of serious abuse or neglect (cases in which a child or young person has suffered, or is likely to suffer, harm from abuse or neglect) immediately, or if that is not possible, no later than before ending that person's shift or session of work with our organisation.

In taking a report of concern, or of an incident, from others within our organisation our Personnel are:

- Not to assess the validity of such allegations or concerns, – but to report all allegations or concerns to the nominated person or persons within our organisation as described in this policy (The validity of an allegation will then be assessed in the manner described in this policy.)
- To disregard factors such as the authority or position of the persons involved and any pre-existing views about the good character, or otherwise, of any person involved or under investigation.

Similarly, our Personnel are obliged to raise any concerns they might have in relation to:

- Our organisational policies designed to safeguard children and young people – such as outlined in our 'Practice and behaviour guidelines' and in our 'Responding to child abuse reports and allegations' policy
- Actions of other Personnel within our organisation that contravene our policies, or that may otherwise have the potential to harm a child or young person.

Personnel within our organisation who are subject to mandatory reporting requirements:

- Child Safety Champion Team
- Chief Executive Officer

Are required to report suspicions of each of the recognised abuse types (i.e., physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect) to Department for Child Protection, (08) 9222 2555 or after hours (08) 9223 1111.

All our Personnel retain the right to report directly to relevant authorities, such as police, any concerns they may have in relation to the safety and welfare of a child or young person, even if they have also reported that matter internally, in line with this policy.

Our policy also:

Prohibits all Personnel from discussing any concerns or allegations with unauthorised Personnel or persons – within or outside our organisation – such prohibition not being designed to limit, in any way, their rights and responsibilities to report their concerns or allegations, but rather as part of our organisation's commitment to ensuring privacy,

- confidentiality and natural justice, and
- that all Personnel do not make deliberately false, misleading or vexatious allegations.

Consequences of breaching policy

If our Personnel fail to report instances, allegations, disclosures or concerns in relation to abuse or neglect of a child or young person – by Personnel within our organisation or by others – we view such failure as a serious matter that, depending on the circumstances, may result in disciplinary action or be grounds for dismissal.

Concerns or allegations regarding abuse or neglect by family or other external sources

All our Personnel are required to report any instance of child abuse or neglect that has resulted in, or is likely to result in, harm to a child or young person to statutory child protection authorities and to the Chief Executive Officer or a Child Safety Champion.

While our Personnel retain the right to report any concern or allegation directly to the relevant authorities, we ask that they also inform our Chief Executive Officer of any report they make to the relevant authorities, to enable our organisation to best provide support to the child or young person and their family, where appropriate.

If a child or young person is at imminent risk of harm or in immediate danger, our Personnel are required to report the situation directly to Department for Child Protection, (08) 9222 2555 or after hours (08) 9223 1111 or WA Police on 131 444.

In situations where a child or young person is making an allegation, our Personnel are required to:

- Listen to the allegation or disclosure supportively, without dispute
- Clarify the basic details, without seeking detailed information or asking suggestive or leading questions, using our organisation's 'Record of a child abuse allegation, disclosure or concern' form as a guide
- Record on the form and on Donesafe what was said (where possible, noting the exact words used by the person making the allegation)
- Date and sign the record
- Explain to the child (if present) that other people may need to be told, in order to stop what is happening
- Provide reassurance that our organisation will take immediate action in response to the allegation

In situations where our Personnel become aware of abuse through observation of potential indicators, such as bruises or cuts, or by directly observing potentially abusive behaviour towards a child or young person, our Personnel are required to use Donesafe to record their observations and concerns as accurately as possible.

Concerns or allegations of abuse or neglect on the part of our employees or volunteers

All Personnel must report, immediately, any instance, allegation, disclosure or reasonable concern of abuse or neglect of a child or young person arising from an action by an employee or volunteer within our organisation. If the Chief Executive Officer is unavailable (or the subject of the complaint), our Personnel are required to report the matter to the Executive Manager of Operations and Facilities.

If a child or young person is at imminent risk of harm or in immediate danger, our Personnel are required to report the situation directly to the WA Police on 131 444.

In situations where a child or young person is making an allegation, our Personnel are required to:

- Listen to the allegation or disclosure supportively, without dispute
- Clarify the basic details, without seeking detailed information or asking suggestive or leading questions, using our organisation's 'Record of a child abuse allegation, disclosure or concern' form as a guide
- Record on the form what was said (where possible, noting the exact words used by the person making the allegation)
- Date and sign the record
- Explain to the child (if present) that other people may need to be told, in order to stop what is happening
- Provide reassurance that our organisation will take immediate action in response to the allegation.

In response to any instance of 'serious' abuse or neglect ('serious' being cases in which the abuse or neglect has resulted in, or is likely to result in, harm to a child or young person), our Chief Executive Officer will, ensure that the incident is reported to:

- WA Police on 131 444 and/or Department for Child Protection, (08) 9222 2555 or after hours (08) 9223 1111 immediately
- Australian Council for Children & Youth Organisations, within 28 days, in accordance with the requirements of that organisation's Safeguarding Children program.

We will investigate and deal with allegations of 'less serious' instances of abuse or neglect in line with our organisation's general procedures for complaint resolution and disciplinary measures.

If an allegation has been made against a staff member of our organisation, our Chief Executive Officer will take any action necessary to safeguard the child or young person (or other children or young people in our care) from additional harm through options such as:

- Redeploying that staff member to a position where they do not work with children
- Additional supervision of that staff member
- Removing/suspending that staff member from duty until the validity of the allegations are determined
- Address the support needs of the person against whom the complaint is made by, for example offering professional counselling.
- Make clear to all other Personnel who are aware of the allegation that:
 - The allegation does not mean the person is guilty, and that the allegation will be properly investigated
 - They are not to discuss the matter with any person, except as directed by police, child protection authorities and/or our Executive Officer and only in direct relation to investigation of the allegation.

Confidentiality and privacy

Our organisation maintains the confidentiality and privacy of all concerned (including the alleged perpetrator), except if doing so would compromise the welfare of the child or young person and/or investigation of the allegation

Documentation

All reports are to be recorded and filed on Donesafe.

Breach of Policy

Breach of this policy could result in serious harm for children and young people in the care of RMHC WA.

A breach of this policy could also cause harm to our employees, volunteers and board members, and may damage the RMHC WA brand. If Personnel fail to report instances, allegations, disclosures or concerns in relation to abuse or neglect of a child or young person – by Personnel within our organisation or by others – we view such failure as a serious matter that, depending on the circumstances, may result in disciplinary action or be grounds for dismissal. Breach of this policy may expose RMHC and its Personnel to criminal or civil legal action.

Policy Approval

APPROVED BY:

Board Chair
Ante Golem



Signature

Date: 1 November 2023