

Core Messages for Information/Briefing Package

NSW Interagency Guidelines for Child Protection Intervention 2006

1. Background

The *NSW Interagency Guidelines for Child Protection Intervention 2006* set out in practical terms the ways that human service agencies can collaborate in their work with children and families, where there are child protection concerns.

The existing Guidelines were revised in order to:

- ensure they contained accurate, up to date and useful information
- make them easy to follow
- include major new government commitments to prevention and early intervention
- reflect achievable and sustainable practice commitments for all partner agencies
- reinforce the importance of all partners in contributing to child protection intervention

2. What remains the same

The processes for reporting risk or harm remain largely the same:

- DoCS maintains statutory responsibility for child protection.
- Responsibility for the safety, health and well-being of children and young people goes beyond the role of a single government department, and continues to require the commitment of all levels of government, non-government agencies and the wider community to deliver a co-ordinated and comprehensive system for protecting children and young people.
- Mandatory reporters continue to be required to identify and report children at risk of harm.
- The reporting process remains the same – DoCS' Helpline continues to operate as the Department's 'front door'. It receives and screens all reports of harm and requests for assistance from the community, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and is staffed by professionally qualified DoCS caseworkers.
- Caseworkers at the Helpline conduct an initial assessment on all calls they receive and refer those assessed as requiring further assistance to the local DoCS' Community Service Centre. Caseworkers at Community Services Centres (and Joint Investigation Response Teams) undertake secondary assessments where possible, which lead to a professional opinion about safety, risk and harm and inform decisions about a child or young person's need for care and protection.

- Reporting continues to be just the beginning of the child protection process and is not necessarily the end of a reporter's role or responsibility in a matter. Where reporters were providing services to the child and family prior to reporting, it is important that they continue to do so.

3. What has changed

- The 2006 Guidelines are easier to use with information about how to make a report at the front of the document, and steps provided for reporters to follow when they are making a child protection report (see Chapter 2). This should assist in improving the quality of reports.
- The Guidelines outline a number of commitments to practice by the Department of Community Services and other agencies, including DoCS' commitment to feedback. The Guidelines clarify that, at a minimum, Community Service Centres will provide **feedback** to mandated reporters who request it, who have an ongoing role with the child, young person or family, and where the feedback will enable that work to continue. Contact might be via letter or email. Alternatively, phone contact or a case meeting between a mandated reporter and the Community Services Centre might be indicated. This does not preclude feedback to other reporters where appropriate.
- International and Australian research shows that to protect children from harm, agencies and members of the public must actively **share information**. Generally, sharing information contributes to good practice where more than one agency is involved in providing support. However, it is important that the privacy rights of a person are respected, and that those rights are balanced with the need to ensure the care and protection of the child or young person. It is also important to maintain the confidentiality of reporters. Chapter 4 provides revised content on **exchanging information** in a child protection context.
- **Resources.** There are a number of new guides and resources to assist users of the guidelines. These include:
 - A new table summarising **when a child or young person should be reported**
 - A table summarising the **roles and responsibilities** of key agencies
 - Improved tables of **indicators** to assist practitioners to identify child abuse, neglect, domestic violence, sexual abuse, physical abuse and psychological harm
 - References to up to date information including **web addresses**