



# protecting CHILDREN

*Protecting children is everyone's duty*

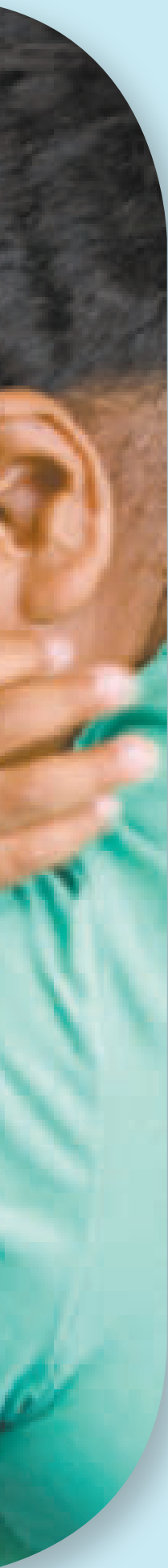
## What people in the Pacific community say...

*"We came to Australia to have a better future for our children. It is our role to protect them so they can grow up to become good citizens".*

Marcia Mahara Hau, Business woman

*"Family violence is never OK. We must find new ways to show our children the right way to live."*

Joanne Loko, Community Educator, PIWASS



## Our children, our future

Most Pacific parents would agree that children are the future of our community. We all have a duty to help children grow up safely because they are often powerless to protect themselves.

Most kids have loving families. However things such as a lack of money, illness and unhappy family relationships can make parenting much harder. In Pacific families, adjusting to a new life in Australia can bring added stress.

Part of adjusting to life in Australia involves learning what is acceptable behavior in our role as parents. Neglect, physical, emotional and sexual abuse are never acceptable.

To help protect kids in the Pacific community, we can offer practical support to parents who are experiencing difficulties such as providing child care for a couple of hours each week. But if we think that a child is being neglected or abused, we need to act. If we don't act, the child may suffer damage that lasts into their adult life. The right thing to do is to get in touch with the Department of Community Services (DoCS), a NSW government department that supports families to look after their children.

## What are child neglect and abuse?

- **neglect** - when parents fail to meet a child's basic needs such as the need for shelter, food, clothes or medical care
- **physical abuse** - if a parent injures a child by hitting, beating, shaking, burning or in other ways
- **emotional abuse** - includes withholding love, constant yelling at or bullying a child, threatening them or allowing a child to see domestic violence
- **sexual abuse** - any form of sexual activity with children.

## What are the signs of neglect or abuse?

Children who have been neglected or abused show common physical and behavioral signs. Remember that if you notice one sign, it does not necessarily mean that a child has been neglected or abused.

- **neglect** - the child is very light for their age, is often unwashed, steals food, has untreated sores or longs for adult affection

- **physical abuse** - the child has bruises on the head or neck, bite marks or scratches, or lots of injuries or bruises. The child may try to explain how an injury happened with an unlikely story
- **emotional abuse** - the child feels worthless, cannot trust others, seeks attention through extreme behaviour or has trouble getting on with people
- **sexual abuse** - the child tells you about the abuse directly or indirectly, wants to harm themselves, is starving themselves or over-eating, or wants to go to bed with their clothes on.

DoCS' brochure, *Spot It, Help Stop It*, has more information on the signs of neglect and abuse. For a copy of this free brochure, phone DoCS on (02) 9716 2255 during working hours or visit DoCS website [www.community.nsw.gov.au](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au)

## How do I report child neglect or abuse?

Contact DoCS' Helpline on 132 111 if you think that a child is being neglected or abused. You can ring the Helpline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You don't have to give your name if you don't want to and the information you provide will be treated in confidence. The cost of ringing the Helpline is the same as a local call.

## What will DoCS do?

DoCS can act in a number of ways. Some staff have been trained to understand Pacific families and their culture. Firstly a DoCS caseworker will assess the situation and determine whether the child is in a high or low risk situation. They will talk to the child if they are old enough and then the parents. DoCS staff might also speak to the child's teacher or relatives. DoCS will always try to involve the child and their family in any decisions that affect them.

If the family needs support with parenting, DoCS will link them to local services.

DoCS will always try to keep the family together, if possible. Where DoCS staff decides that a child is in immediate danger, the Department may take legal action to move the child to a safe place.