

Keeping us all safe

A staff orientation to safeguarding in OSCAR



About OSCAR Safeguarding

OSCN and Holistic Safeguarding have partnered to develop tailored Safeguarding training for the OSCAR sector, aimed at all levels of the OSCAR workforce: from frontline staff to senior managers/programme directors/owners.

Read more at <https://www.oscn.nz/oscar-safeguarding>

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Holistic Safeguarding has assisted with content and editing.*

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Safeguarding You
to Safeguard Children



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How to use this resource

This booklet aims to promote discussion and build confidence in OSCAR staff teams, to effectively respond a range of child and staff safety concerns.

It is not a child protection policy – our expectation is that your staff will also read and sign off on your relevant policies. The topics in this booklet are intended to provide a framework for you to initiate conversations with staff, to supplement what staff read in your policies and build on their understanding of these policies. This could be at team meetings or other opportunities where these topics are raised.

This process should not replace external child protection training but it does offer a way to continue important discussions with your staff and help maintain open and timely professional communication across your whole team.

- The resource is aimed at managers and senior staff with a good working knowledge of child protection policies. It is not intended for general staff use or as a substitute for a more thorough staff induction that covers your child protection policies.
- It provides a plain English script on key topics to help you introduce staff to relevant child safety policies and safe practice expectations. Most sections are written so you can simply read through them aloud with staff, if you prefer.
- It gives you guidance on some more difficult topics and is structured so that you can take a phased approach: it's not expected that all this information would be covered in a single discussion.
- In some sections you will need to refer to your own particular procedures for more guidance, e.g. applying sunscreen.

There is record sheet at the end of the resource to help you keep track of the topics you have covered and with which staff.

This is a living document – we'd appreciate any feedback you have.

Part 1 - Child safety

What do we mean by child safety?

Child safety is both SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN and applying CHILD PROTECTION if needed.

Safeguarding – relates to overall well-being and covers the whole spectrum of vulnerability. Safeguarding is about being preventative. For example, trying to prevent any risks or vulnerabilities from occurring or from becoming embedded in your programme. It applies to everyone, so includes thinking about children, staff and our environments (e.g. are they safe and welcoming). Think of it as not just the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff, but also the path that keeps us free from the cliff edge to begin with.

Examples which we will cover (not necessarily all today) include

- supervision and conduct guidelines
- physical contact with children
- personal care
- professional conduct and relationships with children

Child protection – all children have a right to be safe. Child protection relates to the action we take when we are worried a child is suffering from or is at risk of suffering from abuse or neglect. Therefore, it only applies to certain children, those we believe there is a risk of significant harm, abuse or neglect. Whilst it can be preventative, child protection is mostly reactive, in that usually some form of harm has already occurred and we are looking to prevent that from happening again or from getting worse.

Examples which we will cover (not necessarily all today)

- our child protection policy
- responding to any child protection concerns
- disclosures of abuse
- peer-on-peer abuse (e.g. child to child harmful behaviours)

Who does child safety apply to?

Child safety concerns can relate to **a child's well-being** or **possible allegations against staff**.

So, being 'child safe' means we always be thinking about the safety and wellbeing of children, staff and the organisation (e.g. our name, brand, environments, etc.).

Our child protection policy

Under [Part 2 of the Children's Act 2014](#) as well as OSCAR sector standards, we are required to have a child protection policy. This is also good ethical practice.

It is our responsibility to make sure you are familiar with and know how to access that policy. So today, I will be confirming some key points relating to the policy and how you can access the policy.

It is your responsibility to be familiar with the requirements of that policy and to implement and uphold those policy requirements.

By our next meeting, you will need to have read the policy and sign confirmation that you have read and understood the policy. It will also be another opportunity for us to discuss any points you may be uncertain about or for me to answer any questions you may have.

Important points to note about our child protection policy

The purpose of this session is to outline just a few of the most important points in our child protection policy. The parts of the policy that we will talk about are:

- RECOGNISING concerns
- RESPONDING to disclosures
- REPORTING and REFERRING concerns; and
- RECORDING concerns

No matter how light we try to keep the topic, child abuse can be an upsetting subject and an uncomfortable topic to explore. We aren't planning today to discuss or describe anything in too much detail, as you will cover child protection more thoroughly in your training. However, it can still be emotive, so I am here to support you. If you find the discussion difficult or a bit overwhelming, it is quite OK to ask for a break or some private time. We are here to listen if you want to talk.

Here we will focus on concerns relating to a child or young person. We will explore concerns relating to staff later.

What is child abuse?

[The Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 \(Children's and Young People's Well being Act 1989\)](#) defines child abuse as: *“the harming (whether physically, emotionally, or sexually), ill-treatment, abuse, neglect, or deprivation of any child or young person”*

RECOGNISING child abuse concerns

New Zealand has some of the highest rates of child abuse in the OECD. Whilst there can be lots of types of harm (e.g. family violence, on-line bullying), these types of harm all fall under **four categories of abuse**:

physical abuse

emotional abuse

sexual abuse

neglect

Types of harm can sit under one or more categories, e.g. family violence mostly sits under physical and/or emotional abuse but it can include all the categories of abuse.

When a child is suffering from harm, there can be possible indicators, both physical or behavioural, to show that this harm is occurring and is non-accidental. You will learn about indicators in your safeguarding training.

Peer-on-peer concerns: children can display harmful or abusive behaviour towards each other e.g. bullying (including online bullying), abusive or offensive language, harmful sexual behaviours, etc.

Given the age range that OSCAR supports, it is normal for children to incorporate some sexualised knowledge, words or behaviour into their play. However, when it isn't appropriate for the age or developmental level or when sexualised play is problematic or harmful (e.g. there are signs of bullying, force or the children differ in age or developmental level*), this can indicate problematic or harmful sexual behaviours. [** Whilst not exclusive, more than two years age difference or between pubescent and non-pubescent children.*]

Whether shown by a child, young person or adult, harmful behaviours, physical, sexual, verbal or emotional abuse, harassment or neglect is not tolerated at our programme. We advise discussing anything you observe with a senior staff member.

Remember you are not expected to reach any conclusions about whether harm, abuse or neglect is occurring or about the type of harm.

Your job is to decide 'am I worried?' and if so, to tell a staff member.
Instead of worrying about 'what if I'm wrong', think 'what if I'm right'.

RESPONDING to child abuse concerns

As well as spotting possible indicators of abuse and neglect we can also become worried about a child due to receiving a disclosure. There are 3 main types of disclosures:

- **direct disclosure:** When a child tells us about something they are experiencing or have experienced.
- **indirect disclosure:** Either consciously or subconsciously the child or young person can communicate possible red flags, e.g. via physical or behavioural indicators, through their play, art work, language, etc.
- **third-party disclosure:** When someone tells us they are worried about a child, e.g. another child or parent tells us they are worried about another child.

If a child discloses abuse

If we do receive a disclosure, we need to make sure we respond safely. Whilst staff may have good intentions, if not correct, our responses can sometimes actually increase the risk of harm for the child or others, or jeopardise any possible legal investigations.

You will explore disclosures and safe responses more in your training. However, keep these in mind for now, if you do receive a disclosure:

- stay calm
- listen to the child.
- don't question the child. You can encourage the child to share more information by saying something like *"I'm listening, go on..."* or *'can you tell me more about that?'*, but if they don't want to or you are nervous about what you can or can't say, just listen.

Remember your role is to listen and you are listening to understand
Our child protection policy determines how we respond

- reassure the child e.g. tell them they are doing the right thing in telling someone and thank them for telling you, reassure them this is not their fault and what is happening is not ok.
- tell them they have been brave in telling you and you would like to see how we can help. So, tell them that you do need to talk to someone so together we can try and find the best help for them.
- if there is no immediate risk to the child, help them to re-engage in an appropriate activity, under supervision.

Outside of our programme we expect all personal information about children and families to be kept completely private.

REPORTING child safety concerns

- If you are worried about a child or young person, immediately notify a senior staff member or manager.
- You can do this privately, as this respects the child and family's right to privacy. Not all of a child's personal background needs to be known by all the staff.
- Senior staff or management are responsible for deciding if and what information we can share with the family. You are not expected to say anything to a child's family about your concerns.
- Not every concern about a child will need a child protection referral. Where we can see a family is struggling or in need of more support, it might be that we can approach them and offer help or signpost them to another community service for help/support. The earlier that a family can get help, the better for them and the child/ren.

REFERRING child safety concerns

The well-being and safety of children is a paramount concern at our OSCAR Programme. If we do have any concerns that need to be shared with Oranga Tamariki or the Police, then our experienced, senior staff or management will lead this process, but work with you.

Our OSCAR programme supports the roles of the Police and Oranga Tamariki and we will consult with them if we have concerns or we need advice. It is unlikely you will need to make a referral to child protection services, but your training will help you understand what to do, should you ever need to do so.

However, it is important for you to understand that legally, under [Sections 15 and 16 of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 \(Children's and Young People's Well-being Act 1989\)](#) if you believe a child has been or is likely to be harmed, abused, ill-treated or deprived, you are entitled to refer a concern directly to Oranga Tamariki or the Police. You may decide to do this if:

- you can't reach any senior staff or management and the concern is urgent
- you don't believe we are taking the concern seriously and believe the child is still at risk
- you don't agree with our response and believe the child is still at risk

This is your legal right and as long as the report is made in good faith, no civil, criminal or disciplinary proceedings can be brought against you.

RECORDING child safety concerns

- When sharing a concern with a senior staff member or a manager, you should be asked to make a written record of your observations and to bring this back to them.
- They will tell you how to access the appropriate incident form.
- When writing your report, try to keep it factual (e.g. what happened, when, where and how) and as accurate as possible, e.g. using the child's exact words if quoting something they said (not your interpretation).

WE WILL SUPPORT YOU. It is our responsibility to follow through and do all we can to make sure children in our programmes are safe.

Part 2 - Staff safety

As mentioned at the beginning, child safety can relate to concerns about a child's well-being and possible allegations against staff. Child abuse thrives in secrecy and to provide a safe environment for everyone, we all need to be able to bring up our concerns and talk about them. It's a professional responsibility we have to each other and to the families who use our service.

If you have concerns about any person or any relationship in the programme, including the behaviour or conduct of staff, we expect you to raise your concerns confidentially with senior staff. It is important that staff operate to the policies, procedures and conduct we expect and we take any breaches of these seriously. Hence it is also important for us to help you recognise:

- what may be a staff concern; and
- how to promote safe practice when engaging with children and young people.

Examples we will cover (not necessarily all today) include

- being in a position of trust
- allegations against staff
- physical contact with children
- personal care
- staff and child safety – supervision and conduct guidelines
- relevant policies and procedures, e.g. child protection policy, code of conduct, supervision policy, late collection policy etc.

Position of trust

Working in any OSCAR role, whether you are paid or a volunteer, puts you in what we call a 'position of trust'. This applies to all staff roles – those that are child facing and all other roles in our organisation.

A position of trust recognises you have an element of authority over the children, whether that authority is actual or perceived (by children or parents.) This means that there is an imbalance of power. Whenever there is an imbalance of power, there is potential for people to misuse this power and trust. Doing so is a betrayal of that trust and can cause harm to children, other staff and our organisation.

Awareness and caution is needed when developing relationships with children. These relationships must be kept fully professional to maintain your position of trust. **You can be friendly, but you are not their friend. You are a professional supporting them in a professional environment.** Examples of conduct that would raise a concern and be considered inappropriate include but is not exclusive to:

- showing bias and favouritism: real or perceived bias and favouritism can undermine positive relationships at the programme and 'special relationships' contribute to this and can also place staff in a vulnerable position.
- any behaviour or relationship indicating: affection, infatuation, friendship and social contact outside of the programme. This includes contact on social media and any form of personal messaging or on-line contact.

Where staff and children already have a social connection outside the programme, e.g. pre-existing friendship, family ties, etc. we expect you to let us know. To help keep all relationships on the same level within the OSCAR setting, you will be asked to minimise these social connections during the programme by reducing your time interacting during the programme, not being assigned to groups together etc.

This is so your engagement with that child does not appear any different to your engagement with any other child or young person and your practice is not open to misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

We have to trust each other – the best way we can build and maintain that trust is to keep to a high standard of professional conduct and boundaries, and to be prepared to raise concerns.

This creates an environment that is less attractive to potential abusers and still fun, friendly, warm and caring for children and staff.

Allegations against staff

Just as some people may wish to be a musician but lack the talent or skills need, some people may wish to work with children, but can be unsuitable as they lack the knowledge or skills needed, and no matter how much professional development or support they are offered, they still struggle to develop these.

Incompetent staff can be a risk for children and the organisation, as it can lead to careless or possibly unsafe practice, e.g. not supervising children properly etc. All of which can lead to complaints and/or allegations against staff.

Initially something might be raised as either a complaint or a concern, but certain concerns would be considered as an allegation against a staff member. This includes where a staff member may have:

- committed a criminal offence in relation to a child
- behaved in a way that has harmed or may have harmed a child
- behaved towards children in a way that indicates they are unsuitable to work with children

Abuse and grooming – what to be aware of

Sometimes unsafe staff practices can arise from ill-intent. Most of the time, abuse is perpetrated by someone known to the child and their family. This can include professionals not just family members or friends. Allegations of abuse can relate to any of the categories of abuse. For example:

- physical abuse - being too rough with a child and causing bruising
- emotional abuse - being verbally cruel to a child (e.g. making them feel worthless) or using inappropriate discipline (e.g. isolating a child)
- neglect - not supervising children properly
- sexual abuse - committing criminal offences against children, sexually exploiting children

Unlike the other categories of abuse, sexual abuse can also be a motive for people seeking out professional positions with children. That's one of the reasons why we apply 'safer recruitment' practices. However, as well as being planned, sexual abuse can also be opportunistic, and the means of conducting offences aligns with factors such as controlling and manipulating others.

Grooming is the term used to describe the various way offenders use to create the opportunity for sexual abuse to occur and to manipulate the child and those around the child so that they do not necessarily recognise concerns. This then increases the likelihood that the child and others won't say anything about what is happening.

You will learn about grooming and sexual abuse more during your child protection training. However, some examples of grooming behaviour to be aware of:

- taking an ongoing personal interest in a child e.g. asking about personal information; turning up at events that the child is also attending; soliciting invitations to family events

- affectionate physical behaviour with children – touching, stroking hair, play fighting
- compliments or excessive praise towards a child, even when not really warranted
- being alone with or having private conversations or interactions with a child
- offering to lend personal assistance to family members, outside of programme time
- giving favours, gifts or ‘special treats’ to a particular child

None of these on their own mean that grooming is taking place, but these should all be seen as potential ‘red flags’ and senior staff or managers should be made aware if you notice any of these occurring.

Again, it is not your role to investigate or decide what is or isn’t happening, that is for our senior staff and managers. **Your role is to decide ‘am I worried?’ and if so, to report that worry. Do not share your worry or concern with the staff member concerned.**

That is why it is so important that staff follow our policies and procedures, as this promotes consistency in practice and helps to make sure that anything unusual can be identified easily. It also helps to reduce the opportunity for staff being in a vulnerable position and for any of their behaviour or conduct to be misunderstood.

Physical contact with children

The OSCAR code of conduct says: *“Staff will provide physical comfort or reassurance when needed by children, but exercise caution and restraint when initiating physical contact or displaying signs of affection.”*

- some children do not like physical touch. Never assume physical contact is acceptable to a child – always ask as a courtesy e.g. *“can I help put sunscreen on your face?”* If a child appears uncomfortable with physical contact, respect that and consider alternatives depending on the situation
- be aware that some cultures may disapprove of physical contact between adults and children
- even if children initiate it, don’t hug children as a greeting or goodbye – high 5’s or handshakes are a good substitute
- sometimes children, especially young ones, will spontaneously hug or grab onto you – don’t be unfriendly or make them feel like they have done something wrong, but do politely and gently unlatch yourself and give them a smile instead
- when children are upset or distressed it is appropriate to offer some comfort – hold their hand or sit beside them for a hug. Don’t let children climb on you or sit on your lap
- piggy backing or carrying children can be a hazard. Unless it is really needed (e.g. to give assistance in certain first aid situations), do not do it
- where children are behaving in a way that poses physical danger it may be necessary to hold the child to prevent immediate harm - but only if it is safe for you to do so. Try to grip clothing rather than their body. Get assistance as soon as possible

Personal care

We encourage children to be as independent as possible, including in their personal care, e.g. dressing, toileting, hygiene and applying sun screen. If a situation arises where a child needs assistance with toileting, you should ensure that another staff member knows what is happening, while respecting the privacy of the child (i.e. don’t shout it across the room). Parents will also be informed of any situations where we have had to provide this sort of assistance.

There may be other situations where more personal care or physical contact is needed e.g. helping children change at swimming pools, applying first aid. Get guidance from other staff in these situations and as much as possible remain in sight of other staff or children.

Amend to reflect your policy re sunscreen, if required - When applying sunscreen most children will be encouraged to do as much as possible themselves – with staff supervision to ensure it is done properly..... you will be expected to.....

If you have any concerns or are uncomfortable with the personal care tasks you are asked to do, please let a senior staff member know.

Staff and child safety – supervision and conduct guidelines

Our supervision policy seeks to ensure children are well-supervised and that safety risks are prevented or significantly reduced. Some key points for consideration include:

- being aware of and avoiding situations where you could be alone with children as much as possible. You should always be in sight and sound of another colleague
- be aware of where children are at all times. Regularly check spaces out of your direct line of sight e.g. play huts, storage areas, toilets, etc
- when needed, direct children or use low-key reminders, so they know you are watching them. Sometimes a simple question like 'hey, what's up' is enough to send a clear supervision message and get children back on track with their behaviour
- you are expected to supervise any visitors, tutors etc. and prevent situations where they could be left alone with children
- it is never advisable to transport children in our care in a private vehicle, for instance after the programme has closed. Where a child is at the centre after hours, our late collection policy will be followed and senior staff will manage the situation

Appendix 1 – other possible peer-on-peer concerns

These issues can be relevant to child protection but may also be relevant to behaviour guidance and those particular policies or procedures.

Abusive or offensive language

To help children respond to abusive language and any form of bullying, we recommend the SPOT/WALK/TALK approach practiced in many schools under the “Positive Behaviour for Learning” (PB4L) system. See OSCN resource: [Verbal Abuse and Offensive Language: How Do We Stop it?](#)

Staff responses should be mindful of:

- the importance of keeping calm.
- sometimes abusive language is motivated by the speaker wanting a reaction (e.g. outrage or maybe it was a poor attempt at humour)
- even when someone has been hurt or deeply offended by certain language or words, it is best to remain calm and give a simple, clear verbal response e.g. “That’s not OK – stop it now.”

Harmful sexual behaviours

Any sexualised play or behaviour that may be worrying, problematic, harmful or abusive, should be taken seriously.

Staff responses to concerns or incidents:

- Remain calm. Ask children to stop immediately. If anyone seems upset, reassure them that you are there to help.
- Take notice of what the children say, but do not get into questions about what was happening.
- Report all incidents and concerns immediately to senior staff or a manager.
- Keep information about an incident as private as possible, but ensure any staff supervising the children know to keep them separate or to keep an eye on their play boundaries, etc.
- Complete an incident report including who was involved and what was said (using the children’s words) and note down staff and children who were present, as potential witnesses.
- Senior staff will take the lead in discussing children’s behaviour with parents. They will advise staff of what information may or may not be shared with parents.

Each incident or concern will need to be considered under our child protection policy to allow proper risk management, investigation and resolution. Interim solutions may include keeping those involved separated until there has been a proper investigation of the incident.

ABOUT HOLISTIC SAFEGUARDING

Holistic Safeguarding supports all organisations forming Aotearoa's children and family's workforce with Child Safety Consultancy, Training and Resource Services to help them embed a mindset of child safeguarding and protection and build a child safe environment for children and young people in their care in line with relevant legislation and best practices in being a child safe organisation.

Contact details:

Email: learning@holisticsafeguarding.com

Phone: +64 22 3940691

Website: www.holisticsafeguarding.com



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ABOUT OSCN

OSCN helps people working in OSCAR to connect, learn from each other and see their work as part of a bigger picture. Our services include:

- **Programme Support:** Expert advice for new programmes, OSCAR accreditation, legal compliance and best practice
- **Resources & Publications:** Activity ideas, staff induction guides, on-line guidance and policy templates
- **Sector Information:** Regular sector updates on trends and issues, up-to-date data on programme provision, fees, wages etc.
- **Professional Development:** Delivered in-person and on-line. Our courses aim to help staff approach their work skilfully and with a good grounding in what really matters when working with children in an OSCAR setting.



Contact details:

Email: oscn@xtra.co.nz

Phone: 09 366 0320

Website: www.oscn.nz

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