

Identifying and Responding to Child and Vulnerable Adult Abuse Procedure



Applicable to:	All MDC Employees	Policy Number:	MDC022A
Issued by:	Chief Executive	Date of Approval:	23 July 2018
Contact person:	Human Resources Manager	Review Date:	23 July 2021

PURPOSE

The purpose of this procedure is to provide Masterton District Council (MDC) employees with guidelines to identify potential child abuse and a clear procedure for responding to potential child and vulnerable adult abuse.

SCOPE

This procedure applies to all disclosures and suspicions of abuse of children, young people and vulnerable adults.

IDENTIFYING CHILD ABUSE

MDC's approach to identifying potential child and vulnerable adult 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 or vulnerable adult and their environment before reaching conclusions e.g. behavioural concerns may be the result of life events, such as divorce, accident injury, the arrival of a new sibling etc.
- We understand when we are concerned a child and vulnerable adult is showing signs of potential abuse or neglect we should talk to a manager or the Designated Person for Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection and that we should not 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 or vulnerable adult. 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.

It is important that all employees are familiar with the signs that may indicate child and vulnerable adult abuse. The table below provides some examples.

Type of Sign	Signs of Abuse or Neglect
Physical signs	Unexplained injuries, burns, fractures, unusual or excessive itching, genital injuries, sexually transmitted diseases. Looking rough or uncared for, dirty, without appropriate clothing, underweight, untreated medical issues.
Developmental delays	Small for their age, cognitive delays, falling behind in school, poor speech and social skills.
Emotional signs	Sleep problems, low self-esteem, obsessive behaviour, inability to cope in social situations, sadness/loneliness and evidence of self-harm. Subdued or changed behaviour in the presence of a particular person.
Behavioural concerns	Age-inappropriate sexual interest or play, fear of a certain person or place, eating disorders/substance abuse, disengagement/neediness, aggression.
Allegation or disclosure	The child or vulnerable adult talking about things that indicate abuse or neglect.

RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

What to do if a child or vulnerable adult discloses abuse to you

When a child or vulnerable adult discloses abuse, regardless of whether the abuse is current or historic, it needs to be taken very seriously. It is important that any disclosure is dealt with appropriately, both for the wellbeing of the child or vulnerable adult and also to ensure that your actions do not jeopardise any legal action against the abuser.

There are a number of basic 'rules' that should be followed to ensure the safe handling of any disclosures of abuse from a child:

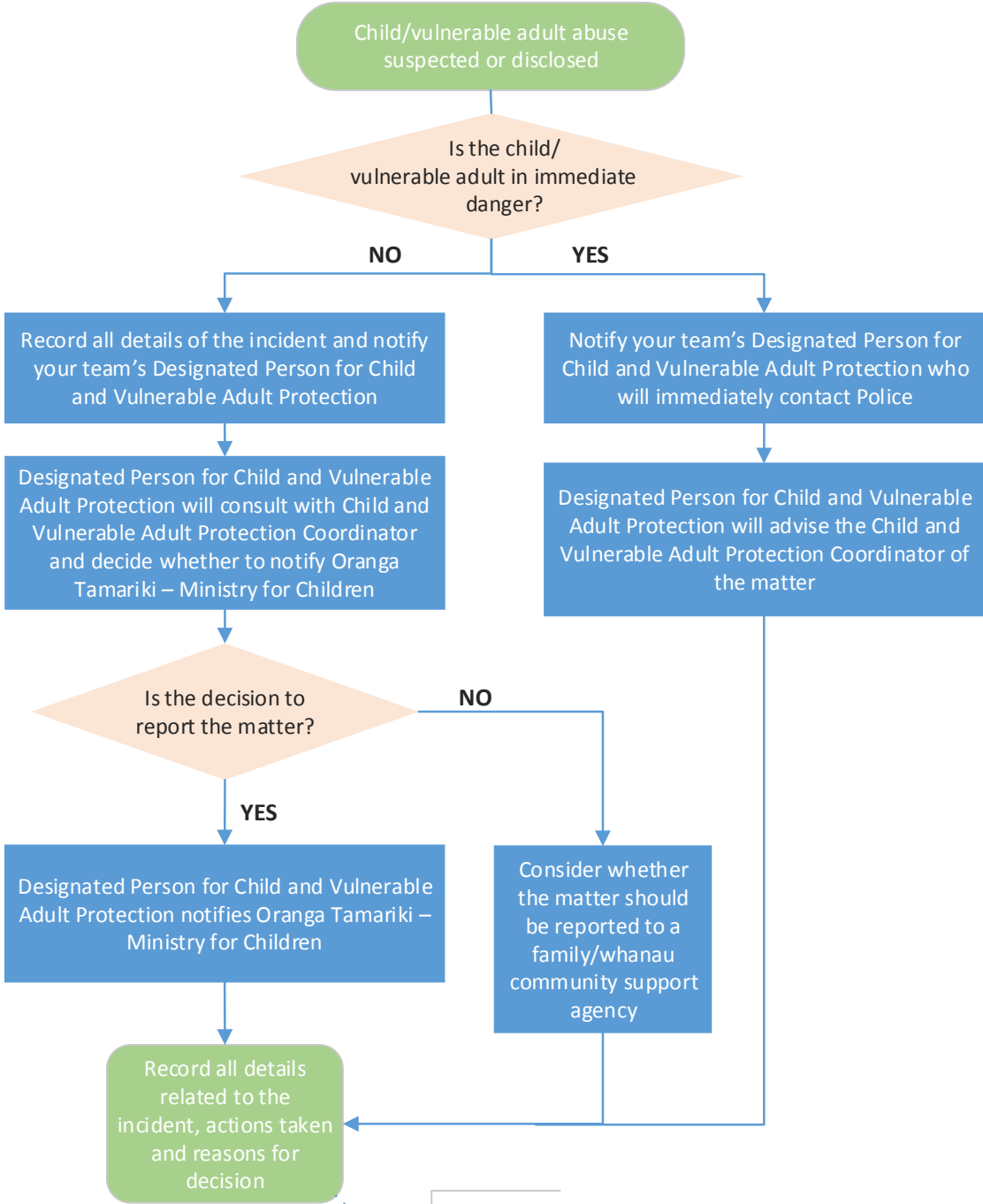
- Remain calm
- Remember that the safety and wellbeing of the child or vulnerable adult come before the interests of any other person.
- Listen to the child or vulnerable adult and accept what the child or vulnerable adult says:
 - Look at the child or vulnerable adult directly, but do not appear shocked.
 - Don't seek help while the child or vulnerable adult is talking to you.
 - Reassure them that they did the right thing by telling someone.
 - Assure them that it is not their fault and you will do your best to help.
 - Let them know that you need to tell someone else.
 - Let them know what you are going to do next and that you will let them know what happens.
 - Be aware that the child or vulnerable adult may have been threatened.
- Write down what the child or vulnerable adult says in their own words and record what you have seen and heard. Make certain you distinguish between what the child or vulnerable adult has actually said and the inferences you may have made. Accuracy is paramount.

Things NOT to do

- Do not attempt to deal with the situation yourself.
- Do not formally interview the child or vulnerable adult:
 - Never ask leading questions.
 - Never push for information or make assumptions.
 - Only necessary relevant facts should be obtained, when clarification is needed.
- Do not make assumptions, offer alternative explanations or diminish the seriousness of the behaviour or alleged incidents.
- Do not keep the information to yourself or promise confidentiality.
- Do not take any action that might undermine any future investigation or disciplinary procedure, such as interviewing the alleged victim or potential witnesses, or informing the alleged perpetrator or parents or carers.
- Do not permit personal doubt to prevent you from reporting the allegation to the Designated Person for Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection.

REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

The flowchart below outlines the procedure for reporting disclosures or suspicions of child or vulnerable adult abuse.



- Details to record include:
- Word for word what the child said (if they disclosed abuse)
 - Relevant dates, times, locations and staff names
 - The factual concerns or observations that led to the suspicion of abuse or neglect
 - Any other relevant information

Contacts	
Orangi Tamariki – Ministry for Children: 0508 326 459	
Masterton Police Station: 06 370 0300	Rangitāne o Wairarapa: 06 370 0600
Strengthening Families: 06 378 8900	

REVIEW OF PROCEDURE

This procedure will be reviewed every three years.

DEFINITIONS

Child: A person under the age of 18 years. For the purposes of this policy, the definition of child also includes vulnerable adults.

Child Abuse: The harming (whether physically, emotionally or sexually), ill-treatment, abuse, neglect or deprivation of any child.

Vulnerable Adult: A person unable, due to detention, age, sickness, mental impairment or any other cause, to withdraw themselves from the care or charge of another person.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy

REFERENCES

- Vulnerable Children Act 2014
- Vulnerable Children (Requirements for Safety Checks of Children's Workers) Regulations 2015
- Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989
- Child Matters website www.childmatters.org.nz

VERSION CONTROL

Date	Summary of Amendments	Approved By
11/7/2017	New procedure	Senior Management Team
23/7/2018	Minor amendments, predominantly to clarify that the policy applies equally to children and vulnerable adults	Human Resources Manager