

Organisational child safeguarding and coronavirus (COVID-19)

This is a difficult time for organisations as we adjust to life in response to COVID-19. For many organisations it means reviewing and adjusting the way services are delivered to still meet the needs of the young people and families while complying with social distancing requirements.

Child safeguarding principles are especially critical in times of crisis and upheaval. Maintaining connection to school or childcare or extracurricular activities is an important protective measure for children, which becomes difficult when services are scaled back or cancelled.

International experience in times of crisis tell us that children can be more susceptible to external child abuse risks. These can include child sexual exploitation or online grooming.

If your organisation is moving to an online platform or providing services remotely, it is important to undertake a comprehensive child safe risk assessment for the proposed changes.

Some questions you can ask and factors to consider as part of this child safe risk assessment include:

- **Remote/video contact:** What level of oversight will be in place if you are engaging one-on-one with children via phone or video conferencing? How will you balance sufficient oversight with confidentiality requirements?
- **Mobile phone and messaging:** If there is increased phone contact with children or use of messaging, what additional safeguarding measures could you put in place (for example, no use of personal phones, always copying in your team leader in messages)
- **Facebook or other online platforms:** How will you monitor group membership? How can you monitor chat or messaging within the platform? What is the most secure platform that will allow you to provide your services?
- **Online content:** Who will be able to access the content? How will you make sure that all content is age-appropriate? You need to make sure that appropriate consent is obtained if images of children will be shared online. For example if children are sharing images or videos of themselves completing an activity.
- **External communication:** Is there a possibility for adult to child or child to child messaging or contact to continue privately? Now, when children are isolated, there can be real benefits in children being able to reach out to a trusted adult or a friend. How will you ensure that this contact is appropriate and safe?
- **Child to child safety risks:** Are there increased opportunities for bullying/ grooming behaviours/ sexting/ sexual abuse between children through new ways of service delivery?

What you can do

Your organisation should already have a child safe policy and code of conduct in place. Review these documents to make sure they reflect any changes to the way you are delivering services. Staff, volunteers and contractors need to understand their child safeguarding obligations. Children and families should know what to do if they have a child safety concern and who they can contact if they have a complaint or if they are reaching out for assistance.

Remember

It is very important for children to be able to turn to trusted adults when they are not feeling safe. By conducting a thorough risk assessment, organisations can adapt to the changed operating environment and continue to provide services that maintain the safety, wellbeing and visibility of children and their families.

Resources

- The Centre – [A range of free modules on the child safe standards and reportable conduct scheme](#)
- Commission for Children and Young People - [Information on child safe risk assessment](#)
- End Violence - [Information about ways to protect children during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- eSafety Commissioner - [Resources on online safety and COVID-19](#)