

University of Tasmania

Responding to Disclosures, Suspicions and Incidents of Child Abuse

CRISIS NUMBERS

- Kids Helpline: **1800 55 1800** (ages 5-25)
- Beyond Blue: **1300 22 4636** (ages 12-25)
- Strong Families, Safe Kids Advice and Referral Line: **1800 000 123**
- Tasmania Police: immediate risk **000** or Police Assistance Line **131 444**

A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON (ANYONE UNDER THE AGE OF 18) MAKES A STATEMENT, OR YOU MAKE AN OBSERVATION THAT SUGGESTS CONCERN AROUND THEIR WELL BEING

LOW CONCERN OF ABUSE

Example: "Grandpa is a bit mean"

Example: Observe bruises on their leg



Acknowledge

Let the young person know that you hear them and/or are noticing physical injuries. Ask if they would like to talk more about it and offer a private space if needed.

Action

If more risk information is disclosed during the talk, escalate to the next level of concern.

If the talk clarifies low/no risk, contact SaFCU to document your observation. There are times where multiple reports of low concern can develop into a bigger picture of abuse. **No external reporting needed at this stage.**

MODERATE CONCERN OF ABUSE

Example: "Dad gets really mad and it scares me"

Example: Signs of distress (tearful, withdrawn), or multiple physical injuries.



Acknowledge

Let the young person know that you hear them and/or are noticing their distress or signs of concern. Ask if they would like to talk more about it and offer a private space if needed. Acknowledge the emotion and offer support e.g. "What's going on for you?" "Do you feel safe?" "I'm worried about you, you seem really upset."

Action

As a University staff member, any moderate suspicions of harm or abuse must be acted upon. Let the young person know that you have a responsibility to keep them safe and supported. Give them the option if they would like to be involved in the process and give them University or crisis support details. Arrange a time to follow up with them again if they consent. **Take action with the 4 critical steps on the next page.**

If in doubt about your actions or concerns, you can always talk it through with a staff member in SaFCU.

HIGH CONCERN OF ABUSE

Example: Direct disclosure of physical or sexual abuse or family violence

Example: Observe severe injury like self-harm by cutting or cigarette burns



Acknowledge

Validate the young person's experience and express your concern in a calm and compassionate way. Ask a few questions to determine the nature of the abuse, but **do not quiz/interrogate** a young person about the abuse. "Can you tell me when this happened?" "Are you safe at home?"

Action

As a University staff member, any high suspicions or confirmation of child abuse must be acted upon. You must take action and complete a mandatory report if you receive a disclosure of child abuse or have reasonable belief/suspicions of child abuse. Negotiate with the young person whether they would like to be involved in the report, who they would like to tell for support, and give them University or crisis support details.

Take immediate action with the 4 critical steps on the next page.

University of Tasmania

Responding to Disclosures, Suspicions and Incidents of Child Abuse

As a University of Tasmania staff member, you play a **critical role** in protecting children and young people (defined as anyone under the age of 18) in our community.

- You **must** act, by following the below actions, as soon as you witness an incident, receive a disclosure, or form a reasonable belief that a child has, or is at risk of being abused.
- You **must** act if you form a suspicion/reasonable belief, even if you are unsure and have not directly observed child abuse (e.g. the victim or another person tells you about the abuse).
- You **must** make a report through the relevant authorities, as well as documenting in your own notes and through the SaFCU.

1. RESPONDING TO AN EMERGENCY

If there is no risk of immediate harm, go to **Action 2**.

If a child is at immediate risk of harm you **must** ensure their safety by:

- separating alleged victims and others involved
- administering first aid
- calling **000 for urgent medical and/or police assistance** to respond to immediate health or safety concerns
- identifying a contact person in your organisation for future liaison with Police.

2. REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed you **must** report all incidents, suspicions and disclosures of child abuse as soon as possible. Failure to report may amount to a criminal offence and/or fines.

REPORT TO THE FOLLOWING

STRONG FAMILIES, SAFE KIDS

You **must** report all instances of suspected child abuse to **Strong Families, Safe Kids (SFSK)**

TASMANIA POLICE

If you are concerned that a crime has been committed (e.g. physical or sexual abuse) you must also notify Tasmania Police.

INTERNALLY

You should also lodge a concern/report internally to the Safe and Fair Community Unit: 03 6226 2560 safcu@utas.edu.au.

If you believe that a child is not subject to abuse, but you still hold significant concerns for their wellbeing you must still act. This may include seeking advice (anonymous if wanted) from Strong Families, Safe Kids, or you can call the Safe and Fair Community Unit to talk through the situation. You must follow the Four Critical Actions **every** time you become aware of a further instance or risk of abuse. This includes reporting new information to authorities.

3. ONGOING SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PERSON

After lodging a concern with SFSK or Police, **they** will take responsibility for informing parents or carers. They may decide not to contact the parent/carer in situations where the young person is a mature minor and does not consent, or if the parents are alleged to have engaged in the abuse.

The University **must** provide support for any students under 18 impacted by abuse. This could include a plan for the student developed in consultation with the Student Wellbeing Team.

Strategies may include development of a safety plan, direct support options and referral/s to wellbeing professionals and crisis lines.

4. DEBRIEF AND SUPPORT FOR YOU

Managing concerns over child abuse or receiving a disclosure of child abuse can be a difficult experience.

It is important to remember that as a first responder you are not alone. Ensure you talk to your team leader as soon as possible. You can also access free, confidential counselling as a University staff member through our [Employee Assistance Program](#).

For more information on staff wellbeing and managing situations around student distress, visit our resource ['Supporting Students in Distress: a guide for University staff'](#)

CONTACTS

- Strong Families, Safe Kids Advice and Referral Line: **1800 000 123** <https://strongfamiliesafekids.tas.gov.au/>
- Tasmania Police: immediate risk **000** or Police Assistance Line **131 444**
- Safe and Fair Community Unit (SaFCU): **03 6226 2560** safcu@utas.edu.au
- University Student Wellbeing Team: counselling.services@utas.edu.au