

RATIONALE

Our Centre is committed to the prevention of child abuse and the protection of children. This commitment means that the interests and welfare of the child are the prime considerations when any decision is made about suspected abuse. Playhouse Early Learning Centre supports the role of the Police, Ministry of Education and Oranga Tāmariki, in the investigation of suspected abuse and will report to these agencies.

Management Plan

TRAINING FOR STAFF MEMBERS

Playhouse is committed to maintaining and increasing staff member awareness of how to prevent, recognise and respond to abuse. As part of the induction, new staff members will familiarise themselves with this Policy and will be encouraged to read any other resource material available. We do not assume responsibility beyond the level of our expertise.

Playhouse is committed to promoting a culture where staff members feel confident that they can constructively challenge poor practice or raise concerns without fear of reprisal.

Staff members will be familiar with indicators of child abuse (see Appendix 1).

RESPONDING TO CHILD ABUSE

Staff members in the Centre need to be aware that there are four forms of child abuse:

- Physical abuse – any acts that may result in physical harm of a child or young person.
- Emotional abuse – any act or omission that results in adverse or impaired psychological, social, intellectual and emotional functioning or development.
- Sexual abuse – any acts that involve forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, including child sexual exploitation, whether or not they are aware of what is happening.
- Neglect – the persistent failure to meet a child’s basic physical or psychological needs, leading to adverse or impaired physical or emotional functioning or development.

Every situation is different and staff members will consider all available information about the child and their environment before reaching conclusions. For example, behavioural concerns may be the result of life events, such as divorce, accidental injury, the arrival of a new sibling, etc.

Playhouse will respond to suspected child abuse by documenting observations, impressions and communications which cause concern. Playhouse will support all services involved in responding to child abuse, e.g. Oranga Tāmariki, Ministry of Education and the NZ Police and will give support to any investigations. Playhouse will maintain a good working relationship with Oranga Tāmariki, as appropriate.

No staff member will act alone regarding suspected child abuse but will consult with the Team Leader or Centre Director, who will be committed to taking action and arranging for consultation with appropriate agencies. Appropriate resources and support will be provided to staff members as required.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND INFORMATION SHARING

The Privacy Act and the Oranga Tāmariki Act 1989 allow information to be shared to keep children safe when abuse or suspected abuse is reported or investigated. Note that under Sections 15 and 16 of the Oranga Tāmariki Act, any person who believes that a child has been, or is likely to be, harmed physically, emotionally or sexually or ill-treated, abused, neglected or deprived may record the matter to Oranga Tāmariki, Ministry of Education or the New Zealand Police and, provided the report is made in good faith, no civil, criminal or disciplinary proceedings may be brought against them.

Playhouse will ensure that all materials and information regarding an abused child and their family/whānau, or any staff member suspected, will be kept confidential. Staff members and Management will be required to maintain confidentiality regarding all individual cases. In situations where it is necessary for staff members to

know about an abuse situation, family/whānau will be consulted on a needs-to-know basis, and how this is managed.

RECORD KEEPING

When a child tells any staff member about abuse, the information will be documented immediately so that details can be provided to authorities investigating the case. These notes are to be kept confidential either in a lockable cabinet for physical documents or in a confidential computer file.

Where suspect bruising occurs on a child, a body chart will be filled in noting the size and colour of bruising and will be dated then counter-signed by the Team Leader.

When records are no longer required, they will be destroyed.

REPORTING SUSPECTED ABUSE

All suspicions or observed incidents or reports of incidents should be reported directly to the Person in Charge as soon as possible, who will immediately take steps to protect the child(ren), record the report and report the concern to Oranga Tāmariki, if appropriate.

If there is clear evidence or reasonable cause to believe an instance of child abuse having taken place, the Person in Charge shall notify Oranga Tāmariki.

In addition to guiding staff members to make referrals of suspected child abuse and neglect to the statutory agencies (i.e., Oranga Tāmariki, Ministry of Education and the Police), this Policy will also help staff members to identify and respond to the needs of the many children whose wellbeing is of concern.

In many of these cases the involvement of statutory agencies would be inappropriate and potentially harmful to families/whānau. Throughout New Zealand statutory and non-statutory agencies provide a network of mutually supportive services and it is important for our organisation to work with these to respond to the needs of children and families/whānau in a manner proportionate to the level of need and risk. Staff members will discuss suspicions with the Centre Team Leader. Where appropriate, the person making the allegation will be given a copy of this policy

SUPPORT FOR PERSON REPORTING AND CHILD BEING REPORTED

Playhouse believes that children, families/ whānau, staff members and others involved in the investigation of suspected child abuse should have support and we will maintain knowledge of individuals, agencies and organizations in our community that we can refer them to. Suggestions for first consultations would include the family/ whānau doctor or Citizens Advice Bureau.

EMPLOYMENT

Safety checking will be carried out in accordance with the Childrens Act 2014. This will include:

- A police vet for staff members who do not have a current practicing teaching certificate
- Identity verification Two forms one of those being photo ID
- Reference checking
- An interview for the position
- A work history will be required, and previous employers will be contacted

If there is any suspicion that an applicant might pose a risk to a child, that applicant will not be employed. Prime considerations in selecting staff members include ensuring that they have skills and attributes that contribute to the children's safety, and to their physical, emotional, intellectual and social development.

SUPERVISION OF STAFF MEMBERS

Playhouse ensures that staff members and other adults visiting or working in the Centre are well supervised in their interactions with children. This includes private spaces where intimate caretaking of children is required. Opportunities for adults to be alone with children are kept to a minimum. Except in emergencies, children are not taken from the Centre without family/whānau approval in writing.

The care of children involves physical touching. Staff members at the Centre are encouraged to show affection, comfort and reassurance to the children as well as taking care of their physical needs.

Playhouse has developed a Field-Based Student Procedure and a Practicum Student Procedure which helps to protect the children and volunteers from being placed in a situation where they are vulnerable to suspicion of

child abuse. Playhouse will complete identity checks of all students, and will accept the Institutions Safety Checks as a proxy for a clean / no result Police Vet. This will be printed and kept on the students file. Children will be protected from inappropriate visual or auditory material – please refer to the Cybersafety Policy.

ALLEGATIONS OF INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS A CHILD BEEN MADE AGAINST A MEMBER OF STAFF

It is important to recognise that all disclosures of abuse of a child must be taken seriously, reported and investigated appropriately.

All allegations, suspicions or complaints must be taken seriously and reported to the Centre Director, who will deal with this immediately.

Record child's disclosure – Date, time and place of allegation

What the child has, in their words said to you, do not put words into the child's mouth

Any behavioural or physical systems

Reassure the child, that you are glad they told you and it is okay, it is not their fault

It is not the responsibility of a staff member to investigate these allegations, this disclosure will be given to the Centre Director and remain confidential.

SUSPENSION OF A STAFF MEMBER

The Centre Director shall be empowered to suspend any staff member where they consider that it is in the interests of the health and safety of a child or a staff member, including the suspended employee, if that person were so suspended. They may also suspend a staff member if they consider that the person should be suspended to preserve the integrity of an investigation. The principles of natural justice and fairness will be observed at all times. The suspension shall be paid leave. The centre Director may lift the suspension at any time.

ADVICE TO STAFF MEMBERS REGARDING RIGHT TO SUPPORT

Staff members that are being investigated must be advised, in writing, of their right to obtain support regarding the investigation. This support may be from NZEI or another specialist advice.

Staff members should never be called into any investigation meeting or suspension meeting unless they have been given sufficient advance notice of the meeting, in writing, and of their right to support and assistance at the meeting.

Having a system in place helps ensure we are providing an environment that is safe and secure for children in accordance with the Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations 2008 (Regulation 46). This centre commits to support the statutory agencies (Oranga Tāmariki and the New Zealand Police) to investigate abuse and will report suspected cases and concerns to these agencies as per the procedure in this document.

PROFESSIONALISM

Playhouse strongly encourages staff members to keep their personal and professional lives separate. We discourage close personal relationships, especially related to care-taking activities with children and family/whānau outside the work environment, including baby-sitting. All private arrangements must be approved by the Centre Director and a Centre Waiver must be signed by the family/whānau and staff member.

PROTECTED DISCLOSURE

As per Protected Disclosures Act 2000:

18. Immunity from civil and criminal proceedings

(1) No person who:

(a) makes a protected disclosure of information; or

(b) refers a protected disclosure of information to an appropriate authority for investigation:

Is liable to any civil or criminal proceeding or to a disciplinary proceeding by reason of having made or referred that disclosure of information.

(2) Subsection (1) applies despite any prohibition of or restriction on the disclosure of information under any enactment, rule of law, contract, oath, or practice.

INAPPROPRIATE MATERIAL (HS32)

In order to protect children from inappropriate material, Playhouse has a robust Cybersafety Policy in place and all staff members and family/whānau are required to sign a Use Agreement before using ICT equipment.

PERSONS UNDER THE INFLUENCE (HS33)

In order to protect children from persons under the influence of alcohol or any other substance that has a detrimental effect on their functioning or behaviour, we have House Rules set in place and management systems written under the Health, Safety and Environmental Policy.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES

At Playhouse we actively encourage family/whānau to be involved in the Centre life.

If family/whānau have any concerns with the care and treatment of their child in the Centre, they have two areas of redress and these avenues are listed in the Information Pack:

1. Confidential conversations with the Team Leader or Centre Manager;
2. Complaints Policy which is displayed in the foyer of each building.

Family/whānau and guardians may be excluded from entering the Centre if they are considered, by the Person Responsible, to be under the influence of alcohol or any other substance that has a detrimental effect on the functioning or behaviour of the person.

Family/whānau and guardians may also be excluded from entering the Centre if, in the opinion of the Person Responsible, to be exhibiting behaviour that is or is likely to be disruptive to the effective operation of the Centre.

Body Chart for Recording Marks and Bruises.

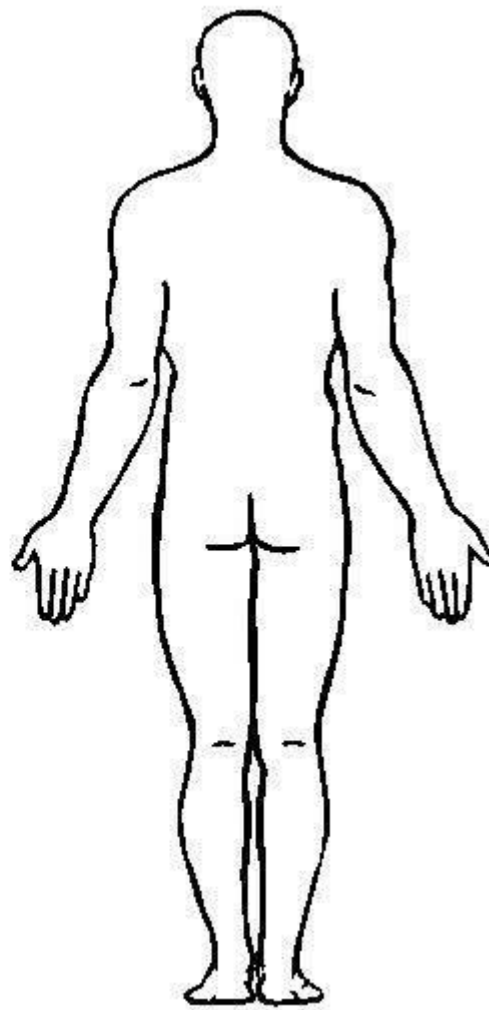
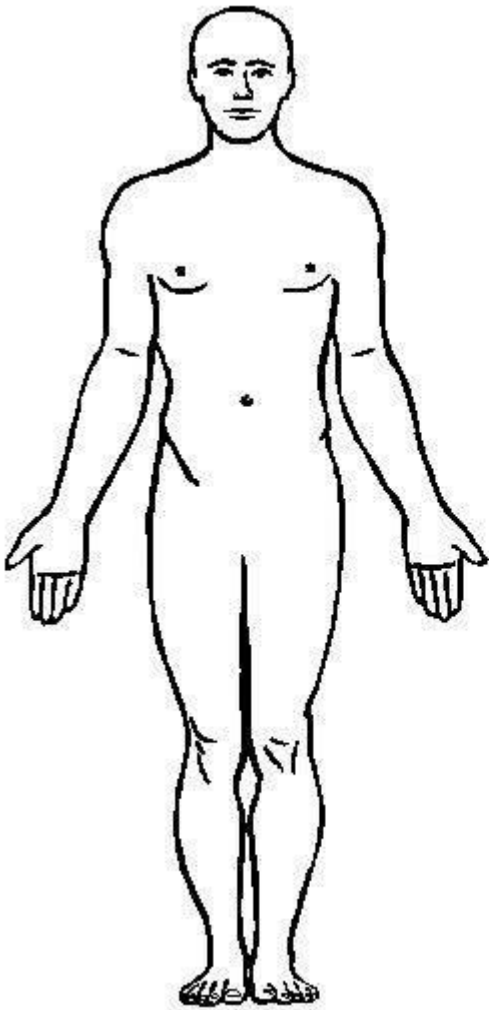
Name of Person Recording Information: _____

Name of Person Verifying the Information: _____

Name of child: _____

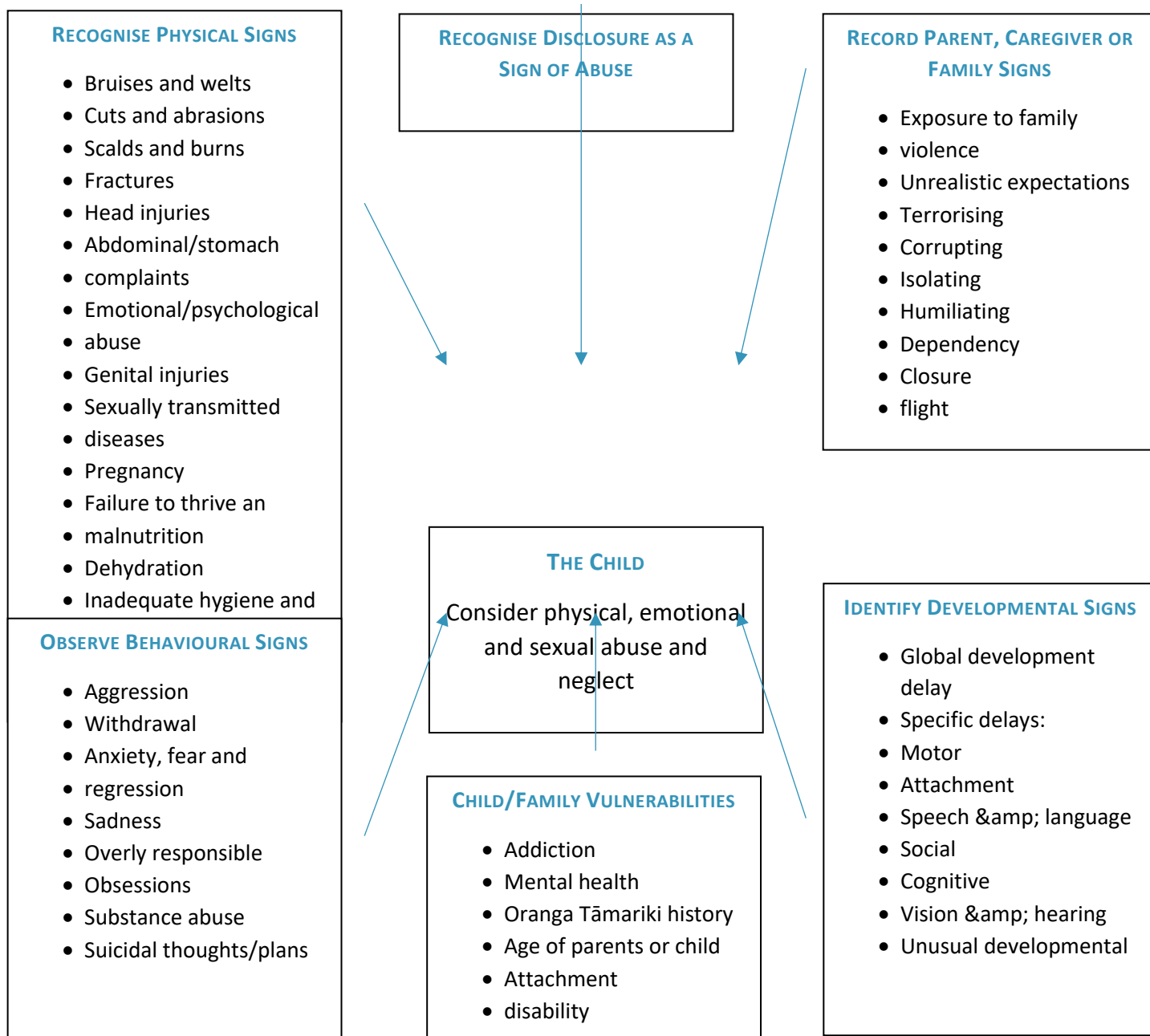
Date: _____

Reason for Recording Information:



SIGNS OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT

The physical and behavioural signs, symptoms and history listed below may indicate abuse or neglect. However, they are not specific to abuse or neglect. In certain situations, contexts and combinations they may indicate other conditions. All signs must be examined in the total context of the child or young person's situation



CHILD ABUSE PROCESS

Responding to a child when the child discloses abuse

i. Listen to the child	Disclosures by children are often subtle and need to be handled with particular care, including an awareness of the child's cultural identity and how that affects interpretation of their behaviour and language.
ii. Reassure the child	Let the child know that they: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are not in trouble • Have done the right thing
iii. Ask open-ended prompts – eg: “what happened next?”	Do not interview the child in other words, do not ask questions beyond open prompts for the child to continue) Do not make promises that cannot be kept, eg: “I will keep you safe now”
iv. If the child is visibly distressed	Provide appropriate reassurance and re-engage in appropriate activities under supervision until they can participate in ordinary activities
v. If the child is not in immediate danger	Re-involve the child in ordinary activities and explain what you are going to do next
vi. If the child is in immediate danger	Contact the Police immediately (call 111)
vii. As soon as possible, formally record the disclosure	Record: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word-for-word what the child said • The date, time and who was present

Responding to possible abuse between children

Staff should be observant of children's play and actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the play age-appropriate and about curiosity or is it a sign of learnt behaviour? • Is the play sexual, does the child display unusual knowledge or describes sexual activity?
If staff is satisfied that play / actions are age-appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult with other staff / management • Record actions and steps taken • Take steps in accordance with positive guidance policy • Communicate and consult with parents
If staff is concerned about play/actions of the child	Contact Oranga Tamariki helpline in the first instance to obtain advice – 0508 326 459

Recording and notifying Ministry of Children – Oranga Tamariki of suspected child abuse or neglect

What process to follow	For example	Key considerations
i. Recording	Formally record: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anything said by the child The date, time, location and the names of any staff that may be relevant The factual concerns or observations that have led to the suspicion of abuse or neglect (eg: any physical, behavioural or developmental concerns) The action taken by your centre Any other information that may be relevant 	Relevant information can inform any future actions
ii. Decision-making	Discuss any concern with the centre manager/supervising teacher or designated person for child protection	No decisions should be made in isolation
iii. Notifying authorities	Notify Oranga Tamariki promptly if there is a belief that a child has been or is likely to be abused or neglected. A phone call to the National Contact Centre is the preferential initial contact with Oranga Tamariki as this enables both parties to discuss the nature of the concerns and appropriate response options. Phone: 0508 Family / 0508 326 459 e-mail: contact@ot.govt.nz	Oranga Tamariki will: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Make the decision to inform the parents or caregivers in consultation with your centre 2) Advise what, if any, immediate action may be appropriate, including referring the concern to the Police
iv. Following the advice of Ministry of Children – Oranga Tamariki	Oranga Tamariki advice will include what, if any, immediate action may be appropriate, including referring the concern to the Police	Oranga Tamariki is responsible for looking into the situation to find out what may be happening, whether they need to work with the family or to put them in touch with people in their community who can help
v. Advise the Ministry of Education	If a referral is made to, and accepted by, Oranga Tamariki and/or the Police, you must notify your closest regional office of the Ministry of Education immediately following.	This is a requirement of the ECE Licensing Criteria HS34
vi. Storing relevant information	Securely store: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The record of the concern A record of any related discussions, including copies of correspondence where appropriate A record of any advice received The action your centre took, including any rationale This concern with any earlier concerns, if the notification is based on an accumulation of concerns rather than a specific incident 	Records assist in identifying patterns

