



MSS & WAABINY OSHC PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENT POLICY



PURPOSE

Montessori Stepping Stones (MSS) aims to create an environment that minimises the risk of children being harmed in any way whilst in the care of the service, and to protect employees from the possibility that allegations of child maltreatment could be falsely made against them, as a result of their work at the service. Child abuse thrives in secrecy, therefore, to prevent child abuse MSS will develop and maintain an open and aware culture where educators, employees and children are aware of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.

We believe we have a responsibility to all children attending our service to defend their right to care and protection. To support this right, we will follow any procedures recommended by WA state child protection authorities, when dealing with any allegations of abuse or neglect of children, and will ensure that all educators and employees undergo appropriate professional development in this area. MSS will also document any evidence of neglect or abuse which may have occurred outside of the service and follow procedures to ensure the child is protected from harm.

MSS believes it also has a responsibility to its employees to defend their right to confidentiality unless allegations of abuse against them are substantiated.

SCOPE

All people involved in ensuring a protective environment at MSS – as well as children, families, educators and employees who assist in the continuous improvement and implementation of relating quality practices.

DESCRIPTION/GENERAL

MSS understands it has a duty of care to ensure that all persons are provided with a high level of safety and protection during the hours of our service's operation. To this end all educators and employees will be fully informed about their responsibilities to implement and adhere to the service's child protection policies and procedures.

We believe that the best way to ensure children's protection at the service is to establish an environment that minimises risks and sets out clear safeguards for educators and employees to follow.

LEGISLATION AND GOVERNMENT REQUIREMENTS

Laws relating to protection of privacy and confidentiality; duty of confidentiality arising from contract with parent; to whom and when information must be disclosed;

- WA State laws relating to child protection
- Education and Care Services National Law (WA) Act 2012
- Education and Care Services National (WA) Regulations 2012

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DEFINITIONS/PRINCIPLES/STRATEGIES FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Child abuse includes physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Educators and employees need to learn about the nature of child abuse, and develop an awareness of how and why some children are victimised. MSS will adhere to these requirements of WA state requirements for mandatory reporting of suspected incidences of child abuse or neglect.

CHILDREN'S NEEDS

To feel safe and have the right to care, which includes safety and personal privacy – and when required counselling and support in the event of abuse.

FAMILIES' NEEDS

To be informed of protective procedures and why they are necessary and the reassurance of their child's safety, whilst confidentiality is maintained. To feel assured every effort has been made to ensure their child is not in danger of abuse – and when required counselling and support in the event of abuse.

EDUCATOR AND EMPLOYEE NEEDS

Training in providing a protective environment, what to do in the event of identified abuse, and current trends and issues; protection from the risk of allegations being made against themselves. That their concerns are heard and acted upon and there is two-way communication with families and management with debriefing/counselling related to specific incidents. There are discussions and evaluations at educator/employees meetings regarding protective practices with confidentiality maintained; at all times. That employees and educators know where to go for advice and support.

MANAGEMENT NEEDS

Appropriate policies are implemented with training on the issues and appropriate protective practices. That there is support for employees to implement policies with feedback from employees and a clear understanding of management responsibilities and liabilities; that confidentiality maintained and knowing where to go for advice and support; knowledge that all employees have appropriate clearances.

THE FACILITIES

MSS will ensure clear observation of child occupied areas through the following means:

- current weather conditions and differing seasons
- Reviewing overall educator/employees supervision within the service to ensure all child occupied areas can be viewed by more than one educator/employees member at all times
- Ensuring furniture/equipment is positioned in a way that all areas are visible

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Visitors/contractors will be screened when entering the service to ensure they have a valid reason to be on site. This will be implemented using the following strategies:

- Security code system in place:
 - the doors to the centre hallway and to the Nido remain locked at all times, and families will have access through use of their security code. Other visitors must report at reception
 - Families and educators/employees will be educated in regard to not allowing unauthorised access to others, as they enter or leave the premises, or giving their PIN to unauthorised persons
 - PINs will be changed annually to ensure past users/educators/employees do not have on-going access.
 - Ensuring validity of visitor
 - All visitors will be required to sign in and out
 - Unauthorised people will be asked to provide identification, preferably photo ID

Where the visitor is unable to provide appropriate ID the service may ask them to make an appointment and return at a later date. This will be dependent on the particular circumstances at the time, i.e. a parent/guardian who has popped in to see what the service is like with a view to enrolling their child, will not be turned away, provided that someone is available to show them around the service at that time. If the educator/employees member is at all unsure about the person, they will be asked to return at a later date.

Appointments will only be made with people who have a valid reason for being in the service.

All people who perform duties at the service, (paid or unpaid) are required to present a current criminal record check or working with children check/card, before being allowed on the premises. (i.e. student assessor; trades persons; volunteers; students, educators/employees etc.)

RECRUITMENT AND EMPLOYMENT OF EDUCATORS AND/OR EMPLOYEES

MSS will ensure all educators/employees working with children provide a current criminal record check or working with children check/card, as well as completing a Prohibition declaration prior to starting employment.

Educators/employees found to have an adverse criminal record check will be given the opportunity to discuss details with the employer to confirm the criminal conviction details are accurate and the circumstances of the conviction.

If a prescribed offence as stated in the relevant working with children law appears on the criminal record check, approval for employment must be obtained from the relevant regulatory authority.

All information obtained through criminal record screening will be treated in strict confidence and only used to determine suitability for employment by the service.

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Within the educator/employee recruitment process, the applicant's knowledge and experience of child protection issues will be determined. Prior to any appointment or offer of employment, the applicant's referees will be contacted to determine:

- details of the applicant and previous employment
- any history regarding child protection issues
- the applicant's reliability and consistency in implementing duty of care practices
- the applicant's supervision skill.

The applicant's employment record will be carefully checked in regard to the reasons for breaks in service, the reasons for any change of employment, and to ensure that the references provided are linked to recent employment.

All new educators/employees will be oriented to the service's child protection policies and procedures and educator/employees code of conduct. Whenever possible new educators/employees will have a period of time to work alongside current educators/employees to familiarise themselves with the children, families, other educators/employees and service procedures, prior to taking up their new responsibilities in a full capacity.

All educators/employees are provided with clear duty statements that describe the daily tasks and responsibilities of their position, and identify lines of reporting and who they are responsible to.

SUPERVISION OF CHILDREN

Children will be supervised at a level appropriate to the age and needs of the children, the program, time of day and associated risks and in accordance with the Education and Care Services National (WA) Regulations 2012.

Supervision of children away from the main play areas (i.e. bathrooms, toilets, nappy change areas, cubbies, tunnels, quiet areas, sleep areas etc.) is carefully monitored.

At times of the day when staffing is at a minimum (i.e. early morning, lunchtimes or late afternoon) educators/employees will be aware of the risks this creates, and will ensure they know the whereabouts of each other, and the children within the service. Strategies will be implemented to ensure that any visitors to the service at these times are vetted prior to entry.

Rosters are planned to ensure appropriate supervision of children is maintained and educators on non-contact duties are replaced in order to ensure appropriate educator-to-child ratios are maintained in accordance with the requirements of the Education and Care Services National (WA) Regulations 2012.

Higher levels of supervision will be needed when older and younger children are playing together. Educators will be aware that children have had different life experiences and are at different developmental stages.

Individual children will only be released from the service to authorised people.

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Educators will undertake appropriate consultation and referral regarding children's inappropriate behaviour with family cooperation and approval. (E.g.: Inclusion Support Agencies; Child psychologist etc.)

SUPERVISION AND SUPPORT OF EDUCATORS/EMPLOYEES

Child protection issues are discussed regularly at educator/employee meetings.

Educators/employees are encouraged to share any observations or concerns in regard to child and educator/employee protection risks. Resolutions are sought to eliminate risks, and management is advised of the issues and current strategies to resolve them.

MSS's educator/employee performance management system addresses educator/employee performance in relation to child protection.

Educators/employees will support each other to limit the time they are left alone with children. Visitors or trades people will not be left alone with children at any time.

Volunteers and students must be supervised by an educator that has attained the age of 18 years and holds or is working towards an approved diploma level education and care qualification, whenever they are educating or caring for children.

Educators/employees will not leave the service alone with individual children except in emergencies and in accordance with other service policies.

Grievances will be dealt with in accordance with the service's educator/employees grievance procedure.

Any allegations of child abuse or neglect made against an educator/employee will be treated with strict confidentiality whilst taking immediate action to protect children at risk in consultation with the relevant child protection authority.

EDUCATOR/EMPLOYEE TRAINING

MSS requires all educators/employees participate in training on child protection organised by relevant child protection authorities or support agencies. This training will include:

- Protective Behaviours Program
- what are appropriate and inappropriate behaviours in relationships with children
- the nature of child abuse and why some children are victimised
- signs and symptoms of child maltreatment
- how to respond if a child discloses sexual abuse
- how to observe and record children's behaviour
- process of reporting child maltreatment to relevant child protection and regulatory authorities;
- child protection authority's role in child protection issues

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- A guide to recognising signs of abuse or neglect will be made available to all educators/employees who have attended child protection training, and will be regularly discussed at educator/employees meetings, to remind educators/employees of the possible signs of child abuse, and the procedures they should follow if a child in their care displays behaviour or physical signs that could indicate abuse has taken place.

MSS will ensure that both management and educators/employees are knowledgeable about current legislation and reporting requirements related to child protection and maltreatment and that a system for the reporting and recording of suspicious incidents is in place.

The service will access current information from the relevant WA state child protection authority, about the procedures to be taken in relation to allegations of child abuse or neglect. Employer and employee responsibilities in relation to allegations of child abuse are included in educator/employees and handbooks. These responsibilities are highlighted to new educators/employees and committee members at their induction.

All educators/employees are regularly reminded about the service's policies, procedures, and confidentiality requirements in regard to child protection and issues are discussed at educator/employee meetings.

CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT

Educators will foster children's self-esteem and positive self-image through their interactions and relationships with children.

MSS 's behaviour management policy will be followed to positively guide children's appropriate behaviour.

Educators will encourage children to be assertive (i.e. learn when to stand up for themselves and say no when appropriate), and to communicate their needs and concerns. This may be done through role play, storytelling, puppets etc.

Educators will role model assertive behaviour and language.

Educators will build relationships with all children based on trust, and will empower children to discuss what is 'safe' and who may be a 'safe' person to talk to.

School age children will be encouraged to actively participate in decision making and policy development and review in regard to Child safe strategies and policies.

Educators will provide information about sexuality in an age appropriate way.

Children are naturally curious about their bodies and will occasionally explore and compare while interacting through everyday play experiences. These behaviours are a normal part of a child's development. Educators will inform parents/guardians of the particular occurrence and environment in which the behaviour was displayed, during their normal daily communication exchange with the parent.

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INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

MSS will make available to all families' information on establishing a protective environment, and the Protective Behaviours Program.

Educators will be available to discuss any issues with parents/guardians/families.

MSS will keep families up to date with any changes and seek their input.

MSS' **Protective Environment Policy** will be made available to families.

REPORTING CONCERNS

MSS will develop a procedure that outlines how an individual can complain about an issue relating to child protection or report an allegation of abuse; and how the service will manage complaints and/or allegations of misconduct against a employees member, volunteer or service user.

All concerns will be acted upon in a confidential and uniform manner.

Mandatory reporting requirements in line with child protection law will be adhered to. MSS will develop a procedure for documenting and reporting allegations of child abuse or neglect.

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