



## Mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse – facts for foster carers

Foster carers play a vital role in supporting vulnerable Western Australian children and young people.

Whilst foster carers are not mandatory reporters, it is important to have an understanding of mandatory reporting.

All children have the right to be protected from sexual abuse, and any person who has a concern that a child is suffering from any type of abuse should report their concern to the Department of Communities - Child Protection and Family Support (the Department).

### What is mandatory reporting?

Mandatory reporting requires specific people or professionals, by law, to report concerns of child sexual abuse, to the Department's Mandatory Reporting Service.

Mandatory reporters must make a report to the Mandatory Reporting Service, if during the course of their work, they form the belief that child sexual abuse has occurred or is occurring.

Mandatory Reporting legislation focuses on child sexual abuse however all forms of abuse such as physical abuse, emotional and psychological abuse and neglect should still be reported by mandatory reporters, foster carers and the general public.

### Who are mandatory reporters of child sexual abuse in Western Australia?

People working in the following professions are specified in legislation as mandatory reporters:

- Doctors
- Nurses
- Midwives
- Teachers
- Boarding Supervisors
- Police Officers

### What does mandatory reporting mean for foster carers?

Foster carers are not mandatory reporters, so by law they do not need to report concerns about child sexual abuse.

However, it is important that all children and young people be kept safe. So, if anyone, including a foster carer, has a concern about the safety of a child, then they should report their concern to the Department.

### Foster carers who are doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers or boarding supervisors

If you are a foster carer and also a mandatory reporter you should follow your work processes for the mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse, in the course of your paid or unpaid work.

When you leave work and resume your role as a foster carer you should follow the department's processes for foster carers wanting to report any type of harm to a child – that is, to contact your child protection worker to report any concerns.

### Foster carers who are also police officers

Unlike other mandatory reporters, a police officer is a police officer 24 hours a day. If concerns for a child are raised, as a police officer and a foster carer you must first follow police processes for making a mandatory report. Immediately afterwards, you should report these concerns to your child protection worker.

### Should foster carers who are also mandatory reporters, interview children to get more information where they have formed a belief of child sexual abuse?

No. It is essential that in your role as a foster carer, mandatory reporters, including police officers, do not attempt to "interview" or ask specific questions of the child in their care. Specialist child interviewers from the Department and the Western Australian Police will conduct any necessary interviews with a child.

The following table shows the mandatory reporting protocols that apply to all mandatory reporters:

My professional role	Reporting protocols that apply at work	Reporting protocols that apply to foster carers
Doctor	Work protocols	Department protocols
Nurse	Work protocols	Department protocols
Midwife	Work protocols	Department protocols
Boarding Supervisor	Work Protocols	Department protocols
Teacher	Work protocols	Department protocols
Police officer	Work protocols	Police protocols then follow Department protocols
Foster carers – not working in an occupation mentioned above	Not applicable	Department protocols

## What if a child discloses abuse or neglect to a foster carer?

The most important and immediate things a foster carer can do when a child or young person discloses abuse or neglect are:

- Always believe the child.
- Reassure the child that telling was the right thing to do.
- Maintain a calm appearance.
- Find a quiet place to talk.

### Be truthful

Children and young people sometimes fear repercussions for themselves or siblings; or consequences for parents or other family members. Because of this, a child might ask an adult to promise secrecy before disclosing abuse or neglect.

Such a promise should not be made. The foster carer can reassure the child and encourage them to speak out about the abuse.

### Let the child or young person take their time

It is important that the child or young person does not feel rushed or panicked and that the foster carer has plenty of time to calm, reassure and listen to the child.

### Let the child or young person use their own words

Children and young people have their own way of describing their experiences. It is important not to ask questions that suggest the 'right' words to a child or young person, or in a way that can be seen as putting words in the child's mouth.

It is important that foster carers do not quiz or interview the child about the disclosure, as this may interfere with any investigation.

Investigation of a disclosure should only be done by professional child protection workers or the Western Australian Police.

### Let the child or young person know what you will do next

Child abuse often leaves a child feeling disempowered and lacking control in their own life. Making sure the child or young person is fully aware of each step can make the process less intimidating and can help return a sense of power and safety.

### Do not confront the person believed to be the abuser

Confrontation has the potential to place the child, foster carers or others at risk. Child protection workers or the Western Australian Police will take any necessary action.

### Contact the Mandatory Reporting Service

Information for mandatory reporters or regarding mandatory reporting legislation is available through the Department's Mandatory Reporting Service on 1800 708 704 or online at [www.mandatoryreporting.dcp.wa.gov.au](http://www.mandatoryreporting.dcp.wa.gov.au). This service operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.