

# KEEP THEM SAFE

A shared approach to child wellbeing

## RISK OF SIGNIFICANT HARM THRESHOLD

*Keep Them Safe: A shared approach to child wellbeing is the NSW Government's response to the Report of the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. Keep Them Safe recognises the importance of the wellbeing of all children and young people, with the aim of providing appropriate support to families earlier, to prevent children and young people from requiring statutory child protection intervention. To achieve this, Keep Them Safe encourages families, communities, government agencies, and non-government organisations to work together to support children, young people, and families.*

### Summary of changes

From 24 January 2010, the statutory threshold (the point at which a concern should be reported to the Child Protection Helpline) changed from "risk of harm" to "risk of significant harm". A child or young person is at risk of significant harm if the circumstances that are causing concern for their safety, welfare or wellbeing are present to a significant extent.

The amendments also include the addition of two new grounds for reporting that indicate a child may be at risk of significant harm:

- parents or carers who have not made proper arrangements and are unable or unwilling to arrange for their child to receive an education (educational neglect)
- a series of acts or omissions that when viewed together may establish a pattern of significant harm (cumulative impact).

### Why the changes?

The Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW revealed that many children who did not require statutory intervention were being reported to Community Services. This used

- more families are supported at a local level by other government and non-government services
- Community Services is able to focus on the most serious cases.

The aim is to ensure that vulnerable children and their families receive appropriate services at an earlier stage in the life of the problem.

### What does this mean for reporters?

From 24 January 2010, members of the community and mandatory reporters who assess that a child or young person is at risk of significant



valuable resources and did not result in children and their families receiving the support they needed. The Inquiry recommended that the threshold be raised so that:

- those children and young people who do not require a statutory response are no longer reported

harm (the statutory threshold) should report their concerns to the Child Protection Helpline:

- mandatory reporters, phone 133 627
- non-mandatory reporters (including the general public), phone 132 111.

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### How will I know what reaches the threshold?

A Mandatory Reporter Guide (MRG) has been developed to help front-line mandatory reporters such as doctors, police officers, teachers and social workers determine whether the risk to a child or young person meets the new statutory threshold. It will form part of the Keep Them Safe framework for all agencies working with children, young people, and families. The MRG is an interactive tool and is available on the Keep Them Safe website.

In addition, Child Wellbeing Units (CWUs) have been established in the four major government reporting agencies to:

- help agency mandatory reporters identify whether a child meets the risk of significant harm threshold
- provide advice to mandatory reporters about possible service responses to children below the threshold

- drive better alignment and coordination of agency service systems over time, to enable better responses to children and families in need of assistance.

Agencies or organisations without a CWU can continue to contact the Child Protection Helpline where they suspect a child is at risk of significant harm (see *KTS Factsheet No. 4b: Child Wellbeing Units: Agencies without a CWU*).

### KTS Support Line

The NSW Government established a telephone support line to assist NGOs with the changes under Keep Them Safe, specifically with the new reporting threshold. It is called the KTS Support Line. The Support Line operates 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays). The phone number is 1 800 772 479.

### What happens to reports that do not meet the threshold?

If a child or young person is not at risk

of significant harm, the report does not meet the threshold. In these situations mandatory reporters should:

- continue to offer the services of their own organisation (where appropriate)
- refer to local services and work collaboratively with other organisations
- refer to Family Referral Services (where available), which are run by non-government organisations to link families to local services (see *KTS Factsheet No. 6: Family Referral Services*).

Information sharing will ensure that concerns for the wellbeing of children and young people are monitored and reported to Community Services if they reach a level considered to reach the threshold.

The Helpline will provide feedback to mandatory reporters about whether or not the report meets the new threshold for statutory intervention.