

KEEP THEM SAFE

A shared approach to child wellbeing

MANDATORY REPORTER GUIDE

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.

What is the Mandatory Reporter Guide?

The Mandatory Reporter Guide (MRG) was developed to help mandatory reporters determine what action to take regarding a child or young person at risk. The development of this tool was in response to the change in the reporting threshold on 24 January 2010 from "risk of harm" to "risk of significant harm". This followed recommendations made by The Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW which noted the need to distinguish between children and young people in need of support and those at

significant risk of harm. (For more information about changes to the statutory threshold, please see *KTS Factsheet No. 2: Risk of Significant Harm Threshold*.)

For reports that do not meet the threshold, mandatory reporters identify potential responses within their own agency or make a referral to other services to provide support to the family, including Family Referral

harm, they should contact the Child Protection Helpline on 132 111.

The MRG is one of several Structured Decision Making Tools developed to improve screening and assessment of children and young people, and the support they receive from services. The MRG and the other Structured Decision Making Tools aim to complement and support practice at each key decision point, using the best



Services (see *KTS Factsheet No. 6: Family Referral Services*).

Mandatory reporters in the NSW Department of Family and Community Services, Department of Education and Communities, NSW Health, and NSW Police Force can also contact their Child Wellbeing Unit for advice. Mandatory reporters from non-government organisations (NGOs) or professionals in private practice can call the KTS Support Line on 1800 772 479. If members of the public and other non-mandatory reporters are concerned that a child or young person is at risk of significant

available evidence to guide decisions. They do not replace professional judgment.

The MRG was developed by the US-based Children's Research Center, and tailored to the local context, after detailed liaison with representatives from the government and non-government sectors in NSW. It is a world-first Structured Decision Making Tool for broad use by thousands of reporters across various professions and workplaces to assist them to decide what action to take regarding a child or young person they are concerned about. The MRG was updated to

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the fourth edition in November 2011. A list of updates and changes incorporated into this version can be found in *KTS Factsheet No. 3b: Enhancements to the Fourth Edition of the MRG*.

A simple to use web-based version has been developed and can be accessed via the Keep Them Safe website. This interactive online version has the additional feature of generating a Decision Report for the user that reflects all the answers provided to the questions. Confidentiality is assured as no identifying information is entered when using the MRG.

How to use the MRG

To start, the mandatory reporter chooses the category of abuse or neglect that most accurately reflects their concern for a child or young person, and then responds to a series of questions regarding the circumstances for the child or young person, before the Guide concludes with a recommended action. The Guide covers a comprehensive range of concerns:

- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- relinquishing care
- parent/carer substance abuse
- parent/carer mental health
- parent/carer domestic violence
- neglect, in relation to supervision, physical shelter/environment, food, medical care, mental health care, education, or hygiene/clothing
- psychological harm
- an unborn child.

Accompanying each question are definitions and examples that assist mandatory reporters to determine whether they should:

- make a report to the Child Protection Helpline
- consult their Child Wellbeing Unit or the KTS Support Line (for reporters from NGOs and in private practice)
- make a referral to community or government support services
- document and continue their relationship with the child or young person or their family.

All the Structured Decision Making Tools include principles relating to culturally appropriate support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

For further information and service options

- Contact your Child Wellbeing Unit (if relevant)
- Call the KTS Support Line (non-government or private practice employees): 1800 772 479
- Access comprehensive information and service options from the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies: www.acwa.asn.au



What's new?

The MRG is a dynamic document that requires ongoing enhancement to ensure that it remains easy to understand and use for all mandatory reporters in NSW. The current fifth edition of the MRG was published in May 2013 and includes a new decision tree (danger to self or others), enhancements to two existing decision trees, and further guidances on a number of child protection matters.

The review and upgrade of the MRG is a collaborative process between several government and non-government agencies and the current third edition has been reviewed and endorsed by the NSW Department of Family and Community Services, Department of Education and Communities, NSW Health, and the NSW Police Force (see *KTS Factsheet no. 3b: Enhancements to the Fifth Edition of the MRG*).