

Providing support to vulnerable children and their families

Information sharing authorised by the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*

Who should I call?

Family services

You may refer a family to a family service where you have discussed your concerns with the child and their parents, and where you have their consent.

Child FIRST (Family Information Referral and Support Team)

You should call Child FIRST if you have a significant concern for the wellbeing of a child.

If necessary, you can make a referral without the consent of the child or their family. (Prior to 2009, you may be in an area where a Child FIRST team is yet to be established. If so, you can make a referral to a family service or a report to Child Protection).

Child Protection

You should make a report to Child Protection if you have a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection.

Contacts:

Your local offices for the above services are listed in your local phone book. They are also listed on our website at:

www.dhs.vic.gov.au/everychildeverychance

The *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*

In 2005, the Victorian Government introduced the *Children, Youth and Families Act* to better meet the needs of vulnerable children.

A key feature of this Act is that it allows professionals to share information with Child Protection and Child FIRST to promote the safety and development of vulnerable children.

As a family violence service manager or worker in Victoria, you have a key role to play in ensuring that vulnerable children are protected and supported.

This summary brochure is designed to help you make the right decisions about sharing information about a child or their family.

The full guide will give you a more complete understanding of how the legislation applies to you.

If your workplace does not have a copy, the full guide is available at our website:

www.dhs.vic.gov.au/everychildeverychance

A guide for family violence service managers and workers in Victoria



Sharing information to promote children's safety and wellbeing

The Victorian Government believes in a society where every child thrives, learns and is respected and valued. *The Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* is the legislative base for services that promote this vision.

Why share information?

As a family violence service manager or worker in Victoria, you have a responsibility to share information about a vulnerable child who may need help. This is because sharing information with an agency such as Child FIRST or Child Protection helps to promote a child's safety and development, and gives a vulnerable child and their family access to services they may need.

What information can I share?

When you share information with Child FIRST or Child Protection, you are allowed to share any information that may help them to make an initial assessment about a child.

In the case of Child Protection, you may also share information that is relevant to the protection or development of a child when Child Protection is investigating a report, or during subsequent Child Protection intervention.

What's new in the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* regarding information sharing?

- You can make a referral to a Child FIRST team when you have a significant concern for a child's wellbeing (you may also do this prior to a child's birth if the concern relates to the wellbeing of the child after their birth).
- You can be consulted by either Child FIRST or Child Protection when they are assessing and deciding how to best respond to a referral or report they have received.
- The person in charge of your service is authorised to share relevant information with Child Protection when they have decided that a child is in need of protection and are working with the child and family.

How am I protected when I share information?

When you make a referral to Child FIRST or a report to Child Protection, or are consulted by them, and when you assist Child Protection with an investigation or intervention:

- your identity will not be disclosed without your consent (although you are encouraged to consider disclosing it to help services engage more easily with the family)
- you are legally protected (for example, you cannot be successfully sued)
- you are professionally protected (you cannot incur any formal adverse professional consequences).

What are family violence service managers and workers authorised to do?

- You can make a referral to Child FIRST if you have a significant concern for the wellbeing of a child, or a report to Child Protection if you believe a child is in need of protection.
- You can be authorised by Child Protection to share relevant information during an investigation.

What additional authorisations does the person in charge of a family violence service have?

The person in charge of a family violence service is authorised to share relevant information with Child FIRST or Child Protection to help them assess a referral or report they have received.

The person in charge is also authorised to share relevant information with Child Protection to help them:

- undertake an investigation
- work with a child and their family where a child has been found to be in need of protection.

Where a child is subject to a Children's Court Protection Order, the person in charge can be required by law to provide relevant information.

Who is the 'person in charge' of a family violence service?

It is the person who is in charge at the time and on the day that the information is requested and disclosed. If the manager is not on site, this might be the senior worker who is present.