

Child Safety POLICY

Title: Assessment and Service Connect

Policy No: 636-2

Policy Statement:

The Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs (Child Safety) has a legislative responsibility to take action when aware of alleged harm or risk of harm to a child and there is a reasonable belief that a child or young person is in need of protection, or an unborn child will be at risk of harm after he or she is born. A child is in need of protection if the child has suffered, is suffering, or is at unacceptable risk of suffering significant harm and does not have a parent able and willing to protect the child from harm.

Assessment and Service Connect (ASC) is a model of working with families, in partnership with ASC funded service providers, or other agencies or non-government services as co-responders, to assess and respond to children and families to increase safety.

ASC aims to provide the right service, at the right time, in the right place and relies on partners working collaboratively to ensure Queensland children are cared for, protected, safe and able to reach their full potential.

The intent of ASC is to facilitate access by families to support services early in the investigation and assessment process to enable children to remain safely at home.

Child Safety is committed to respecting, protecting and promoting human rights. The *Human Rights Act 2019* requires Child Safety to act and make decisions in a way that is compatible with human rights and, when making a decision, to give proper consideration to human rights. The safe care and connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with family, community, culture and country will be a key consideration in decision making by Child Safety staff.

Principles:

- The safety, wellbeing and best interests of the child, both throughout childhood and the rest of the child's life, are paramount.
- Every child has a right to protection from harm, and a child's protection and care needs take precedence over the protection of an individual's privacy.
- The preferred way of ensuring a child's safety, belonging and wellbeing is through supporting the child's family.

- The chief executive has the primary responsibility for investigating, assessing and responding to allegations of harm to children, including by making plans for their protection and care.
- The State is responsible for ensuring that children in need of protection, and children who may become in need of protection, receive coordinated protection and care services in a timely and effective way to ensure their safety and promote their wellbeing.
- The State is responsible for ensuring that children and families receive the family support services that they need in order to decrease the likelihood of the children becoming in need of protection.
- Child Safety staff will act and make decisions in a way that is compatible with human rights and obligations under the *Human Rights Act 2019*.
- The five elements of the child placement principle (prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection) under the *Child Protection Act 1999*, section 5C, apply to any processes, decisions and actions taken for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child.
- Each service provider will contribute to assessing and meeting the protection and care needs of children and supporting their families, within the provider's sphere of responsibility.

Objectives:

This policy aims to ensure children and families are provided with the right service, at the right time, in the right place to meet their safety needs, as part of an investigation and assessment.

The ASC model and ASC co-response provides the following:

- proportional responses to concerns about the safety and wellbeing of children
- culturally responsive service delivery to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- integrated responses to domestic and family violence
- coordinated and partnered assessment and service delivery
- timely responses to enable rigorous and balanced assessment and access to early support to keep children safely at home
- improved quality of responses, specialist advice, evidence gathering and analysis
- streamlined access to support services, and provision of services that increase safety, reducing re-entry and re-substantiation of harm
- increased co-responses and maximising secondary sector service system engagement and investment to protect children and support families.

Scope:

This policy refers to the ASC model of assessment and service provision following notification that a child may be in need of protection, with the ASC funded service provider performing as the conduit to establish connections and link a child and family to ongoing support.

As part of the investigation and assessment, Child Safety will gather information to investigate the concerns, assess the level of harm or risk of future harm to the child or unborn child and determine whether a support response is appropriate. The assessment of harm and risk of harm and the support needs of the child and family may occur in partnership with ASC co-responders, with support intervention generally provided by Child Safety and a secondary sector provider.

Support responses may meet the needs of children and families where parenting coping and functioning impacts on children's safety. Investigative responses will be required when criminal charges or forensic evidence-gathering skills are required and in these circumstances an ASC co-response may not be appropriate. The involvement of an ASC co-response does not alter the role of the Queensland Police Service in a joint investigation.

Roles and Responsibilities:

- When undertaking an investigation and assessment, Child Safety can partner with ASC funded service providers, and in some circumstances government partner agencies or a non-government organisation, to:
 - effectively engage the child and their family
 - assess whether the child is in need of protection
 - prevent future harm to children
 - increase safety, belonging and wellbeing through intervention.
- Senior team leaders and child safety officers will work together to identify investigation and assessments that are suitable for an ASC co-response.
- Child Safety will engage the most suitable co-responder by referring identified matters to ASC funded service providers, or partnering with other co-responders.
 - An ASC co-response may have more than one co-responder, if appropriate to the child and family's needs, such as:
 - an ASC funded service provider
 - a government partner agency
 - a non-government organisation.
- The role of the ASC funded co-responder will be to:
 - partner with the Child Safety Officer to assist in the assessment process through engaging with the family to enable, support and inform the response provided to the child and family
 - assist the child and their family to receive the support and services they need to increase safety and decrease the likelihood of the child entering care
 - determine the most suitable services for a child and their family and act as the conduit to make the connection and link families with ongoing support.
- Government partner agency or non-government organisation ASC co-responder will work with the family, with consent and within the boundaries of their role. ASC co-responders, who are not funded, may be limited by their organisational capacity and/or scope of their service agreement.

- ASC co-responders can only engage with the family when there is consent. If the family does not consent, contact with the ASC funded service provider must cease and only Child Safety will continue the investigation and assessment in line with usual procedures.
- The Child Safety Officer, as an authorised officer, will retain responsibility for the investigation and assessment, and where it is not possible for a child to safely remain in the home with support for the family, will take action to protect the child, either through intervention with parental agreement or with a child protection order.

Authority:

Child Protection Act 1999 sections 6, 14, 21A, 186, 187, 188 and Chapter 5A.

Delegations:

Refer to instruments of delegation for delegations relevant to investigation and assessments.

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Date to be reviewed:	1 January 2023

Office:	Office of the Chief Practitioner
Help Contact:	Child Protection Practice

Links:

Procedures

Child Safety Practice Manual

Assessment and Service Connect Operational Policy Guidelines

Related Legislation

Human Rights Act 2019

Related Policies

Investigation and Assessment Policy (386)

Rescinded Policies

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