



Guidance document: When is a Child at Risk of Significant Harm?

Under the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW), certain persons who work with Children are under an obligation to make a report to the Department of Communities and Justice if they have reasonable grounds to suspect a Child is or may be at Risk of Significant Harm.

Persons who are not required to do so may still make a report to the Department of Communities and Justice if they have reasonable grounds to suspect that a Child is or may be at Risk of Significant Harm.

This document provides some guidance as to what constitutes a Risk of Significant Harm.

Overview

A Child is at Risk of Significant Harm if current concerns exist for their safety, welfare or well-being because of the presence, to a significant extent, of any one or more of the following circumstances, which fall into the broad categories of Neglect, abuse and psychological harm:

Neglect

1. the Child's basic physical or psychological needs are not being met or are at risk of not being met;
2. the Child's parents or other caregivers have not arranged and are unable or unwilling to arrange for the Child to receive necessary medical care;
3. in the case of a Child who is required to attend school, the parents or other caregivers have not arranged and are unable or unwilling to arrange for the Child to receive an education;

Abuse and psychological harm

4. the Child has been, or is at risk of being, physically or sexually abused or ill-treated;
5. the Child is living in a household where there have been incidents of domestic violence and, as a consequence, the Child is at risk of serious physical or psychological harm; and
6. a parent or other care giver has behaved in such a way towards the Child that the Child has suffered, or is at risk of suffering, serious psychological harm.

Related documents

1. Protocol: Reporting a Child who is at Risk of Significant Harm to the Department of Communities and Justice
2. Flowchart: Reporting Safeguarding Complaints
3. Fact sheet: When is a Child at Risk of Significant Harm?

Specific descriptions

Possible signs a Child's basic needs are not being met

Signs in Children include:

1. low weight for age and/or failure to thrive and develop;
2. untreated physical problems;
3. poor standards of hygiene;
4. poor complexion and hair texture;
5. Child not adequately supervised for their age;
6. scavenging or stealing food and focus on basic survival;
7. extended stays at school, public places, other homes;
8. longs for or indiscriminately seeks adult affection;
9. rocking, sucking, head-banging; and
10. poor school attendance.

Signs in parents and/or caregivers include:

1. inability or unwillingness to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing, medical attention, safe home conditions;
2. leaving the Child without appropriate supervision;
3. abandoning the Child;
4. withholding physical contact or stimulation for prolonged periods;
5. inability or unwillingness to provide psychological nurturing;
6. limited understanding of the Child's needs; and
7. unrealistic expectations of the Child.

Possible signs of physical abuse

Signs in Children include:

1. bruising;
2. lacerations and welts;
3. drowsiness, vomiting, fits or pooling of blood in the eyes, which may suggest head injury;
4. adult bite marks and scratches;
5. fractures of bones, especially in Children under three years old;

6. dislocations, sprains, twisting;
7. burns and scalds (including cigarette burns);
8. multiple injuries or bruises;
9. explanation of injury offered by the Child is not consistent with their injury;
10. abdominal pain caused by ruptured internal organs;
11. swallowing of poisonous substances, alcohol or other harmful drugs;

Signs in parents and/or caregivers include:

1. frequent visits with the Child in their care to health or other services with unexplained or suspicious injuries;
2. explanation of injury offered by the parent is not consistent with the injury;
3. family history of violence;
4. history of their own maltreatment as a Child;
5. fear of injuring the Child in their care; and
6. use of excessive discipline.

Possible signs of Sexual Abuse

Signs in Children include:

1. describing Sexual Acts; and
2. sexual knowledge or behaviour inappropriate for the Child's age.
3. adolescent pregnancy;
4. sexually transmitted infection; and
5. unexplained accumulation of money and gifts.

Possible signs of psychological harm

Signs in Children include:

1. constant feelings of worthlessness about life and themselves;
2. inability to value others;
3. lack of trust in people;
4. lack of people skills necessary for daily functioning;
5. extreme attention-seeking behaviour;
6. obsession with pleasing or obeying adults;
7. taking extreme risks;
8. being highly self-critical, depressed or anxious;
9. persistent running away from home;
10. anorexia or over-eating; and

11. risk taking behaviours - self harm, suicide attempts.