

Understanding Risk and Applying the Child Safe Standards in Centre -based Services

Warning: These case studies discuss child abuse and the content may be distressing to some participants. Crisis support services can be reached 24 hours a day: Lifeline 13 11 14, Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636 and Mental Health Line 1800 011 511.

Case study 1

This case study is fictional but has been developed based on research from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, literature reviews and information based on organisational abuse in NSW.

Background

Maria is a 45-year-old qualified childcare worker who has been working at Growing Strong Kids Inc for 10 years. Maria is friends with the director of the centre and their children are friends. She did not have a formal interview as the director knew her well but she did have all of her WWCC and police checks done before she started work. She also participated in the induction when she started that covered all the policies and procedures. Maria is very knowledgeable about children's development and does a lot of programming for the 0-3 room. Junior staff have noticed that Maria can be abrupt with some children and even a little rough in the way she handles them when there is a dispute. Junior staff respect Maria and don't challenge her, and they don't feel comfortable mentioning any concerns to the director because of the known friendship.

Reflective comments

Recruitment *(Is this typical recruitment? Would you have done anything differently?)*

Induction and training *(Is this a typical induction? What is your induction process like? How do you communicate and train staff in your policies and procedures? Do you have ongoing targeted training opportunities?)*

Supervision *(How regularly do you supervise your staff? How do you gauge if they feel supported or need training in particular areas?)*

Incident

One day two three-year-old children have a physical altercation and one child bites down hard on the other child's arm for several seconds. Maria intervenes and yells at the child to stop biting, then drags the child along the ground by the arm, shoving them into the time-out chair. The child cries for 30 minutes and when junior staff try to comfort the boy, Maria yells at them for comforting him while he is in time out. The boy calms down but continues to nurse the arm the rest of the day. The parents are informed of the incident at pick up time and sign the incident form.

The next day the parents call to inform the director that the child had a dislocated elbow and required medical attention. They wanted to lodge a complaint. The parents reportedly noticed their child was avoiding using their arm and cried while changing for bedtime. They were very upset the centre did not disclose more details about the incident or notice that their child required medical attention.

Reflective comments

Reporting (How would you have documented this incident? What would you have documented it as? Who would you have reported it to?)

Organisational culture (What has shaped the organisational culture and dynamics of staffing in this case study? What is your organisational culture like? Do your staff have someone to talk to if they have concerns? Do they know external people/agencies they can call if required?)

Policies and procedures (What would your organisation's internal response be with the child/family, Maria, staff members? What action would occur — reviews, discussion at team meeting, interviews?)

What if the child reported to another educator Maria hurt their arm? (What would the response be? Would it be any different? Would the incident report or reporting to agencies have occurred earlier or be written differently?)

Case study 2

Case study two has been adapted from a [police brief](#) from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The information has been summarised for learning purposes. The names of all parties have been de-identified. Police arrested and charged the accused but the case was never prosecuted.

Background

John is a 57-year-old part owner of a childcare centre and his daughter (director) is also part owner of the centre. John has a number of small jobs at the centre such as maintenance, work health and safety, and cooking. He is not responsible for the care of the children at the centre and has no childcare qualifications, but he often helps out during nap time and plays with the children in the outdoor areas.

Reflective comments: (Does this sound like a typical scenario? Would you consider John to be a manager, staff or volunteer? How do you supervise and induct different types of staff? Are John's interactions with children appropriate?)

Incident

An allegation of sexual assault is made against John. A preschool aged girl made a series of disclosures to her mother and father that John kisses her and gives her massages and tickles that are a 'secret'. The girl reported this happening during nap times and whenever she sits on his lap. The family had also noticed some sexualised behaviours that were not age appropriate. This included trying to kiss parents with an open mouth and tongue, trying to 'tickle' her mother's groin area, and showing her vagina and inserting her finger into her vagina in front of other family members.

The allegation was reported to police who investigated. Police interviewed the child, parents of the child, educators and John.

Reflective comments:

Organisational response: If this happened at your centre, what would be the process or steps taken in response to this allegation? Do you know who you need to report to? Which of your policies and procedures help guide you in this scenario? If staff observed these sexualised behaviours, would they know how to respond to the girl and would they know what is and is not age appropriate behaviour?

Interviews with educators revealed the following.

- Educators had observed John supervising and playing with children. However, staff accounts of the level of interaction varied (for example, some staff said he just sat and supervised while other staff (and John) reported he played with the children).
- One educator described John as a 'great person to have at the childcare centre' and there is 'no problem with hugging the kids'.
- Several educators stated that they did not believe the allegation and that they would have noticed if something inappropriate had occurred.
- Educators acknowledged they did not always have line of sight of John during nap time and the girl was segregated from other children so she did not disrupt the others.
- Many educators reported the girl did not sleep but would get a pat on the back by John for resting. However, educator accounts of John patting the girl's back were also inconsistent.
- An educator acknowledged that although they had met the ratios of supervision outside, they did not have line of sight in relation to John's interactions with children.
- Supervisor reported to have never seen any children lifting dresses or showing private parts. No staff had reported this and, if this happened, they would have reported it.

Reflective comments:

Organisational culture: (What are your thoughts on educator reports of John's character, staff reaction to the allegation and the inconsistencies in observations? Do the educator reports tell you anything about the organisational culture/power imbalances?)

Training and supervision: (Do educator reports tell you something about training/education on identifying and responding to grooming/abuse? How else could the staff have managed the girl's unwillingness to sleep? Does your sleep policy address these types of visibility and interactions during sleep times?)

The mother reported the following to police.

- She did not know that John was the father of the owner/director until he was arrested.
- John was initially just the cook but over a period of 6-12 months she noticed he gradually appeared to become more involved with the children and was more like a carer.
- She did see behaviour she thought was inappropriate such as seeing her daughter sit on John's lap but did not say anything.
- When she witnessed John kissing her daughter's forehead on arrival one day, she emailed the owner expressing her discomfort. After the complaint was made, John stopped talking to them and stopped touching the girl in front of them but the mother continued to see John touching other children (for example, to apply sunscreen).

Reflective comments:

Organisational culture and relationships with families: (What do you think about the mother not knowing about existing relationships in the centre? Does your service declare conflicts of interest (relationships between staff)? Why do you think the mother did not say anything about seeing inappropriate behaviour or behaviour that made her feel uncomfortable? What does this say about the centre's culture?)

Complaint culture and management: (What are your thoughts on how the complaint was managed? How could the implementation of the Child Safe Standards have supported the centre and mother to have had a conversation earlier? What child safe practices would have empowered and supported this mother to raise her concerns (name at least three documents or practices)? How could the Child Safe Standards have prevented the alleged abuse from occurring?)

John reported the following in his police interview.

- The girl had a problem staying on her bed or sleeping in her bed.
- He rubbed the girl's bare stomach and back, and patted her bottom, during rest time.
- He had pinched and squeezed the girl's bottom.
- The girl flashed her vagina and chest to him, and other children also do this (boys and girls). This happens 'quite often'.
- All the children jump and climb on him when he is in the yard.
- The girl liked a cuddle and said 'I love you' to him.
- The girl was in need of affection and attention since the mother had more children.

- He would be ‘busted’ if he was a schoolteacher as they have different rules about touching children.
- He spends quality time with the children playing with them.
- He denied deliberately touching the girl’s vagina but conceded it could have happened by accident while rubbing her stomach or picking her up.

Reflective Comments: *(What are your thoughts on John’s comments during the police interview? Could you see this sort of behaviour going unnoticed or ignored by a staff/volunteer in your service if there was a power imbalance or you had known the person a long time (believing they wouldn’t abuse a child)? What are the grooming behaviours displayed?)*

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