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| Providing support to vulnerable children and their families |
| A guide for registered community service managers and workers in Victoria |

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# Who should I call?

## If you work for a registered child and family service:

You may consult with the Community Based Child Protection worker at your local Child FIRST team if you need advice about your work with a child and family, or if you want to discuss making a report about a child who may be in need of protection.

If you believe a child is in urgent need of protection, you should contact Child Protection directly.

## If you work for Child FIRST:

You may consult with the Community Based Child Protection Worker to discuss a referral you have received.

You must make a report to Child Protection if you believe a child referred to you is in need of protection.

## If you work for a registered out of home care service:

You may consult with a family service that is part of your agency or call Child FIRST if you have a significant concern for the wellbeing of a child who is placed in your care voluntarily by a parent, without Child Protection involvement.

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

You should contact Child Protection if you have concerns about a child they have placed in your care.

### Contacts:

Your local offices for the above services are listed in your local phone book. They are also listed on our website at: [Department of Health and Human Services](http://www.providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/) [http://www.providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/]

## 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 community 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: [Department of Health and Human Services](http://www.providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/) [http://www.providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/]

# 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?

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.

You are authorised to share information as a community service manager or worker if you manage or work for:

* a registered child and family service
* a Child FIRST team
  + a registered out of home care service

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

* Anyone can make a referral to a Child FIRST team where they have a significant concern for a child’s wellbeing.
* Anyone can make a referral to Child FIRST or a report to Child Protection prior to a child’s birth if their concern relates to the wellbeing of the child after their birth.
* As a community service manager or worker, you can be consulted by either Child FIRST or Child Protection when they are trying to decide how to best respond to a referral or report they have received.
* As well as being allowed to share information with Child Protection during an investigation, you are 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.
* As a family service worker, you can consult with
  + Child Protection at any stage of your involvement with a child or their family. This will usually take the form of a consultation with a Community Based Child Protection Worker.

## Information sharing to assist Child FIRST

You are authorised to share relevant information with Child FIRST to help them assess a referral they have received.

## Information sharing to assist child protection

You are authorised to share relevant information with Child Protection (including the Community Based Child Protection worker) to help them:

* assess a report they have received
* conduct an investigation
  + work with, and coordinate services for, a child and family where a child has been found to be in need of protection.

## 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).

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