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| Providing support to vulnerable children and their families |
| A guide for Victorian Government Department employees |

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# 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: [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 Victorian Government department employee, 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.

As a Victorian Government Department employee, you have a key role to play in ensuring that vulnerable children are protected and supported. This involves sharing information about children’s safety and development where it could help a vulnerable child.

## 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.

## 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.
  + 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 their 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).

## Making a referral to Child FIRST or a report to Child Protection

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.

## Information sharing to assist Child FIRST

You are authorised to share 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 to help them:

* assess a report they have received
* conduct an investigation
  + work with, and coordinate services for, 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, you can be required by law to provide relevant information.

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