



Protocol for Researchers: Children and Young People at Risk of Harm

Rationale

Researchers with UnitingCare Burnside (Burnside) may be exposed to events or disclosures that cause them to develop concerns relating to the safety of particular children or young people. This protocol is binding where concerns arise during the course of research work for the safety of direct research participants and/or any other child or young person that a researcher comes into contact with in their work with Burnside.

As stated in the UnitingCare Burnside's Research Code of Ethics, it is Burnside's "ethical and legal responsibility to protect its clients, especially more vulnerable groups such as children and young persons, against any risk of harm or exploitation". This refers to both harm or exploitation deriving from the research process, as well as harm or exploitation that the researcher has reason to believe is occurring outside of this research process.

A formulated protocol is necessary so that concerns regarding risk of harm can be dealt with expediently and consistently. This protocol provides clear guidelines so that Burnside staff and researchers are able to work together in the best interests of the child or young person.

Burnside's position is that where a researcher has reasonable suspicion that a child is at risk, particularly when a disclosure by a research participant activates such suspicion, Burnside staff are the most qualified and informed people to assess the need for a report to the Department of Community Services (DoCS) Helpline. Staff are familiar with the history and background of the child or young person and their family, and have formal training and experience in child protection. Therefore, researchers should report any concern to the relevant Burnside staff rather than act independently. Program staff, the coordinator/ manager, and/or senior manager will take action as soon as possible. The manager of the Social Policy and Research Program will be kept informed of the issues as they relate to research activity.

Burnside has internal policy and procedures relating to these issues that are followed by Burnside staff. These include; Reporting Children and Young People at Risk of Harm and Responding to and Reporting allegations of abuse within Burnside programs. Copies of these are available from the Social Policy and Research Program on request.

What does a researcher do if they suspect a child or young person is ‘at risk’, or in the event of a child or young person disclosing information that is cause for concern?

A researcher must abide by the procedures below, according to which situation most resembles the researcher’s concerns. In all cases the manager of the Social Policy and Research Program will be kept apprised of the situation.

Scenario a)

- If a researcher has reason to believe that a child or young person is at risk of harm from a family or community member they must immediately inform the co-ordinator/ manager of the relevant program of their concerns. The coordinator/ manager will then take any necessary action, and report this concern to the relevant senior manager.

Scenario b)

- If a researcher has reason to believe that a Burnside staff member, volunteer, carer or contractor, has failed to exercise their duty of care they must immediately inform the co-ordinator/ manager of the relevant program. The coordinator/manager will then report this concern to the relevant senior manager.
- If the concern relates to the coordinator/manager of the program, the relevant senior manager or the manager of the Social Policy and Research Program should be informed immediately.

Scenario c)

- If a child/young person or parent makes an allegation of abuse against a Burnside staff member, volunteer, carer or contractor, the researcher should notify the program coordinator/manager immediately.
- If the researcher is uncomfortable with this, or if the concern relates to the coordinator/ manager, they should notify the relevant senior manager and inform the manager of the Social Policy and Research Program. The researcher may be contacted by Burnside or external investigators to assist further investigation into the matter.

What happens after a researcher expresses concern?

Burnside staff will assess all concerns raised by a researcher about a child or young person at risk of harm within the context of the current situation for that child or young person. If it is deemed necessary, a report will be made to the DoCS Helpline by relevant Burnside staff.

Burnside staff are well placed to make an informed decision about the need for a report to be made due to their experience and knowledge of the child

and family concerned and the relevant legislation (The Children and Young Person's Care and Protection Act 1998).

Is the researcher informed of action taken?

The relevant coordinator/manager or senior manager, or their delegate, will inform the researcher of the response to their concerns. This may happen immediately or as soon as possible after further discussion with the child/family/staff member.

What if a researcher does not agree with the judgement of Burnside staff?

If the researcher is unsatisfied with the action taken to address their concerns, they should discuss this directly with the coordinator/manager involved. If the researcher is still unsatisfied, they should then consult the relevant senior manager.

It is Burnside policy that where there is a disagreement about whether a report of risk of harm is made to the DoCS Helpline, both parties should together contact the DoCS Helpline (ph 133627) to determine whether a report is appropriate.

Burnside's Complaints Policy details how the organisation responds to any complaints regarding our services or staff. The Social Policy and Research Program can provide a copy of the policy on request.