

SLSQ Policy

Title: Receiving and Reporting Disclosures or Suspicions of Harm to minors.	Department: Membership Services
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Introduction

Surf Life Saving Queensland (SLSQ) is committed to the safety and wellbeing of members who participate in any related activities. Our volunteers and staff will treat all members with respect and understanding at all times.

The aim of this SLSQ policy and supporting procedures are to assist members/staff when confronted with disclosures or suspicions of harm, or who witness acts of harm to children and young people. It will enable staff/members to respond professionally, and as quickly as possible, and in the best interests of the child or young person, under the age of 18, who is the subject of alleged harm. SLSQ recognises that children and young people are vulnerable members of the community and that extra measures must be taken to protect and support them.

When making a report, your details are kept confidential and your identity is strictly protected. You are able to remain anonymous, however it is preferable for you to provide your details in case any information needs to be clarified.

Definitions

Harm - as defined under the *Child Protection Act 1999* is:

Harm, to a child, is any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing. (2) It is immaterial how the harm is caused. (3) Harm can be caused by— (a) physical, psychological or emotional abuse or neglect; or (b) sexual abuse or exploitation.

Harm can be caused by—

(a) a single act, omission or circumstance; or

(b) a series or combination of acts, omissions or circumstances.

Harm may be categorised in the following types:

- **Physical abuse:** for example, beating, shaking, burning, biting, causing bruise or fractures by inappropriate discipline, giving children alcohol, drugs or inappropriate medication
- **Emotional or psychological abuse:** for example, yelling, insults, swearing, criticism, bullying, not giving children positive support and encouragement
- **Neglect:** for example, not giving children sufficient food, clothing, enough sleep, hygiene, medical care, leaving children alone or children missing school, and

- **Sexual abuse or exploitation:** for example, sexual jokes or touching, grooming behaviours, exposing children to sexual acts or pornography or having sexual intercourse with a child or young person under 16 years of age (even if the child appears to have consented).

Suspicion of harm - You can suspect harm if:

- you suspect that a child or young person may be suffering from any category of harm.
- Witness harm to a child or young person

Disclosure of harm - A disclosure of harm occurs when someone, including a child or young person, tells you about harm that has happened or is likely to happen.

Application

Any disclosure of harm is important and must be acted upon, regardless of whether:

- the harm to a child or young person had been caused by a person from within or outside surf lifesaving, or
- the child or young person disclosing the harm to you is from within or outside surf lifesaving.

Irrespective of the source of the harm, i.e. whether from within our organisation (internal) or outside our organisation (external), you must take action.

Actions for Receiving a Disclosure of Harm

When receiving a disclosure of harm:

- Remain calm and find a private place to talk (it is recommended to stay within sight of others);
- **Never question the validity of the child's disclosure;**
- Don't promise that you'll keep a secret; tell them they have done the right thing in telling you but that you'll need to tell someone who can help keep them safe;
- Only ask enough questions to confirm the need to report the matter; probing questions could cause distress, confusion and interfere with any later enquiries, and
- Do not attempt to conduct your own investigation or mediate an outcome between the parties involved.
- **Under no circumstances should any member or club of Surf Life Saving Queensland:**
 - Conduct their own investigation to substantiate claims
 - Hold its own internal hearing , or
 - Attempt to mediate settlement of the matter instead of notifying relevant authorities.

Reporting Disclosures, Witnessing or Suspicions of Harm

The following are the actions staff/members of our organisation will take immediately following a disclosure or suspicion of harm.

Phone Triple Zero (000) if you believe a child is in immediate danger or in a life-threatening situation.

If you have reason to suspect a child or young person is experiencing, or is at risk of harm, contact:

- Child Safety Services on 13 QGOV (13 74 68)
- Child Safety After Hours Service Centre on 1800 177 135 (24 hours a day)
- your local police station about criminal matters related to child sexual abuse

If there is no immediate risk of harm, members may make a report (incl anonymously) via the SLSA website:
<https://sls.com.au/safeguarding/>

Documenting a suspicion of harm

If you or others have concerns about the safety of a child, record your concerns in a non-judgmental and accurate manner as soon as possible. If a parent explains a noticeable mark on a child, record your own observations as well as accurate details of the conversation. If you see unsafe or harmful actions towards a child in your care, intervene immediately, provided it is safe to do so. If it is unsafe, call the police for assistance.

Documenting a disclosure of harm

Complete an *Incident Report Form – Member Harm* (refer to Section 12 of the SLSQ Patrol Operations Manual) or record the details as soon as possible so that they are accurately captured. Include:

- time, date, and place of the disclosure;
- ‘word for word’ what happened and what was said, including anything you said and any actions that have been taken, and
- date of report, and signature.

If you need to take notes as the person is telling you, explain that you are taking a record in case any later enquiry occurs.

Reporting the disclosure or suspicion of harm to SLSQ

SLSQ will not conduct its own enquiries in relation to the disclosure or suspicion of harm or try to come to an agreement between the parties involved. The person who receives a disclosure or suspects harm is to contact the relevant authority to ensure information provided is comprehensive and accurate. If the person who has witnessed harm, received a disclosure or suspects harm is not able to report to the authorities directly, another person can assist in the reporting process.

Once the matter has been reported to authorities, the matter should then be reported to:

The Club President/Club Grievance Officer/Club Captain who will report the matter immediately to SLSQ Member Welfare team.

Still not sure who to contact?

If you are unsure that the matter has been reported directly to the authorities, you may report the matter directly to the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women or Queensland Police Service. The safety of the child or young person is paramount.

Actions Following a Disclosure of Harm

Support and counselling must be offered to all parties involved through appropriate organisations.

The person against whom the allegation has been made:

If the person responding to the allegation of harm is a member of the organisation, you will need to review their duties. If they continue to interact/work with children, ensure that they are appropriately supervised at all times. You are advised to seek legal advice as to the extent to which that person can carry out duties in the organisation.

Policy Review

SLSQ's policy and procedures for handling disclosures or suspicions of harm are to be reviewed and assessed regularly to ensure that the organisation is continuing to provide a safe and supportive environment for children and youth.

Legislative Framework

- SLSA Member Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- SLSA Safeguarding Children and young people guideline
- *Child Protection Act 1999*
- SLSA Codes of Conduct
- SLSQ Child & Youth Risk Management Strategy including:
 - MS06 - SLSQ Blue Card Screening Policy
 - MS02 - SLSQ Chaperoning and Supervision of Minors
 - MS03 - SLSQ Policy and Protocols for dealing with police investigations, criminal charges, guilty pleas and/or convictions



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