Targeted visits to OSHC services

In coming weeks the Directorate will be conducting unannounced visits to a selection of OSHC services that are intending to offer vacation care during the upcoming school holidays. The focus of the visits will be on services' compliance with child protection requirements, specifically compliance with Regulations 84 (awareness of child protection law), Regulation 145 (staff records) and 273 (completion of a course in child protection). Since services to be selected for a visit will not be given advance notice, all OSHC services that will be providing vacation care these holidays should take action now to ensure they are fully compliant with the requirements of the regulations.

Child Protection Report Writing Guide

A new child protection report writing guide, produced by Network of Community Activities and funded by the NSW Department of Education’s Sector Development Grants Program, has recently been released and should prove useful for services as part of their ‘providing child safe environments’ policies and procedures (regulation 168(2)(h)). The Guide sets out, in simple terms, why a report should be written, and how to write objectively about a child protection matter. The guide includes annotated examples which could useful as part of a staff development activity or group brainstorming session during a staff meeting.

EXPANDED REQUIREMENTS FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN CHECKS – FAMILY DAY CARE

Changes to the law for Working With Children Checks came into force on Monday 2 November. The changes, which are intended to strengthen the protection of children in care situations, expand the categories of people who need a Check and affect family day care educators and home-based care services. The changes means that people who reside for longer than three weeks on a property (not just in the home) of a family day care educator or home-based service educator will need to obtain a Working With Children Check. An overview of the changes is available here.

YOUR CHILD PROTECTION RESPONSIBILITIES

Many factors contribute to a child safe environment and it is important that services take the time to consider how their service is meeting its responsibilities in relation to educating staff and families on child protection. Important points to consider include:

■ Ensuring that your staff are aware of child protections laws and the obligations that they have under these laws
■ Ensuring that the nominated supervisor and any certified supervisor placed in day to day charge of your service has an approved qualification in child protection. You can find the requirements regarding staff qualifications here
■ Induction plans for new staff which include the services policies and procedures relating to child protection
■ Communicating with parents on the responsibilities of staff and ways for parents to report any issues or incidents of concerns
■ Regularly reviewing your child protection policies and procedures to ensure that they are applied day to day.

MANDATORY REPORTING

If you are an employee of an early childhood education and care service and have reason to believe that a child attending the service is at risk of significant harm, you must report the name or a description of the child and the grounds for suspecting that the
child is at risk of significant harm to the Child Protection Helpline on 133 627 as soon as practicable. A report can be made anonymously. More information on your obligations as a mandatory reporter are available at www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au.

CYBERBULLYING

OSHC service providers and educators will be pleased to learn that the recently established Office of the eSafety Commissioner has wasted no time in ensuring children’s online safety. Through working with social network partners that include Facebook, Twitter and Google+ the Office has ensured the removal of offensive material from social networks within 12 hours.

The Office has also resolved 40 cases of online bullying that in some cases targeted children as young as 11. It has referred over 600 children to Kids Helpline, already completed 2000 investigations into illegal online content, and taught over 5200 students across Australia about online safety issues.

Services that have policies about bullying may choose to update these to include information and contact details in relation to cyberbullying. You can find additional information and contact details at http://www.esafety.gov.au.

CHILDREN LEFT ON BUSES AND IN CARS

In recent months there have been instances where a child has been accidentally left and locked in a bus at the end of a collection or drop-off round. As you will appreciate, these incidents can be very distressing and traumatic for children, parents and service staff.

Services that provide a transport service for children should ensure that they have policies and procedures in place for physically checking that a bus is empty at the end of a run. If the transport service is provided by another organisation, communication and procedures need to be in place to ensure that all children are accounted for.

REPORTING COMPLAINTS ABOUT STAFF

Services are reminded that any complaints that allege that the safety, health and wellbeing of a child or children has been compromised must be reported to us within 24 hours. Notifications can be made by services through the NQA ITS portal.

The notifications include any allegations made against a staff member or educator, for example complaints about inappropriate staff interactions such as smacking, force-feeding, or hitting children. Refer to Section 174(2)(b) of the National Law and r176(2) (b) of the National Regulation for more information.

ASSESSMENT AND RATING IN NSW

The Early Childhood Education and Care Directorate has been progressively introducing improvements to way we assess and rate your service. From now, services commencing their new assessment cycle will start to see more informative assessment and rating reports that include examples of practice that the officer has used to determine your service’s rating.

These reports are designed to assist services to critically reflect on their practice against the National Quality Standard and will help with planning for quality improvement.

HOT GROUND SURFACES

There has been an increase in young children requiring medical attention, including hospitalisation, for severe blistering to their feet caused by walking on hot softwall surfaces without footwear.

Surfaces on the ground, including pavers, softfall, stones, sand and concrete can store significant amounts of heat. In many instances the surface may not feel hot to touch for an adult but for a young child severe blistering can occur in a manner of minutes, even when they are wearing socks. It is very important that children wear shoes at all times when walking on these surfaces.

Kidsafe provides advice and information about keeping children’s sensitive skin and feet safe. Services may find it helpful to read the Playground Surfacing 2015 factsheet available from Kidsafe NSW through their website at http://www.kidsafensw.org/information-sheets/playground-safety/.

DIRECT APPROACH TO CHILDREN OFFERING CARE SERVICES

The Directorate has received reports of adults directly approaching school children on their way to and from school offering to provide them with care and transport between home and school. Concerns have been raised by schools about these approaches and the incidents have been referred to the police. These approaches are highly inappropriate and services may wish to remind Parents that they can access a list of approved providers using the MyChild website.

Keeping in touch

Update your contact details by logging onto the NQAITS portal and/or for funded services by logging onto ECCMS.

You can also get in touch with us by:

- phoning us on 1800 619 113 (general) or 1300 755 426 (funding)
- emailing us on eced@det.nsw.edu.au (general), ecec.funding@det.nsw.edu.au (funding) or ecextra@det.nsw.edu.au (EC Extra editor)