Sharing information to support families and protect children

A guide for domestic and family violence prevention and support service providers

Sharing information to support families earlier

The Queensland Government is working to build stronger families and keep children safely at home by strengthening early intervention and prevention services. This includes significant investment in Family and Child Connect, Intensive Family Support and domestic and family violence early intervention and prevention services to help get vulnerable families back on track, before their problems escalate requiring Child Safety to intervene.

Why share information?

Sharing relevant information is vital to protecting vulnerable children and supporting their families to get the right help.

Sharing concerns and information about a family with a support service that can help them, leads to better outcomes by:

• enabling a comprehensive assessment of their needs and identifying risks
• informing decision making and safety planning
• maximising opportunities to ensure the safety of the child and other family members.

Sharing information can also help with the coordination of multi-agency responses to families who have multiple or complex needs, or who are considered to be at risk of further domestic and family violence.

Legislative changes to enable information sharing

The Child Protection Act 1999 sets out the legal framework for sharing information about vulnerable children and families.

From January 2015, changes to the Act will allow professionals from the following particular prescribed entities to refer families directly to Family and Child Connect or other support services, including Intensive Family Support services and domestic and family violence services:

• the chief executive or authorised officers of the department responsible for administering the Act
• delegated officers of government:
  - adult corrective services
  - community services
  - disability services
  - education services
  - housing services
  - health services
• the police commissioner
• the chief executives of the Mater Misericordiae Health Services Brisbane Ltd and other health services within the meaning of Hospital and Health Boards Act 2011
• principals of non-state schools.

What information can be shared, with whom and when?

Relevant information

As a domestic and family violence service provider, you can share information that is relevant to the protection and care of children and their family members. Information can be shared with Child Safety, other government departments, Family and Child Connect and other support services such as Intensive Family Support services.

The type of information that can be shared depends on who you are sharing it with, and why.

Consent

You must have the family’s consent to share relevant information about them with another agency or service provider.

The only exceptions are sharing information with Child Safety or the police where a family or child may have been a victim of a crime.
Sharing information with Child Safety

You should report to Child Safety a reasonable suspicion that a child may be in need of protection, or an unborn child may be in need of protection following their birth.

You may form a reasonable suspicion that a child may be in need of protection if:

• you have information to suggest that the child has suffered, is suffering, or is at an unacceptable risk of suffering significant harm and
• may not have a parent able and willing to protect them from the harm.

You may also share information with Child Safety if they request relevant information from you.

• Although you may share information with Child Safety without a family’s consent, you should obtain consent wherever possible and appropriate, as this leads to better outcomes.

Sharing information with particular prescribed entities

Particular prescribed entities can refer families without their consent to service providers, such as domestic and family violence prevention and support services, to prevent a child from becoming in need of protection. This supports the focus on prevention and early intervention. Professionals sharing information about a child and their family with support services enables the family to have their needs assessed earlier, and receive help before their problems escalate and require Child Safety to intervene.

However, when information is shared with you without the family’s consent, you cannot then share that information with Family and Child Connect or another support service until you obtain their consent to do so.

For example, if a family has been referred to your service without their consent, and they are unwilling to engage or consent to you sharing their information further, you cannot share it with Family and Child Connect or another support service. You can only share this information with Child Safety or the police, if appropriate to do so.

Sharing information with Family and Child Connect and other support services

Family and Child Connect provides an easily accessible central point for professionals to refer families, and for families to access support services. You can contact Family and Child Connect for information and advice about support services for children and families.

You may refer a family to Family and Child Connect with their consent. Family and Child Connect can help identify support needs and determine the most appropriate support services for the family or refer them to.

You may also refer a family with their consent directly to a support service, including an Intensive Family Support service.

How am I protected when I share information with Child Safety?

The Child Protection Act 1999 offers the following protections when you provide information about a child who may be in need of protection, or an unborn child who may be in need of protection once they are born:

1. Your identity will not be disclosed, unless the disclosure of your identity is permitted under limited exceptions, for example, by the direction of a court.
2. You cannot be held legally liable (for example, for criminal prosecution or a civil suit for defamation or breach of privacy) if you are acting honestly and reasonably.
3. You cannot be held professionally liable (for example, for disciplinary action) if you are acting honestly and reasonably.

For more information

For more information about information sharing or the role of Family and Child Connect, call the Department of Child Safety and Disability Services on 3225 8470 or go to www.qld.gov.au/supportingfamilies.