Responding to observations of harm involving another child

By following these key steps, you can effectively respond to observations of harm, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all children involved while maintaining a supportive and professional approach.

PAUSE AND TAKE A BREATH



- Take a moment to calm your body and mind so you can respond thoughtfully instead of reacting out of shock or emotion.
- Take a deep breath and tell yourself something reassuring like, "I can handle this".
- If you become upset, reassure the child you are not upset at them.
- Explain that you care for them and are upset they experienced this. Becoming angry, overly emotional or distressed may scare or upset the child.

PRIORITISE IMMEDIATE SAFETY AND WELLBEING



- Step in immediately when harm or a risk of harm has been observed. Consider all children involved or in the area.
- Apply responses to all children involved to ensure their safety and wellbeing.
- Responses may involve separating children, moving other children away from the situation, checking for injuries or distress, increasing supervision, and arranging support from another staff member so that all children can be safely supported.

GIVE CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS TO STOP THE BEHAVIOUR



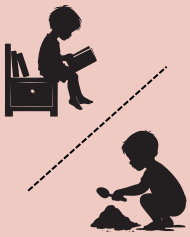
- Use clear and simple language to calmly tell the child the behaviour needs to stop.
- Describe what you are seeing in neutral language that clearly states the expectation.
- For example, “Stop touching their penis. We do not touch other people’s private parts.”

GIVE AN EXPLANATION AND ALTERNATIVE BEHAVIOUR



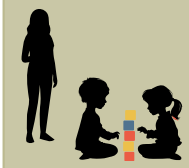
- Calmly explain why the behaviour is not okay and unsafe and teach the child what to do instead.
- For example, “Touching other people’s private parts, like their penis, is not safe. Their body belongs to him. During playtime with your friends, you can choose games that are safe, like playing in the sandpit or on the play equipment.”

SEPARATE AND REDIRECT



- Gently separate the children and guide each child to their own separate activity.
- For example, if they are inside during free play, you might direct one child to the reading corner to choose a book and direct the other child to the dress up corner to choose a costume.

STAY CLOSE



- Stay nearby and keep a close eye on each child until you can talk to them separately about what happened.
- Reach out to other staff or your supervisor if you need help to stay close.

SUPPORT AND CHECK-IN



- As soon as possible, speak with both children one-one-one, giving them the opportunity to tell you what happened.
- Give them any comfort or reassurance.
- Spend time sharing an activity to reconnect before returning to the daily routine or activity.

ESCALATE, DOCUMENT, AND REPORT THE OBSERVED HARM



- Record the observed harm accurately and objectively.
- Share the information only with those who need to know, such as your supervisor or service leader.
- Follow your organisation's processes and any relevant reporting obligations as soon as possible.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF



- Responding to observed harm can be upsetting and stressful.
- Seek support from a supervisor and use self-care strategies to manage your wellbeing so you can continue to support the child and return to everyday routines.

Adelaide University | Australian Centre for Child Protection

A national Child Safety Reform initiative