



Child Protection Policy



Purpose

This policy outlines our commitment to child protection. It includes guidelines to ensure appropriate safety checking occurs, so that we create a safe environment for children as per the Children's Act 2014 (the Act) and related protocols to ensure correct action is taken when child abuse is reported or suspected by us.

Scope

This policy applies to all Invercargill City Council (Council) employees, volunteers, and elected members who are deemed to be "children's workers".

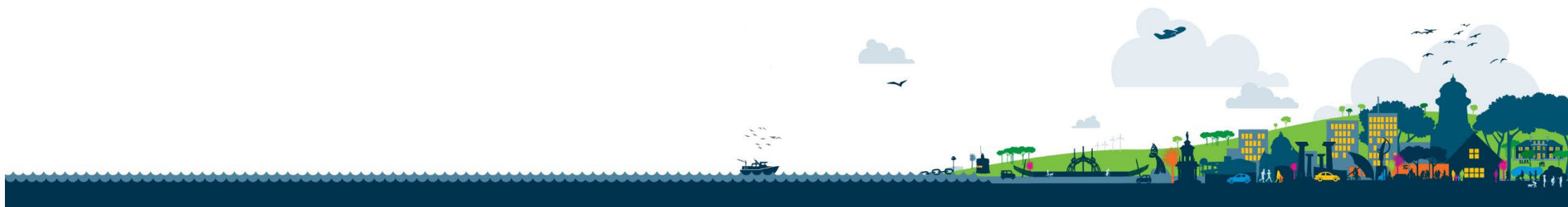
Principles

- The interest and protection of the child always comes first
- We are committed to ensuring that our people who work with children as part of their role at Council are able to identify the signs and symptoms of potential neglect, and are able to take appropriate action in response
- We are committed to supporting our people to work in accordance with this policy and alongside relevant agencies and organisations
- We will always comply with relevant legislation
- We are committed to share information in a timely way and to discuss any concerns with the appropriate people
- We are committed to promoting a culture where all our people feel confident that they can constructively challenge poor practice or raise issues of concern without fear of reprisal



Definitions

Children's worker	those persons who work with children or who have regular contact with children as part of their roles, as defined in the Act. For the purposes of this policy, elected members who are appointed to Council's Youth Council, and/or who participate in Youth Council events, are also considered to be children's workers.
Designated person	the person responsible for providing advice and support to staff where they have a concern about an individual child or who want advice about the Child Protection Policy. At Council all tier three managers of departments that employ children's workers are a designated person.
Child abuse	the harming (whether physical, emotional or sexual), ill-treatment, neglect or deprivation of any child.
Neglect	the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical or psychological needs, leading to adverse or impaired physical or emotional functioning or development.
Child	any child or young person under the age of 18 years.
Elected member	means those persons defined as such in Council's Code of Conduct.



Safety checking

Pre-employment

Due diligence checks will be undertaken for all employees and volunteers who are recruited for roles that are considered to be children's workers. Recruiting managers will complete a risk assessment using the matrix in Appendix D. Our risk assessment will involve collecting information to determine whether the applicant poses any risk to the safety of children as a children's worker, and the extent of any risk.

Our checks may include:

- Application forms and initial applicant screening.
- Interviewing and reference checking process: applicants and referees must be asked at least one question about the applicant's interactions with children and suitability to work with children. Examples of appropriate questions are provided in Appendix C.
- Confirmation of identity.
- Police vetting and / or criminal conviction history checks.

While we endeavour to complete all of these checks before any prospective employees or volunteers are able to commence working with us, the results for some checks such as vetting may take time. During this period you will be unable to commence work as a children's worker. Anyone with convictions for specified offences as outlined in Schedule 2 of the Act will not be able to work as a children's worker, and their conditional offer of employment may be withdrawn or their employment or volunteer agreement may be terminated.



Existing employees and elected members

Ongoing safety checks, namely police vetting, will be carried out at least once every three years for all existing employees and elected members who are considered to be children's workers.

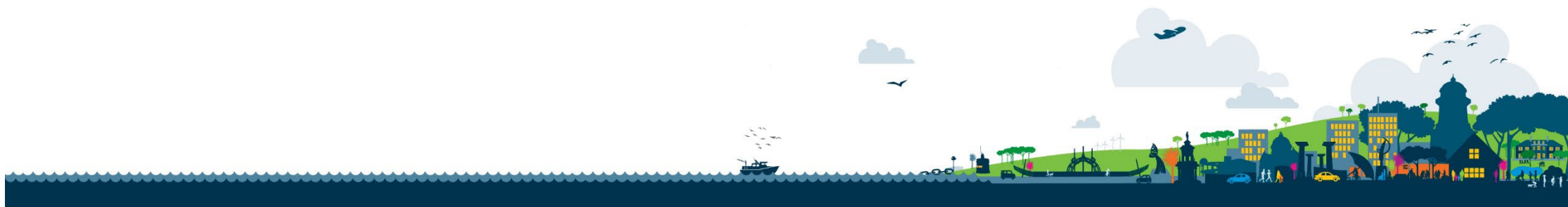
All children's workers have the responsibility to disclose any relevant conviction or pending conviction as soon as practical.

If a children's worker is found to have a conviction for any of the specified offences outlined in Schedule 2 of the Act, they will be suspended from duties while an investigation can take place. For the avoidance of doubt, if the children's worker is an employee of Council they may be suspended from all duties. If the children's worker is an elected member, they will not be permitted to attend any Youth Council event until the matter has been investigated.

Employees or elected members who have convictions for specified offences will not be allowed to continue working with children. For employees, this may result in the termination of their employment.

Privacy

Council recognises and treats seriously the right to privacy of all our employees, prospective employees and elected members. As such, results from any safety checking will be received by People and Culture and will only be disclosed to an employee's manager or the hiring manager, the Manager – People and Culture, and the individual. For elected members, the results will only be disclosed to the Manager – People and Culture, the Chief Executive, the Mayor, and the individual.



Identifying and responding to abuse or neglect

How to identify

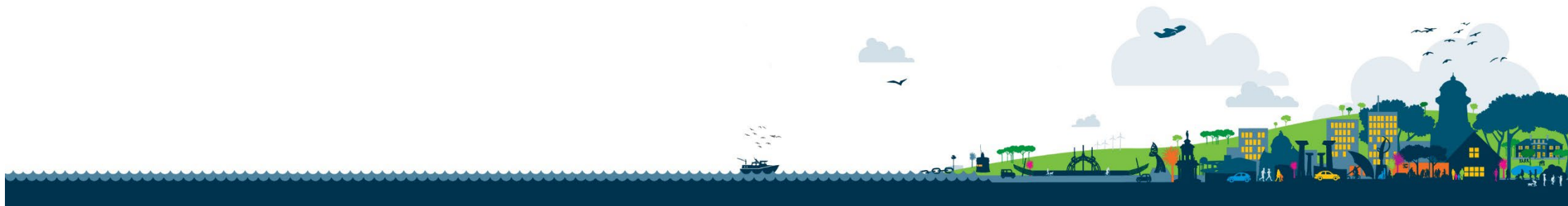
Employees, volunteers and elected representatives working with children need to be aware of the indicators of potential abuse and neglect. There are indicators that when found, either on their own or in combination, can point to possible neglect, abuse or family violence.

Indicators can be:

- Physical - such as bruises or burns.
- Behavioural - such as a child flinching if touched unexpectedly or a caregiver constantly calling a child names. These indicators can be displayed by the child or by the alleged abuser.

These indicators do not necessarily prove harm, but they can alert us that the child may require help or protection.

Further detailed information about types and indicators of abuse can be found in Appendix B.



What to do

If it is an emergency and you suspect a child is at serious risk, in immediate danger or a crime has been committed, this should be reported immediately to the manager in charge as the designated person for child protection. You or they will call the emergency services.

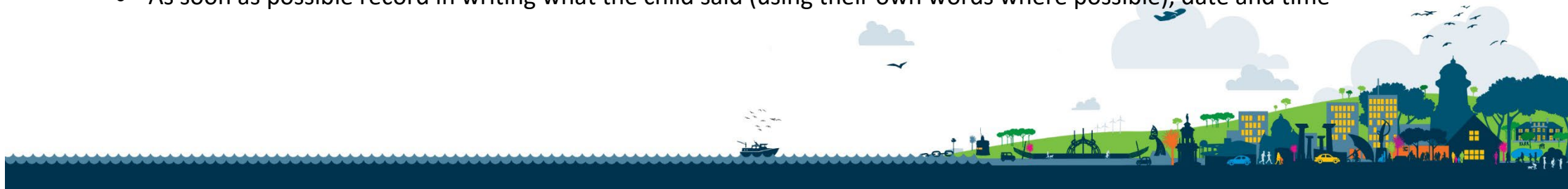
Sometimes it may not be obvious that a child is at risk, a children's worker may simply have an uncomfortable feeling about a situation. If so, always put the child first. Report immediately to the manager in charge, they will work with the children's worker on the best course of action. Under no circumstances should the children's worker attempt to deal with the matter alone.

Options could be:

- Offering help to the parent, caregiver or child, or giving information to the caregiver explaining that violence is not OK
- Calling Oranga Tamariki on 0508 326 459 who can provide a trained social worker to give assistance
- Officially reporting concerns to either NZ Police or Oranga Tamariki

If a child discloses abuse, a children's worker should:

- Stay calm
- Listen to the child, giving them time to say what they want
- Ask open ended questions, do not interview the child, make them repeat the story unnecessarily or enquire as to the details of the alleged abuse, and do not make promises that can't be kept
- Thank the child for telling you, and reassure them that they are not in trouble and they have done the right things
- Tell the child they are being taken seriously, explain that you will need to pass on what they have told you, and explain what they can expect to happen next
- As soon as possible record in writing what the child said (using their own words where possible), date and time



Allegations or concerns about employees, volunteers or elected members

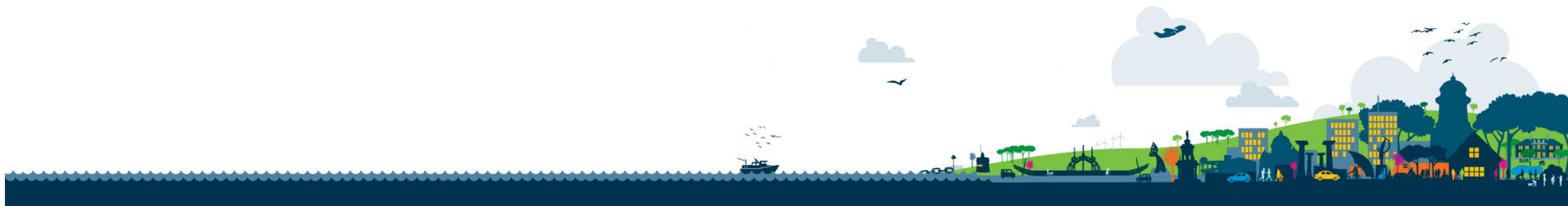
Where allegations are made, or concerns arise regarding an employee or volunteer, an investigation will take place as per Council's Discipline and Procedural Fairness Policy. If the allegations or concerns are found to be valid, disciplinary action may be taken, which may result in termination of employment. Where appropriate Oranga Tamariki and / or NZ Police will be notified.

Where an allegation or concern is raised regarding an elected member, an investigation may take place in accordance with Council's Code of Conduct, and the elected member may be asked not to attend any activities involving children, including Youth Council. Where appropriate, Oranga Tamariki and / or NZ Police will be notified.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is important when dealing with sensitive information including that of children, and employee / volunteer and elected member privacy. Children's information should not be shared with members of the public to ensure the children's safety.

The Privacy Act 2020 and the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 allow information to be shared to keep children safe when abuse or suspected abuse is reported or investigated. Generally advice should be sought from Oranga Tamariki and / or NZ Police before identifying information about an allegation is shared with anyone other than the designated person for child protection. It is the responsibility of the designated person to decide if information sharing is warranted.



Safe Working Practices

Council maintains clear and consistent expectations of behaviour to ensure that children, employees, volunteers and elected members are kept safe.

Council employees, volunteers, representatives, and elected members shall:

- Treat children with dignity and respect at all times.
- Conduct themselves in a manner appropriate with their position as a representative of the Council in all of their dealings with children.
- Immediately raise concerns regarding a child's safety or wellbeing with the designated person for child protection.
- Be visible when working with children and wherever possible ensure that another adult is present when working in the proximity of children.
- Listen to children and allow them to be engaged in decisions that may affect them.
- Comply with all relevant New Zealand legislation.
- Follow organisational policy and guidelines regarding the safety of children.

Training

To ensure that all those who will have interaction with children as part of their employment or role within Council understand and apply our Child Protection Policy, all employees will be required to sign a copy of this policy.

Ongoing training will be organised to ensure that children's workers have received training on identifying and responding to abuse or neglect, and responding in accordance with this policy.



Document control

Version

1.0 Approved 5 February 2024



Appendix A

Child Protection Policy Declaration

Employee / Volunteer / Contractor / Elected Member / Other Council Representative

(delete as appropriate)

I _____ (please print your name) hereby acknowledge receipt of the Child Protection Policy (the Policy).

I confirm that I have read this Policy and I accept the terms and conditions. I acknowledge that any breach by me of this Policy may result in disciplinary or other investigative action.

I understand that if I have a conviction specified in Schedule 2 of the Children's Act 2014 I will not be able to work as a "children's worker" or have contact with children in my role with Invercargill City Council

or (for elected members)

I understand that if I have a conviction specified in Schedule 2 of the Children's Act 2014 I will be asked not to attend any Council event involving children, including Youth Council, and that failure to comply may result in Code of Conduct proceedings being initiated against me.

Signed: _____

Date: _____



Appendix B

Types and Indicators of Abuse

The following tables provide a summary of types of abuse and some indicators of abuse. These physical or behavioural signs act as signals to warn and indicate that something might be happening in the life of that child/youth and must be taken note of. However, it should not be automatically assumed that abuse is occurring; talking to the child/youth may reveal something quite innocent. It's important not to dismiss changes in behaviour, fears, worries and physical indicators a child/youth is showing.

Physical abuse

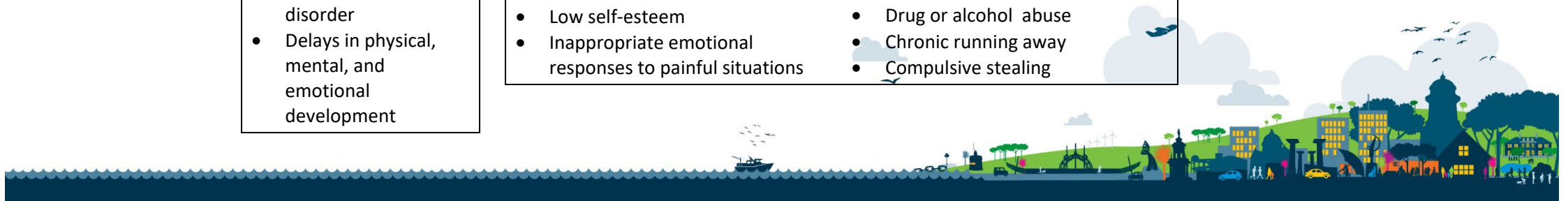
Physical abuse occurs when a person purposefully inflicts injuries or threatens to injure. This may take the form of slapping, punching, shaking, kicking, burning, shoving or grabbing. Many non-accidental injuries result from excessive physical discipline. The administration of illegal or inappropriate drugs and medications is a form of abuse.

<i>Physical indicators</i>	<i>Behavioural indicators</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bruises• Burns• Sprains• Dislocations• Bites• Cuts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highly anxious• Fear of new situations• Low self-esteem• Inappropriate emotional responses to painful situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extremes of passivity or aggression• Drug or alcohol abuse• Chronic running away• Compulsive stealing

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse of child/youth includes constant criticism, belittling, teasing, constant yelling and withholding praise and affection. It can also be caused by a failure to provide the psychological nurturing necessary for the child's/youth physical and emotional growth and development.

<i>Physical indicators</i>	<i>Behavioural indicators</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delayed speech or sudden speech disorder• Delays in physical, mental, and emotional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highly anxious• Fear of new situations• Low self-esteem• Inappropriate emotional responses to painful situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extremes of passivity or aggression• Drug or alcohol abuse• Chronic running away• Compulsive stealing



Neglect

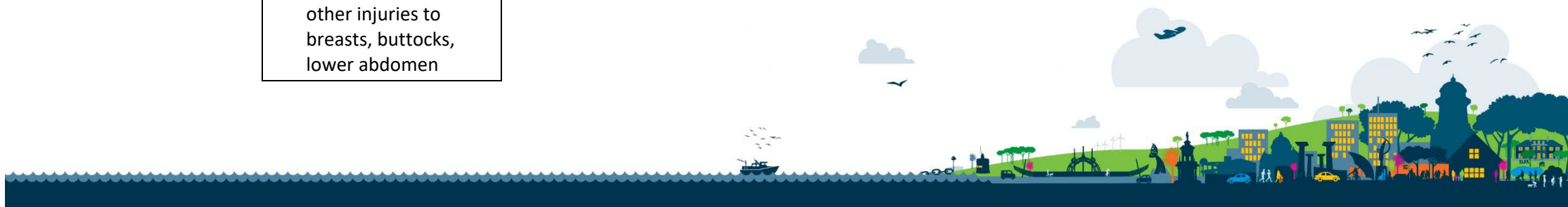
Neglect is the ongoing wilful failure to provide the basic physical and emotional necessities of life, including food, clothing, shelter, emotional security, affection, medical care and adequate supervision.

<i>Physical indicators</i>	<i>Behavioural indicators</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent hunger • Poor personal hygiene • Constant tiredness • Inappropriate clothing e.g. summer clothes in winter • Untreated medical problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent lateness or non-attendance at school • Low self-esteem • Poor social relationships • Compulsive stealing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alienated from peers, withdrawn, pale, and listless • Beggars for food or steals food • Indiscriminate with affection

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is when a person uses their power or authority over a child/youth and takes advantage of their position in the relationship to involve the child/youth in sexual activity of any sort. This can take many forms: from sexual jokes, innuendo in conversation, showing pornographic images to children/youth, sexual touching and invasive acts.

<i>Physical indicators</i>	<i>Behavioural indicators</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Injury to genital or rectal area: bleeding or bruising • Frequent urinary tract infections • Signs of sexually-transmitted diseases • Persistent headaches or recurrent abdominal pain • Bruises, bite marks or other injuries to breasts, buttocks, lower abdomen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over attention to adults of a particular gender • Persistent and age-inappropriate sexual activity • Regressive behaviour: bed wetting, speech loss • Delinquent or aggressive behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-injurious behaviour: alcohol abuse, self-mutilation, suicide attempts, prostitution • Signs of depression • Lack of appropriate role boundaries in family: child/youth fulfils parental role



Family violence

Family violence is violent, abusive and intimidating behaviour perpetrated by one person against another in a personal, intimate relationship, causing fear, physical and/or psychological harm. Family violence has a profound effect on children/youth and constitutes a form of harm.

<i>Physical indicators</i>	<i>Behavioural indicators</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same as signs of physical and emotional abuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child/youth tells of home situation • Acts out the aggression seen in the home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clings to people with whom they feel safe

Bullying

Bullying is defined as unreasonable repeated behaviour towards a person or group of people that creates a health and safety risk.

- Unreasonable behaviour covers actions which a reasonable person wouldn't do in similar circumstances, including but not limited to victimising, humiliating, intimidating, and threatening.
- Repeated behaviour means behaviour that is persistent and can include a range of actions. A single incident isn't considered bullying but can escalate if ignored.

Some of the same indicators of emotional abuse can be seen in victims of bullying.

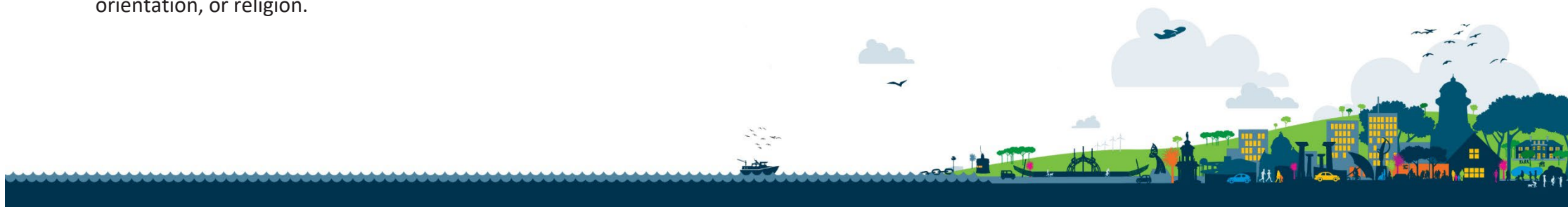
When bullying is not addressed, victims may feel worthless, at fault for not coping with the bully, defeated and fearful. The message learnt by the bully when their behaviour is minimised or ignored is just as harmful. They learn to use power over people, to control people using fear, that dealing with situations using anger and fear works, and that they have the right to attack anyone weaker than themselves.

Cultural abuse

Allowing – actively or passively – any form of abuse or neglect considering such behaviour and actions as a part of someone's culture.

Discrimination

Limiting choices not based on the needs or ability of someone, but made with prejudice about matters such as ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, or religion.



Institutional abuse

Allowing—actively or passively—any form of abuse or neglect considering such behaviour and actions as a part of a service / programme / treatment.

Material/financial abuse

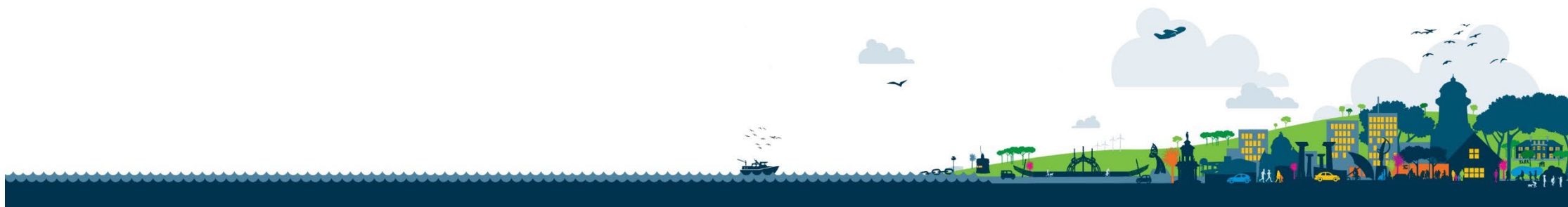
Improper exploitation or use of funds or other resources that are the property of the service user, this includes deprivation of treatment, food or care.

Vicarious abuse

Bearing witness to another's trauma.

Other abuse

Destruction of treasured possessions, harm to pets, etc.



Appendix C

Example questions for interviews and reference checks

Interview

1. What are your thoughts about being alone at work with children, young people or their families?

Listen for: awareness that these situations can be a cause for concern and there has been evidence of pre-planning prior to the engagement. What safety measures have been thought about and actioned to keep the person and themselves safe, for example, informing their line manager or a colleague, appropriate meeting environment, talking a colleague, etc?

2. What do you think constitutes professional practice when working with children, young people or their families?

Listen for: personal awareness, increased knowledge and insight into the group you are working with, knowing limits of role, consultation with team members and referrals to other organisations if needed.

3. If you were accepted for the job what are the chances of abuse allegations being made against you?

4. What would you do if a child, young person or family member threatened you / hit you / was disruptive or made a false allegation against you?

5. What would you do if a child, young person or family member disclosed abuse?

Listen for: acknowledgement of disclosure, keeping the person safe, getting support, following procedure. Caution if you are hearing attempts to control and manage the situation alone.

Reference

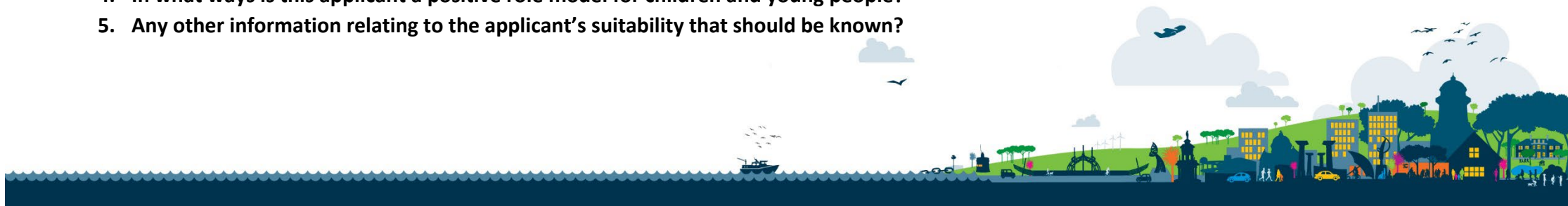
1. From your knowledge of the applicant, how would they handle incidents where they are under pressure with children or young people?

2. Do you have any concerns around the applicant working with children or young people?

3. What are your observations around the applicant working with children or young people?

4. In what ways is this applicant a positive role model for children and young people?

5. Any other information relating to the applicant's suitability that should be known?



Appendix D

Risk assessment matrix

The following steps are to be completed for all applicants who are applying for roles as a children's worker

Step	Requirement	Completed by	Date	Outcome (concerning, good, excellent)
1.	Two forms of ID checked			
2.	Summary of work history (last five years) checked			
3.	Specific interview question(s) asked			
4.	At least two referees contacted			
5.	Specific reference question(s) asked			

If the outcome of any of the above steps is "concerning", this applicant is not suitable to be employed as a children's worker.

If the outcome of any of the above steps is "good" and the employer wishes to employ the applicant, attach a plan for support and required training/improvement, then complete police check forms.

If the outcome of the above steps is "excellent", complete the police check forms.

6.	Police and / or MoJ check outcome		
7.	Overall risk assessment	<i>Comments:</i>	
8.	All documentation saved and sent to P&C		
9.	Completed risk assessment matrix sent to P&C		

