

## **Protecting Children and Young People and reporting to the Department of Community Services**

The following article is produced by NSW Department of Health.

Sometimes taking children to health services can be a difficult experience for parents. It is even harder on those occasions where a health worker becomes concerned about a child's welfare and has to contact the Department of Community Services (DoCS).

It is important for parents to understand that under the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 all health workers who become concerned that a child may be at risk of abuse or neglect must report this to DoCS. If there are indicators that a child may be at risk, the health worker has no choice about reporting. This can be very confusing for parents and difficult for health workers.

Children or young people can be 'at risk' when they have been or might be:

- physically or sexually abused or mistreated
- living in a house where there is domestic violence
- suffering serious psychological harm because of the behaviour of their parents
- not receiving important things like food, safety, clothing and love
- or, the people looking after them are unable or unwilling to arrange medical care for them.

These issues are discussed further in other fact sheets produced by Multicultural Health Communication Service.

The role of health workers is to work with families to help them stay healthy. Most times even if a health worker has to make a report to DoCS they will still want to work with the family. It is not the role of the health worker to prove if a child has been abused or neglected – only to report this risk to DoCS.

It is the job of DoCS to establish if a child has been abused or not. Anyone who has worries about the safety, welfare or well-being of a child can phone the DoCS Helpline on 132-111 (24 hours English language only). If you need help making a call in English, ring the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131 450.

DoCs involvement with a family is often difficult but, can also be a positive experience. When a report is made:

- A decision may be made not to investigate
- DoCS may meet with families to find out whether everything is OK.
- DoCS may meet with families to discuss ways to help keep the children safe including referrals to other agencies who can help parents.

- DoCs may decide for a small number of families that court action is required to ensure that the children are safe.

You can find more health information in your language on the Multicultural Communication website at <http://mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au>

Telephone numbers are correct at time of publication but are not continually updated. You may need to check the numbers in the telephone directory.