

# Virtual Services Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy

Virtual Services (Counselling Centre)



## Purpose

The document outlines the risk management strategies undertaken by **yourtown** Virtual Services when working with children within Kids Helpline and Parentline services, in accordance with Chapter 8, Part 3 of the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000.

**yourtown** maintains numerous Position Statements, Policies and Procedures that inform and are referenced in this Risk Management Strategy. Some of these documents are internal 'company in confidence' documents. If additional information is required regarding any of these referenced documents, please contact us by accessing the online feedback form via the Feedback link on the Kids Helpline, Parentline or **yourtown** websites.

## Commitment

### 1. Statement of Commitment to the Safety and Well-Being of Children and the Protection of Children from Harm

**yourtown's** *Commitment to Care and Protection of Children and Young People Position Statement* explicitly confirms our commitment, in line with our Mission and Values, to providing services that protect and keep children and young people from harm.

**yourtown** understands that the safety and well-being of children and young people requires an ongoing focus and commitment to culture and compliance, and to that end **yourtown** will continue to implement, refine and evaluate strategies, standards and procedures to ensure:

- Governance structures champion a child safe culture and clear accountabilities are set by **yourtown** leadership
- Personnel working with children hold a current Working with Children clearance and are supported, and equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe
- Personnel are knowledgeable on their responsibilities regarding mandatory reporting requirements to statutory bodies
- Personnel are empowered to support children and young people to disclose harm or the risk of harm arising from **yourtown** operations or from their wider family and social environment (including any concerns arising from historical and past abuse)
- Physical and online environments minimise opportunities for the safety of children and young people to be compromised
- Practice is supervised and reviewed so as to promote and achieve ongoing learning and the application of new ideas and strategies
- Processes that facilitate child safe and child friendly environments are documented, maintained and communicated to children and young people, personnel, and the wider community through appropriate training and awareness strategies
- Children and young people have opportunities to participate in service and program development
- Complaint processes are child friendly and available in different ways and formats
- Identified child and young person protection risks and controls are maintained and accurate records are kept of any complaints and responses.

**yourtown** will regularly evaluate the effectiveness of its practices with regard to the reporting of harm, management of any breaches of child protection, and compliance with Working with Children regulatory requirements.

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## 2. Code of Conduct for interacting with Children and Young People

**yourtown's** expectations of staff behaviour in interacting with children and young people is enshrined within our Values and Core Behaviours, our *Consumer Rights Position Statement* and supported by our internal *Ethical Code and Practice Policy in Client Service Delivery*.

**yourtown** will:

- Uphold our mission, values, policies and procedures
- Uphold the rights of individuals as a person-centred organisation
- Encourage participation in decision making about matters that affect individual service users
- Respect individuality, cultural difference and diversity
- Respect individual choice to decline our help or services
- Be responsive to the needs of individuals, families, groups and communities, who use or interact with **yourtown** as supporters, individual service users of **yourtown** and members of the community
- Always take reasonable steps to make our services safe, and that individuals using our services are free from harm, neglect, abuse and violence
- Comply with legal and contractual requirements
- Within the bounds of program requirements, ensure our services are easy to access
- Treat each person using our services equitably
- Measure and evaluate our services to inform continual improvement
- Seek feedback openly and act upon it
- Safeguard individuals' privacy
- Act in a professional manner.

We will do everything we can to help and in return we ask for:

- Respect be given to **yourtown** personnel and other individuals connected with **yourtown**
- Consideration for the safety of self and other individuals connected with **yourtown**
- Individual service users to engage with their **yourtown** worker e.g. to develop and work towards achieving goals and objectives to meet individual needs.

There may be times when **yourtown** is not able to provide services to individuals and this may happen when:

- Individuals are not able or willing to comply with requirements for program participation
- The program is full or we are no longer able to offer the service
- Accessing the service will render them or others unsafe.

**yourtown** commits to continual improvement regarding our position on Consumer Rights through a process of monitoring updates to industry standards, legislation and management review.

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## Capability

### 1. Procedures for Recruiting, Selecting, Training and Managing Staff and Volunteers

**yourtown** has effective policies and procedures in place relating to recruiting, selecting, training and managing paid employees and volunteers, in order to minimise risks at each stage of the employment process.

All Virtual Services staff providing Kids Helpline and Parentline services are paid, tertiary qualified and experienced Counsellors. Volunteers are not engaged within Kids Helpline or Parentline.

#### Recruitment and Selection of Virtual Services Staff

**yourtown's** recruitment practices are designed to elicit key information relating to working with children and young people.

Position descriptions for all Virtual Services Counsellor positions outline the key expectations of practices in working with children and young people.

Recruitment processes include assessment of professional boundaries, ethics, duty of care practices, and alignment with **yourtown** practices for all client service delivery.

Applicants undertake a thorough recruitment process including a phone interview with People & Culture, a face to face clinical interview, and professional references. Each stage directly focuses on duty of care, ethics, and professional boundaries within applicant's practices, to confirm their eligibility and experience.

More information regarding **yourtown's** recruitment and selection processes is detailed in:

- *People Management Position Statement*
- *Recruitment Policy*
- *External Recruitment Selection Procedures and Guidelines.*

In addition, potential Virtual Services candidates are also provided with *Counsellor Recruitment Information Sheet Form* and *Queensland Blue Card Check*, an information sheet that outlines the mandatory requirements within the recruitment process.

#### Training of Virtual Services Staff

Once employed, new Virtual Services Counsellors commence work as Kids Helpline Counsellors. They may progress to providing services within Parentline after a period of employment with Kids Helpline and further training and assessment that demonstrates sound counselling skills relevant to parenting/caregiving and family relationships.

Counsellors participate in a three month probationary period, including a structured learning program that includes:

- Initial two week face-to-face intensive training program
- Online learning
- On-the-job training.

Virtual Services Counsellors are then supported, to further develop their knowledge and skills in working within Kids Helpline through Line Management supervision and feedback from Counselling Centre Supervisors (CCS), including regular feedback sessions and monitoring of phone calls with clients.

**yourtown** also provides ongoing Quality Assurance and Professional Development to all Virtual Services Counsellors, through a dedicated Practice Unit. Support includes:

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- Fortnightly Practice Supervision during probation
- Practice review and feedback
- Review of client files
- Review of Duty of Care and risk assessment decision-making
- Practice Unit review and support for serious and complex client situations.

Within the first three months of employment, Virtual Services Counsellors complete:

- **yourtown's** Organisational Induction
- Online Induction
- Learning Program - Outline - Supervision, Training and Evaluation Program (STEP).

Details regarding STEP training are included in Learning Program - Outline - Supervision, Training and Evaluation Program (STEP).

During their employment, Virtual Services Counsellors may also complete:

- Parentline Skills Training after gaining sufficient experience as a Kids Helpline counsellor, to enable them to also provide Parentline services (see *Learning Program - Outline - Parentline Skills Training*)
- Professional and personal development training
- Relevant and up-to-date training around new and emerging issues, trends, ways of working with clients, to ensure currency.

All training is designed to ensure Virtual Services Counsellors work safely and effectively. Counsellors receive training around topics such as:

- **yourtown's** counselling framework
- Ethics, Duty of Care and working in the best interests of the client
- Issues facing children, young people and parents such as e.g. family issues, bullying, cyber-safety, mental health and well-being
- How to provide counselling services by phone, web and email
- **yourtown's** *Virtual Services Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy* (this document).

## Concerns

### 1. Policies and Procedures for handling Disclosures or Suspicions of Harm

**yourtown** maintains clear policies and procedures to ensure that responses occur as quickly as possible and in the interests of the child/young person, if disclosures of harm are received or harm is suspected.

These policies and procedures include guidelines for responses where the actual or suspected harm originates both outside of **yourtown** and within **yourtown**.

Children, young people and other external stakeholders may report matters concerning harm or suspicions of harm, or breaches relating to our *Virtual Services Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy* (this document) by:

- Speaking with any **yourtown** employee
- Lodging a complaint using the Feedback facility on the **yourtown**, Kids Helpline or Parentline websites.

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Where harm or suspicion of harm reported to us by children and young people arises from outside of **yourtown**, extensive Duty of Care procedures are in place to ensure that these reports are appropriately assessed and acted upon.

Duty of Care situations can include:

- Child Abuse and Neglect (including witnessing domestic and family violence)
- Suicide and Suicidal Behaviour
- Homicide
- Violence/Harm to Others
- Self-Injury
- Threats of intended harm to self
- Threats of intended violence to others
- Psychiatric and Medical Emergencies or the potential for an emergency.

Within the context of the provision of a high quality national service, operating via virtual modalities, **yourtown** ensures that its organisational policies and procedures contribute to meeting the obligation of Duty of Care. Virtual Services Counsellors are required to be familiar with the practice context, be aware of the issue of Duty of Care and identify, consult, and incorporate client centred practice that addresses risk. Duty of Care decisions are by their very nature complex and idiosyncratic, hence practice decisions are formulated on a case by case basis.

A Duty of Care discussion between a Counsellor and a Counselling Centre Supervisor reviews the assessment of a client's risk presentation and/or considers other aspects of risk and duty of care. A Duty of Care Consultation should be sought from a Senior Practice Supervisor for complex risk presentation or when assessment determines it may be necessary to enact the limits of confidentiality. Consultations consider ethical decision making, based on the client's right to autonomy versus the need to act protectively under the Child Protection Act 1999 and the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000. The outcome of the consultation is a clear rationale for decisions made and subsequent actions.

Policies and procedures for handling disclosures or suspicions of harm regarding Duty of Care/harm originating outside of **yourtown** include:

- *Feedback and Continual Improvement Position Statement*
- *Duty of Care Position Statement*
- *Performance Management Policy*
- *Counselling Centre Duty of Care and Response to Risk Procedure*
- *Duty of Care Information Guide*
- *yourtown Kids Helpline (KHL) Policy Intervention Protocols*
- *Client Support Pathways Standards and Guidelines*
- *Unsupervised Shift Manual*
- *Online Counselling Manual*
- *Social Media Manual*

If harm or suspicions of harm arising from within **yourtown** are identified or reported to Virtual Services employees, these will be managed in accordance with:

- *Ethical Code and Practice Policy in Client Service Delivery*
- *Performance Management Policy*

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- *Managing Breaches of Virtual Services Ethical Practice Procedure*
- *Virtual Services Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy* (this document).

Where situations arise or incidents occur that may constitute misconduct or a breach, including those giving rise to harm and suspicions of harm towards a child or young person, appropriate action is taken in line with the seriousness of the matter.

Actions following a disclosure of alleged harm to a child or young person involving **yourtown** personnel include:

- The alleged misconduct or breach must be reported to the immediate Line Manager of the employee involved
- The Line Manager should, in the first instance, consult with the Virtual Services Manager and the Employment Relations Manager to determine the seriousness of the matter. Following this, a strategy that is most appropriate to the situation should be documented and implemented. This may include
  - Assigning different personnel to work with the client
  - Restricting the employee's access to client information and records
  - Reviewing of the duties of the employee and suspending any further interaction with children until the matter is resolved
  - Standing down the employee and advising that a formal investigation process will be undertaken in line with **yourtown's** *Performance Management Policy*
  - Where the allegation of harm is of a serious nature, the matter must be referred immediately to the Head of Client Services and the Head of People and Culture.
- If the allegation of harm occurs within a funded service, the Head of Client Services will confirm whether a report is to be made to the relevant funding body or other identified statutory authority (e.g. Police). This requirement also applies to major incidents impacting or likely to impact the delivery of services
- Support and counselling may be offered to all parties involved
- Confidentiality of all parties involved in the disclosure and investigation of the alleged breach will be maintained in accordance with **yourtown's** policies and procedures and all relevant legislation
- Possible outcomes of an investigation may include:
  - further training and development
  - development of a strategies for ongoing practice development with the Counsellor's Senior Practice Supervisor
  - performance counselling and monitoring
  - performance management including disciplinary actions
  - termination of employment.

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## 2. Plan for managing breaches of the Virtual Services Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy

A breach of the *Virtual Services Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy* (this document) is any action or inaction by any Virtual Services employee/s or participant/s that fail to comply with any part of this strategy or the *Ethical Code and Practice Policy in Client Service Delivery*. **yourtown** will manage any breaches in a fair, unbiased and supportive manner.

The following will occur:

- All people concerned will be advised of the process and be able to provide their version of events
- The details of the breach, including the versions of all parties and the outcome will be recorded
- Matters discussed in relation to the breach will be kept confidential.

Possible outcomes for breaches, depending on the nature of the breach, may include:

- Emphasising the relevant component of the *Virtual Services Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy* (this document) e.g. Policies and Procedures for handling disclosures or suspicions of harm
- Providing increased supervision
- Further education and training
- Facilitated communication between those involved in the incident (where appropriate)
- Disciplinary procedures or outcomes as appropriate
- Termination of employment
- Reviewing current policies and procedures and developing new policies and procedures if necessary.

## 3. Risk management plans for high risk activities and special events

This Strategy pertains to **yourtown's** Virtual Services (Kids Helpline and Parentline) therefore, as there are no high risk activities or special events conducted by these services, this clause is not required. Should the service delivery model for Kids Helpline and Parentline be amended to include high risk activities and special events, **yourtown** will develop appropriate Risk Management Plans.

## Consistency

### 1. Policies and Procedures for Managing Compliance with the Blue Card System

**yourtown's** People and Culture unit is responsible for managing compliance with the Blue Card System for all Virtual Services employees. Procedures for implementing, maintaining and reviewing the Blue Card requirements for all Virtual Services employees, as part of the *Virtual Services Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy* (this document), include:

- Initiating the Working with Children Check application process during the recruitment phase, if the applicant does not already possess a Blue Card
- For new employees who have an existing Blue Card, taking a copy of the current Blue Card and lodging appropriate paperwork to link the new employee to **yourtown**
- Monitoring and initiating and processing all renewals for Blue Cards when these are due for renewal
- Keeping records regarding each Virtual Services employee's Blue Card within Preceda (**yourtown's** online Human Resources management system) and yourCloud (**yourtown's** online Record Management System) including:
  - Whether or not the employee's position requires that they must possess a Blue Card

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NOTE: This is mandatory for all Virtual Services personnel.

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- Whether or not a Blue Card application has been made, and when this was submitted
  - If a Blue Card has been issued for the employee (Positive Notice) and when this was issued
  - The date of expiry of the Blue Card
  - The date that a Blue Card renewal application was submitted
  - The date that the renewed Blue Card (Positive Notice) is issued
  - Where an employee submits a Change in Police Information Notification form or upon notification from the Children’s Commission that there is a change to an employee’s police information, a risk assessment is undertaken in relation to the disclosure and the duties the employee performs, whilst their Blue Card is reviewed by the Children’s Commission.
- As a requirement for ongoing employment is a valid Blue Card, where a Negative Notice (declined Blue Card application) is received, employment will be terminated.

## 2. Strategies for Communication and Support

Stakeholders of **yourtown’s** Virtual Services consist of employees and Board members, partner organisations, funding bodies, and children, young people and parents/carers, who access these services. These stakeholders are made aware of this *Virtual Services Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy* (this document) through the following:

- The strategy is published on the **yourtown**, Kids Helpline and Parentline websites and is available for download by all stakeholders and clients
- Funding bodies and supporters are provided with information about the strategy when **yourtown** is seeking funding and support for Kids Helpline and Parentline, and directed to the website/s to access a copy as required
- Children, young people and parents/carers are provided with information about the strategy and directed to the website/s to access a copy as required
- As appropriate via **yourtown**, Kids Helpline and Parentline communication or publicity strategies such as e-newsletters, blog or other social media posts, media releases and media appearances.

In addition, Virtual Services employees receive training regarding the strategy to:

- Outline the content and expectations of the strategy
- Help them to identify risks of harm and how to handle disclosures or suspicions of harm.

Details of this training are included in Learning Program - Outline - Supervision, Training and Evaluation Program (STEP).

## Documents Review

The *Virtual Services Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy* (this document) will be reviewed annually, and all other documents referenced within will be reviewed in accordance with the *Document Development, Review and Approval Policy*

- If significant changes are made to Kids Helpline or Parentline service delivery models that involve reconsideration of any child safety risks
- In order to comply with any legislative or policy changes made under the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000.

The annual review process will consider:

- Whether the policies and procedures were followed
- Whether any incidents relating to children and young people’s risk management issues occurred

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- The actual process used to manage any incidents
- The effectiveness of the policies and procedures in preventing or minimising harm to children and young people
- The content and frequency of communication to staff in relation to the child and youth risk management strategy.

All future changes to the *Virtual Services Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy* (this document) will be appropriately communicated to **yourtown** Virtual Services employees.

## Referenced and Related Records

- Child Protection Act 1999
- Commitment to Care and Protection of Children and Young People Position Statement
- Consumer Rights Position Statement
- Counselling Centre Duty of Care and Response to Risk Procedure
- Counsellor Recruitment Information Sheet Form
- Document Development, Review and Approval Policy
- Duty of Care Information Guide
- Duty of Care Position Statement
- Ethical Code and Practice Policy in Client Service Delivery
- External Recruitment Selection Procedures and Guidelines
- Feedback and Continual Improvement Position Statement
- Learning Program - Outline - Supervision, Training and Evaluation Program (STEP)
- Learning Program - Outline - Parentline Skills Training
- Managing Breaches of Virtual Services Ethical Practice Procedure
- Online Counselling Manual
- Client Support Pathways Standards and Guidelines
- People Management Position Statement
- Performance Management Policy
- yourtown Kids Helpline (KHL) Police Intervention Protocols
- Queensland Blue Card Check - IS - BC - Qld - 0117
- Recruitment Policy
- Social Media Manual
- Unsupervised Shift Manual
- Virtual Services Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy (this document)
- Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000

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