

Virtual Services Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy

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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.

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 Code of Conduct and [Ethical Code and Practice Policy in Client Service Delivery](#).

Capability

3. Procedures for Recruiting, Selecting, Training and Managing Staff and Volunteers

yourtown has 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 currently 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 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](#).

File Name:	Virtual Services Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy - cs	DN:	PLN-1289
Approved by:	Virtual Services Manager	Approved Date:	15-Sep-20
Owner:	Virtual Services (Counselling Centre)	Review Date:	15-Sep-21
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Screening checks including Working with Children Check and National Criminal History Check are undertaken for all prospective Counsellors prior to offer of employment. A positive working with children clearance and satisfactory criminal history check are required prior to commencement of employment and ongoing employment is subject to maintenance of these.

Training of Virtual Services Staff

Once employed, new Virtual Services Counsellors will commence work in either Kids Helpline or Parentline.

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

- Initial 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) and Managers, including regular feedback 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:

- 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).
- Parentline Training (if recruited as Parentline Counsellors).

Details regarding STEP training are included in the outline to this learning program Learning Program - Outline - Supervision, Training and Evaluation Program (STEP).

During their employment, Virtual Services Counsellors may also complete:

- 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.

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Concerns

4. Policies and Procedures for Handling Disclosures or Suspicions of Harm

yourtown maintains 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 by:

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

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

These 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.

All counsellors are provided with training in relation to the application of these procedures in daily practice and are required to adhere to and follow these processes. Understanding and application of these procedures are regularly monitored by line managers and in mandatory monthly Practice Supervision.

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

- [Duty of Care Position Statement](#)
- [Performance Management Policy](#)
- [Counselling Centre Duty of Care \(DoC\) and Response to Risk Procedure](#)
- [Duty of Care Information Guide](#)
- [Client Support Pathways Standards and Guidelines](#)
- [Operations and Unsupervised Shift Manual](#)
- [Online Counselling Manual](#)
- [Social Media Moderating Manual](#)
- Child Protection Act 1999
- Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000.

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

5. 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 in accordance with the processes outlined above

6. 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

7. Policies and Procedures for Managing Compliance with Working with Children requirements

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

- For candidates who **do not** hold a current and valid Working with Children clearance **yourtown's** People and Culture team will direct the candidate through the relevant Working with Children and National Criminal History Check process to ensure all compliance requirements are met prior to offer of employment.
- For candidates who **do** hold a current and valid Working with Children clearance they are required to provide a copy to **yourtown's** People and Culture team who will validate and link to the organisation prior to offer of employment.
- Monitoring of compliance requirements is undertaken to ensure all Working with Children Check and National Criminal History Check renewals are submitted prior to the expiry date.
- Keeping records regarding each Virtual Services employee's Working with Children Check within Preceda (**yourtown's** online Human Resources Information System including:

NOTE: This is mandatory for all Virtual Services personnel.

- The date the Working with Children Check application is submitted
- Details of the employee's Working with Children check including the date of issue
- The date of expiry of the Working with Children Check
- The date that a Working with Children Check renewal application was submitted
- The date that the renewed Working with Children Check clearance is issued

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- Where an employee submits a Change in Police Information Notification form or upon notification from a Working with Children regulatory body 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 Working with Children Check clearance is reviewed by the Regulatory body.
- A prospective employee will not commence work without first receiving a Working with Children Check Clearance
- Where an existing employee does not receive a WWCC clearance upon renewal, a risk assessment will be undertaken and a decision will be made regarding ongoing employment. While this process is underway, appropriate actions will be taken to ensure the safety of all clients and employees of **yourtown**.

8. 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 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.

In addition, Virtual Services employees receive training regarding elements of this strategy.

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 and other relevant legislation.

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
- 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 will be appropriately communicated to **yourtown** Virtual Services employees.

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Referenced and Related Records

- Commitment to Care and Protection of Children and Young People Position Statement
- Consumer Rights Position Statement
- Code of Conduct
- Ethical Code and Practice Policy in Client Service Delivery
- Counselling Centre Duty of Care (DoC) and Response to Risk Procedure
- Counsellor Recruitment Information Sheet Form
- Document Development, Review and Approval Policy (currently in review)
- Duty of Care Information Guide
- Duty of Care Position Statement
- 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
- Client Support Pathways Standards and Guidelines
- Online Counselling Manual
- People Management Position Statement
- Recruitment Policy
- Social Media Moderating Manual
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