

LEGAL POLICY

Child Safe Reporting Procedure

1.0

How anyone can raise a child safety concern, how we respond to disclosures and wellbeing concerns, and how we report to the right authorities.

DATE

4 December 2023

ABN

74 101 234 664

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1. Purpose

Real World Technology Solutions is a Child Safe Organisation that proactively aims to create a safe and nurturing environment for all children engaged with it. As part of this, we expect that all employees — including staff, volunteers, contractors, and any other members of the community engaged in the organisation — can raise child safeguarding concerns. This document helps everyone to identify the different types of harm or neglect that children may be exposed to, understand their roles in reporting concerns, and report concerns in a timely fashion to all necessary internal and external parties.

2. Scope

This Procedure applies to any person (child or adult) involved with the organisation, including any adult (18 years or older) engaged by Real World Technology Solutions that may work with children at any time (employees, volunteers, contractors and sub-contractors, tutors, board members, work experience students/interns/secondments, and any other individual that may deal with children), children (under the age of 18 unless otherwise specified), and parents (including carers or legal guardians).

3. Related documents

This procedure should be read together with our other relevant policies and documents, including the Child Safe Policy and Commitment to Child Safety, the Child Safe Code of Conduct, and the Policy on Exposure to Adult Themes.

4. Reporting & Complaints

Reporting principles. The duty to report a child safety concern to child protection authorities and/or the police applies to a reasonable belief that child abuse is either likely to occur in the future and/or may have already happened. Belief on 'reasonable grounds' is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds. As long as reports are made in good faith, it does not constitute unprofessional conduct or a breach of professional ethics, and the reporter cannot be held legally liable in respect of the report. We approach our reporting responsibilities through a child-focused lens: a child making a disclosure is always to be believed; the best interests of children are paramount; our systems are accessible and recognise the diverse needs of children and families; and complaints are dealt with thoroughly and promptly.

Who can make a complaint? Any person — including employees, parents/carers and children — should promptly raise concerns or lodge a complaint about inadequate working conditions for children, conduct not in keeping with our child safe policies and procedures, or suspected or potential child abuse or neglect. If employees suspect or witness an incident of unacceptable behaviour towards a child, they are obliged to report it to the Child Safety Officer or management as a matter of urgency, and ensure the child is safe from any immediate risks. **Any person who believes a child is at immediate risk of abuse should call 000.**

What type of concerns should be raised? Alleged, suspected or observed incidents of abuse or neglect (as a matter of urgency); conduct not in keeping with our child safe policies and procedures; perceived risks in the organisation's environment; and wellbeing concerns, including concerns around mental health or signs of self-harm.

Who should complaints be made to? Complaints or concerns should be lodged with Andrew or Elizabeth Yager or other relevant management position using any method (verbally, email, call, etc.) the person feels comfortable with. Urgent matters should not be conveyed by email. If an act of criminal activity has been alleged, such as physical or sexual abuse, child protection authorities/police will be informed urgently and the child will be kept safe from any immediate risks.

How will complaints be handled? Real World Technology Solutions is committed to being responsive to concerns and seeks to resolve issues with the welfare of children as our first priority. The appointed Child Safety Officer or relevant management will investigate the complaint in a timely fashion, allowing the person complained about the opportunity to respond. If a complaint involves another child, their parents/carers will be informed. Where appropriate and in the best interests of the child, we will seek to resolve the complaint to the satisfaction of all parties. If we become aware of a risk of child abuse by someone involved with the organisation, we will act to reduce or remove the risk and protect the child as our first priority, and will promptly contact child protection authorities/the police when any criminal activity is alleged. The child (and, if appropriate, parents/carers) will be informed of the steps we are taking. We may also help children and/or parents/carers to access other appropriate support services.

How will the complaint be resolved? Relevant leadership shall determine whether a person should be disciplined in accordance with the misconduct committed and within the organisation's means, or whether the matter should be referred to an appropriate authority for further investigation and action pursuant to the law. For procedural fairness, any person involved in a complaint is encouraged to seek support from our Employee Assistance Program or another relevant person. All complaints about unacceptable conduct shall be documented (record of action taken, any internal investigation, any reports made to statutory or external bodies) and kept confidential unless otherwise required to be released by law.

5. Responding to disclosures

Concerns may arise through direct disclosure, observation or information received from others.

Employees should remain open and aware to the various ways concerns may arise, including suspicions that children have suffered or are at risk of abuse, inappropriate relationships, concerning changes in behaviour, or feelings of discomfort about a relationship between a child and an adult. Disclosures of child abuse must be reported to child protection authorities. Any other suspected or actual breach of this Procedure, the Child Safe Policy, the Code of Conduct, or other related practice must be reported to the Child Safety Officer, management and/or General Manager.

Staff who notice behavioural signs of abuse are encouraged to talk with the child when they are disclosing a concern, through an open approach: honest two-way communication, respectful interactions, being open about the limits of confidentiality, and supporting personnel to respond to disclosures confidently and supportively. This disclosure is to be distinguished from an investigative interview process, which must follow a formal process.

Handling complaints from children. Employees who receive a complaint from a child will: let the child talk about their concerns in their own time and words; be a supportive and reassuring listener; tell the child that raising their concerns was the right thing to do and explain in plain language how their concerns will be addressed; record the nature of the complaint in the child's own words; and contact the child's parents/carers, if appropriate.

Children who face additional forms of discrimination. We work in child-centred ways that celebrate the strengths and individual characteristics of children regardless of their abilities, sex, gender identity, socioeconomic status and cultural background. An allegation involving an Aboriginal child requires a culturally appropriate response. Children with a disability and children who live in out-of-home care may need additional support; suspicions or allegations of abuse of children in statutory out-of-home care should be reported to child protection authorities as well as the head of the organisation.

Responding to harmful sexual behaviour in children. Sexually harmful behaviour involves children engaging another party in sexual activity that is unwanted or where the other party cannot give consent. We are committed to ensuring all employees have access to education and support to prevent, identify and respond to peer-to-peer abuse in a timely, child-focused and protective manner. If a child perpetrates abuse or harm, we have a duty of care to both the perpetrator and the victim, and recognise that a child who demonstrates sexually harmful behaviours requires therapeutic intervention and may also require protection.

Confidentiality. Where concerns arise, confidentiality is maintained as far as possible, with internal communication on a 'need to know' basis only. Exceptional circumstances apply, including where there is a reasonable belief that a child has been harmed or is at risk of harm necessitating an obligation to report to authorities, or where the child has consented to a secondary disclosure and has the capacity to consent. Where parents/carers are the alleged perpetrators, we will seek advice from child protection authorities about how information is communicated and how to protect the child's safety.

Record keeping. Timely, clear and effective record keeping should include details of the child safety concern, key people involved, external agencies notified if relevant, and any actions taken.

Historical allegations. Where historical abuse allegations are made that pertain to Real World Technology Solutions, the organisation will cooperate fully with child protection authorities and/or the police, and will review its current policies and procedures in light of any findings to strengthen protective approaches.

Reporting principles. Once staff have formed a reasonable belief that a child is at risk or in need of protection, they will need to report. If a child is deemed to be at immediate risk of harm, contact emergency services on 000 immediately. All reports will be treated seriously. Where an employee or third-party provider forms a belief that a child has suffered child abuse or is at risk of harm, they must notify within 24 hours. The recipient of the disclosure should work with the head of the organisation or their delegate to agree on appropriate reporting avenues; it is best practice for the recipient of the disclosure to make the report. We will treat all matters confidentially, disclose critical information to relevant authorities, and work in the best interests of the child.

Reporting process.

- 1. Emergencies.** If a child is in immediate danger, contact Triple Zero (000) or the local police station. All other concerns start at the next step.
- 2.** Keep comprehensive, dated notes covering the information that has led to concerns, the source of the report, and the actions taken.
- 3.** Discuss any concerns with the Child Safety Officer, management and/or the General Manager. For internal reporting, a determination is made regarding the need for reporting and to whom — this does not substitute for any mandatory reporting obligations.

4. Gather the relevant information necessary to make the report (the child's details, the concerns and reasons for them, details of anyone within the organisation involved, and details of any other agencies involved).
5. Make a report to the relevant agency: report immediate risks by calling 000 or the local police station; sexual offences must be reported to the child protection authorities and police; report concerns about a child's safety to the child protection authority; and obtain and record the lodgement number.
6. Log and store the information securely, undertake a learning review of policies, procedures and practice, and provide information to the board as part of its periodic update on child safety.

Once a report has been received and the head of the organisation notified, the concerns will be reviewed. There are four possible outcomes: the concerns are unfounded; a crime has allegedly been committed; the Code of Conduct has been breached but no crime alleged; or it is not possible to form a conclusive view. Alleged criminal matters are referred to the police as soon as practicable, typically within 24 hours.

6. Responding to wellbeing concerns

Mental health and emotional wellbeing are as important to a child's safety as their physical health. Signs that a child may be struggling can include sudden mood and behaviour changes, self-harming, unexplained physical changes, sudden poor performance, sleeping problems or fatigue, withdrawal from friends and family, changes in eating habits, reduced ability to concentrate, and changes in appearance. These signs suggest a child may be struggling, but there could be many explanations. Employees must not attempt to diagnose mental health or wellbeing issues or make assumptions about a child's life.

Principles to help discuss mental health and wellbeing sensitively: use language the child understands and avoid technical or diagnostic terms; reflect the child's own terms back to them; create an open environment where children know who they can talk to; and promote mental health and wellbeing by encouraging self-care and maintaining routines. If a child is not able to engage in a conversation, employees must still consider what support can be put in place. If you identify a safeguarding or child safety issue, you must follow our reporting procedures.

Children getting dressed/undressed in communal areas. Where possible, use designated single-gender changing rooms or areas; otherwise use furniture or screens and allocate time slots. Adults should change privately and never in the same space as children, and as far as possible should only supervise/assist children of the same gender.

Managing a disclosure of suicidal ideation/risk. If you feel the child is in immediate danger, call 000 and stay with them until they are safe. Take warning signs and disclosures seriously, listen without judgement, be open to talking about their thoughts, be aware of confidentiality and its limits, follow our reporting policy and procedure, raise the issue with a supervisor and/or the head of the organisation, and ensure the young person remains with a supportive adult while a safety plan is developed.

Managing incidents of self-harm. Self-harm is any act of intentional self-injury or self-poisoning. Manage physical injuries by keeping calm and following first aid guidelines, calling 000 if there are immediate concerns about an overdose or serious injuries, and asking the child if they are in pain. Help the child by identifying a staff member they are willing to speak to, acknowledging their distress, reassuring them,

reminding them there are less harmful ways of coping, and mentioning sources of support (such as Kids Helpline or Youth Beyond Blue). If you identify a safeguarding or child safety issue you must follow our reporting procedures.

7. Review

This reporting procedure was approved on 4 December 2023 and last reviewed on 4 December 2023.