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**Greater Shepparton**

**Child and Family Vulnerability Guide**

**Early Childhood Education & Care services**

**The primary purpose of the Child and Family Vulnerability Guide is to facilitate a common understanding of the dimensions of vulnerability for Kindergarten and Childcare educators in regard to identifying, documenting and supporting children and families experiencing vulnerability.**

*‘Children and young people are considered to be experiencing vulnerability if the capacity of parents and family to effectively care, protect and provide for their long-term development and wellbeing*

*is limited.’*

**(Victoria’s Vulnerable Children – Our Shared Responsibility Strategy 2013-2022 May 2013)**

*‘Every child and family will experience some difficulties, and each will have some resources and strengths to help through difficult times’*

**(Kids Matter - Early Childhood Information Sheet No. 6 -**[**www.kidsmatter.edu.au**](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/)**)**

**When utilizing this Guide please consider the following information:**

* The dimensions of child and family vulnerability are wide ranging and complex and *must always be considered in conjunction with corresponding protective factors.*
* The **five categories of vulnerability and indicative reasons** on page 3 have been drawn from current research, with input from practitioners.
* The existence of one or more vulnerability factors does not necessarily mean that a child is experiencing vulnerability. It is the intensity and combination of such factors that potentially place a child at risk of developmental vulnerability, in association with the balancing protective factors.
* Consideration of such a balance contributes to a professional judgment as to whether a child is experiencing a **‘high level of vulnerability’**, a **‘moderate level of vulnerability’** or is considered to be **‘developmentally on track’**. These three levels described on page 4 broadly align to the terminology used within the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC).
* The step by step method for using the Vulnerability Guide is set out in the *Greater Shepparton Best Start Child & Family Vulnerability Guide Tool Kit* *2018 - ECEC Version 2.* Section 1 of the Tool Kit describes how this Vulnerability Guide was developed, and the key resources which have informed its development.

**Other benefits of the Guide:**

* The Vulnerability Guide has also been developed to promote consideration of when additional support is required to foster positive outcomes for children and families, and what action needs to be taken to respond to identified vulnerability issues.
* Practitioners may consider that a child or family could be in need of additional support due to a short-term emergency situation, a medium term set of circumstances in which their needs cannot be met from within their own resources and networks, or an ongoing, complex situation which would be assisted by a range of longer term strategies.
* Common definitions may also assist in communicating with external organisations/agencies.

**Action 1: Is the child/family vulnerable?**

Use your practice knowledge and assessment of the child and family circumstances, in conjunction with the Child and Family Vulnerability Guide categories of risk factors and indicative reasons table listed on page 4 of this Guide, to determine whether vulnerability factors are significant enough to record the child on the **ECEC Vulnerability Guide Audit Record.** Protective factors must be considered in conjunction with vulnerability factors to make this decision.

**Action 2: Determining the level of vulnerability**

Utilizethe table below to determine if a child is considered to be **highly vulnerable**, **moderately vulnerable** or **developmentally on track**. If a child is considered to be **highly** or **moderately** vulnerable proceed to Action 3.

*Think about which of the following levels of vulnerability and descriptors best apply:*

Engaged with child protection services/homelessness/family violence/ongoing drug and alcohol abuse/parent non-compliant with mental health treatment/inter-generational poverty/minimal attendance at universal services such as M&CH and kindergarten/poor parenting skills.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **HIGH LEVEL OF VULNERABILITY** | Engaged with family support services/parent or child with an intellectual disability/teenage parent/long term or terminal illness of family member/mental health issues/poor parenting skills/unemployment/ minimal family support/ limited service and community connections/ not regularly accessing universal services such as M&CH and kindergarten/limited parenting skills. |
| **MODERATE LEVEL**  **OF VULNERABILITY** | Engaged and regularly attending universal services such as MCH and kindergarten/ adequate parenting skills/single parent with support network/short term family emergency or illness/disability of child or parent being effectively supported/access to transport/established links with community and social groups. |

**DEVELOPMENTALLY**

**ON TRACK**

**Action 3: Recording vulnerability**

A child may be considered to be experiencing vulnerability in more than one area. All information recorded for each child needs to be considered in accordance with privacy and confidentiality policies and practices.

Return your form in line with your organisational requirements.

Complete the **ECEC Vulnerability Guide Audit Record** – see instructions on next page.

**Action 3: Recording vulnerability (continued)**

**Please note:**

1. For each child recorded, **use the same number** which is used for the child in the **formal attendance record.**
2. Only record information about those children who are considered to be **currently experiencing vulnerable situations** and/or family circumstances which may affect their learning and development.
3. For each child recorded, please indicate the reason/s for your concerns about the current and/or potential vulnerability of the child **in order of significance** (see examples below):

As demonstrated in the example below, for Child no. 3, **‘Parent/Carer capability’** may be your only area of concern so it would be marked as **‘1’** under the appropriate column.

If you are concerned about more than one area, then look at the example for Child no. 7 in the table below. The child’s **wellbeing** has beenmarked as ‘1’ (your main concern) but you may wish to include **‘Family circumstances and economic environment’** as an additional concern and mark it **‘2’** on the table. Child no.15 has three areas of concern as noted in the example below:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Child Attendance**  **Number** | **Child safety, stability, development & wellbeing** | **Parent/Carer capability** | **Family composition & dynamics** | **Family circumstances & economic environment** | **Social & Community factors** |
| Child no. 3  EXAMPLE |  | 1 |  |  |  |
| Child no. 7  EXAMPLE | 1 |  |  | 2 |  |
| Child no. 15  EXAMPLE |  |  | 2 | 1 | 3 |

**Action 4: Responding to vulnerability**

The vulnerability status of each child needs to be reviewed/considered on an ongoing basis so that program planning is inclusive of the needs identified by the practitioner. Enhanced practitioner awareness, reflection and care planning are therefore promoted through use of the Vulnerability Guide.

It is recommended that the **ECEC Vulnerability Guide Child Record Form** be completed by the practitioner for each child identified as experiencing vulnerability.

Organisational responsibility/duty of care includes both centre and service management playing a role in monitoring the progress/outcomes for vulnerable children in their services. It is also recommended that the practitioner/centre manager completes the **ECEC Vulnerability Guide Summary Form** and forwards this to their service manager. The manager is then responsible for arranging contact to discuss identified vulnerability issues.

Greater consistency in collecting regular data from kindergarten and childcare services will result inimproved data reliability, inform early identification of vulnerability and protective factors, and facilitate additional support for children and families facing vulnerable circumstances.

**Risk and Protective Factors Table** *Think about which of the following categories and indicative reasons correspond to the child and family vulnerability and protective factors you are aware of:*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Categories of vulnerability/**  **protective factors** | **Indicative reasons** |
| **The Individual**  **Child** | **Risk Factors**  *Child safety, stability, development and*  *wellbeing* | Premature birth/low birth weight/birth injury/ ongoing health concerns/chronic illness /disability/speech and language delay/general developmental delay/poor attachment experiences/poor social skills/disruptive behavior and/or destructive behavior /impulsivity or lack of self-regulation/attention deficit/out-of-home care. |
| **Protective Factors** | Good health/positive peer relationships/strong, positive social networks/hobbies, interests/high self-esteem/independence/secure attachment with parent(s)/social skills/positive disposition. |
| **The Parent/Family/Carer** | **Risk Factors**   1. *Parent/carer capability*   *(2) Family composition*  *and dynamics*  *(3) Family circumstances and economic environment* | Single parent/young maternal age/birth trauma and/or injury/limited or lack of antenatal care/rapid successive pregnancies/ chronic illness or disability/depression or other mental illness /gambling issues/ /drug and alcohol misuse/harsh or inconsistent discipline, use of corporal punishment/low level of parental education/lack of warmth and affection/lack of stimulating learning experiences for the child/active rejection of child/child abuse and/or neglect/ Involvement in criminal behavior/ history of child abuse/neglect/ low self-esteem.  Disharmony, conflict or violence/ disorganized lifestyle/ separation / divorce/ new sibling/new parent partner/blended family/ /large family size/multiple birth/absence of one parent/ parent incarceration/child in out of home care/non- biological parent(s) in the home.  Limited or no extended family support/significant (short or long term) debilitating life events/family background/cultural background/ lack of extended family support/socio economic disadvantage/housing issues/ homelessness/parental unemployment. |
| **Protective Factors** | Secure attachment with child/positive parent-child relationship/supportive family environment/extended family networks/high level of parental education/parental resilience/concrete support for parents/sound parental coping skills/awareness of stages in child development. |
| **Social/**  **Community** | **Risk Factors**  *Community/*  *neighbourhood* | Limited or no community connections and networks /limited opportunities for role modelling/limited access to transport, childcare, social services/inadequately resourced ECEC services and/or schools/geographical and/or social isolation/exposure to racism. |
| **Protective Factors** | Strong, positive social networks/stable housing/employment/family expectations of pro-social behavior/well-resourced ECEC services and/or schools available in neighbourhood/access to health and social services. |