

SQS 16

The service unit takes all reasonable steps to ensure that service users are free from abuse.

- 16.1 The service unit has policy and procedures for ensuring that service users' rights to freedom from verbal, physical and sexual abuse are being respected, and the policy and procedures are accessible to service users, staff or other interested parties.
- 16.2 Staff of the service unit are aware of its policy and procedures on protecting service users' rights to freedom from abuse.
- 16.3 Staff and service users are encouraged to raise any concerns about verbal, physical or sexual abuse and are given appropriate opportunities to do so.

A. INTRODUCTION TO SQS 16 - FREEDOM FROM ABUSE

In striving to provide high quality support for service users under the best possible circumstances, service unit must be committed to ensuring a safe and protected environment. This includes taking all reasonable steps to guarantee that service users are free from any and all types of abuse, including verbal abuse, intimidation, physical abuse, sexual abuse or neglect.

It is therefore important that each service unit has appropriate processes and strategies in place for ensuring that staff respect service users' rights to freedom from abuse. Relevant processes and strategies may potentially include work practices, supervision arrangements, training and communication strategies. It is also important that the service unit responds quickly and effectively to any incidents of alleged abuse. The service unit's approach to preventing and responding to abuse will need to be clearly documented and communicated throughout the organisation.

It is also important that the service unit has procedures to follow up instances of reported abuse.

Service Quality Standard 16 seeks to address this issue by ensuring that service providers recognise and understand their responsibilities to:

- provide service users with a safe and secure organisational environment free from abuse;
- have processes and procedures in place to prevent abuse from occurring;
- have processes and procedures in place to report and manage suspected incidents of abuse involving service users; and
- ensuring that staff receive appropriate training, guidance and supervision to ensure the prevention of abuse of any type.

All social workers and other social welfare professionals will have received some formal instruction on issues relating to prevention of abuse during their undergraduate training. However, this is a critical and sensitive area and it is also one that is currently the subject of significant research. Therefore, service unit should ensure that all of their professional staff have appropriate opportunities for further learning, information and exploration of relevant issues. Non-professional staff who have contact with service users should also receive in-house training, guidance and supervision in relation to this issue.

B. ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR MEETING SQS 16

In order to meet SQS 16, your service unit will need to:

1. Have written policy and procedures on the prevention and handling of verbal, physical and sexual abuse, which are accessible to service users, staff and other interested parties;
2. Have mechanisms for informing staff and service users about the service unit's policy and procedures on prevention and handling of abuse, and for encouraging, supporting and providing them with opportunities to raise issues and concerns about abuse;
3. Ensure that the above policy, procedures and mechanisms are implemented; and
4. Inform service users of their right to raise complaints and that they will not be disadvantaged if they do so.

C. RESOURCES TO ASSIST YOUR SERVICE TO MEET SQS 16

This handbook contains the following resources:

- Guidelines for developing a policy to prevent and respond to abuse; and
- Guidelines for developing procedures to prevent and respond to abuse.

The guidelines provided may be used either as:

- a basis for developing a policy and procedures specific to your service unit, in the event that you do not already have existing documents in this area; or
- a checklist for reviewing and, if necessary, amending your service unit's relevant policy and procedures, if you already have such items in place.

It is important to note that these examples are guidelines only and that they should be focused to reflect the special circumstances of your service unit. Policy details will vary according to the nature of the service under consideration.

Developing these policies does not necessarily mean producing a lot of written material. Brief documents that succinctly capture your key messages are more likely to be read and understood by staff and service users.

GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING A POLICY TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO ABUSE

1. Introduction

These guidelines have been prepared to assist a service unit develop a policy to prevent and respond to abuse. The focus of the policy will depend on the type of service you provide.

2. Contents

We have listed below the contents that are likely to be included in a policy on preventing and responding to abuse. The contents of the policy need to be reviewed and amended in the light of the type of service you provide.

A. Purpose

In this section of the policy, you will need to explain the purposes of the policy. These may include:

- i) ensuring a safe environment for service users;
- ii) ensuring that staff are respectful of service users' rights to freedom from abuse; and
- iii) ensuring that staff and service users are aware of procedures to follow up instances of reported abuse.

B. Definitions of abuse

In this section of the policy, the various types of abuse need to be defined.

Some forms of abuse can be quite subtle – for example, ignoring service users who are trying to communicate with a staff member may be a form of emotional abuse; delaying delivery of services such as personal hygiene services may be a form of physical abuse. Ensuring that all staff and service users have an awareness of what potentially constitutes abuse will be important in preventing, limiting and detecting any incidents of abuse.

C. Philosophy

In this section of the policy, the broad philosophy of the service unit in relation to preventing and responding to abuse needs to be presented. This may include issues such as:

- being committed to ensuring a safe environment for all service users, staff and visitors;

- respecting the rights of service users, staff and visitors to freedom from any forms of abuse, such as verbal, physical and sexual abuse;
- this respect forms the basis of all interactions between service users and staff and is reflected in organisational policies and procedures; and
- should instances of abuse occur, the service unit is committed to examining matters in a thorough and sensitive manner and resolving them appropriately.

D. Policy

In this section of the document, the key policies need to be explained. These may include:

- the service unit's commitment to the prevention of verbal, physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect;
- outlining the service unit's expectations that:
 - staff will not abuse service users;
 - service users will not abuse service users; and
 - staff will be alert to signs and symptoms of abuse and act upon them according to the service unit's policies and procedures;
- expressing the service unit's intention to follow up on any reported instances of abuse;
- reassurance that any matters reported and investigated will be handled in a sensitive manner in accordance with other organisational policies such as privacy and confidentiality, individual rights and responsibilities and with government ordinances covering privacy and anti-discrimination legislation; and
- outlining the strategies the service unit will put in place to prevent abuse, such as:
 - providing training on preventing abuse as part of staff induction; and
 - providing service users and their families (where appropriate) with opportunities to attend presentations on preventing abuse and self-protective behaviours.

E. Cross-references

In this section, you should consider how this policy aligns with other organisational policies and cross-reference as appropriate. For example, this policy may impact upon the privacy and confidentiality policy and complaints policy.

F. Administration issues

In this section of the policy, you will need to indicate:

- the date of the policy;
- how and to whom the policy will be distributed; and
- how and when the policy will be reviewed.

GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING PROCEDURES TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO ABUSE

1. Introduction

These guidelines have been prepared to assist you to develop procedures appropriate to your service unit. The outline below may be used by your service unit as:

- a reference document when reviewing existing policies and procedures; or
- a basis for developing your own documentation.

2. Contents

The contents proposed will need to be reviewed and amended in the light of the type of service you provide. The proposed contents of the procedures to prevent and respond to abuse are listed below:

A. Prevention

In this section, you may wish to include elements such as:

- steps to prevent abuse occurring; and
- steps to ensure staff and service users are familiar with this information.

Specific details on how to prevent types of abuse from occurring may include raising awareness through staff training and regular refresher courses, inclusion of this principle in organisational publications such as a brochure, staff orientation manual, conditions of employment and performance pledges.

B. Reporting

This section would include processes and steps by which incidents or suspected cases of abuse could be raised, investigated and resolved.

In addition to step by step procedures, this section could also detail the rights, roles and responsibilities of persons raising the problem and the roles and responsibilities of those designated to investigate and resolve the complaint.

Additional information might also include:

- timeframes within which action to manage the process should occur;
- methods of communicating between parties;
- documentation required;
- how confidentiality will be maintained;
- involvement of internal and external mediators as required; and
- how service users may access counselling and advocacy if required.

C. Cross references

You should consider how these procedures align with other organisational procedures and cross-reference as appropriate. For example, these procedures may impact upon staff disciplinary procedures, and the procedures in relation to the privacy and confidentiality policy, service philosophy, and the complaints policy.

D. Administration issues

In this section of the procedures, you will need to indicate:

- the date of the procedures;
- how and to whom the procedures will be distributed; and
- how and when the procedures will be reviewed.

- End -