
What's the law? – Child protection and parenting

Presenter's notes

How to use these notes

Topic: Parenting, laws protecting children, the role of the Department of Communities, Child Protection and Family Support (WA).

Resources: *What's the law?* free online resource 'Child protection', which contains a photo story, activity sheets and answer sheets.

These notes provide guidelines for a presenter's script and information on how to use these resources when presenting to a community group. The notes include a story summary, questions and answers, key messages, areas for further discussion and referral information.

Preparing to present

It may be useful to read the activity and answer sheets to prepare for your presentation – they may give you ideas for additional questions and activities for your group. It is also a good idea to look at the websites and referral information provided under 'Possible discussion points and referral information' below.

If you need assistance with presentation skills, engagement ideas or coordination support for the group you are preparing for you can contact cle@legalaid.wa.gov.au or (08) 9261 6500.

Introduce yourself and *What's the law?*

Before you begin the presentation, introduce yourself, your role and your organisation.

For example, if you work at Legal Aid WA:

- Legal Aid WA helps the community in many different ways if people have problems with the law. We provide legal education to newly-arrived communities about their rights and responsibilities.

Refer to the *What's the law?* free online resource and its purpose by mentioning these key points:

- We see many different newly-arrived communities get into trouble with the law and often the same legal problems arise. These problems can be avoided if you know some simple information about the law and where to go to for help before your problem becomes serious.
- The photo stories in *What's the law?* have been made to help you learn about the law on thirteen different topics.

Begin with some introductory statements and general questions about the topic:

- Today we are going to show you a photo story about the laws created to protect children.
- There are laws to protect children against harm from anyone in the community, including family members. The laws allow government to act to protect children if they think they are being hurt in any way.

- The government might think a child is being hurt if someone reports this to them. Some people in our community, like doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers and police officers, are required by law to report to Department of Communities, Child Protection and Family Support (“the Department”) if they believe that a child is being sexually abused.
- Different cultures and families have different ways of bringing up children. Australian laws understand this but they do not let parents hurt children, even when they are teaching them how to behave.
- The Department will act to protect the best interests of children in any situation where they think they are at risk of harm. This includes physical harm and emotional harm, such as being neglected.
- It can be very difficult raising children, especially when there are rules about how to do this.
- Do you have children? What is your favourite thing to do with your child?
- Can you see any differences between your childhood and the way children are raised in Australia?

Summarise the photo story

- This story is about Meena and her parenting responsibilities for her two children, aged around six and three years old.
- Meena is a single mother with no family in Australia. She is busy working. She must work during the school holidays and has no-one to look after the children.
- She leaves the children alone, telling them to stay inside and not talk to anyone.
- Meena returns home and the children are not there. She hears that they were playing on the street and the neighbour took them into her care for the day.
- Meena is angry at the children and wants to beat them for not listening to her.

Ask questions

To strengthen engagement with the photo story and develop the group's legal literacy, ask the following questions before showing the story. This will encourage the group to watch actively and think about key messages.

While you are watching the story, think about the next four questions:

Why shouldn't Meena leave her children at home alone?

What might happen if Meena beats her children?

How can Meena teach her children how to behave without beating them?

How can Meena get help with her parenting troubles?

Show the photo story



Answer the questions

Ask the same key questions after you show the story and allow for discussion to tease out the right answers.

Why shouldn't Meena leave her children at home alone?

- They are too young to stay at home alone.
- It is not safe. Leaving young children alone is likely to make them stressed and worried.
- They will be unable to respond to an emergency situation such as an accident, fire or break-in.
- If children are left in a dangerous situation, it can be seen as neglect or not looking after children properly. It can become a matter for the Department of Communities, Child Protection and Family Support to investigate.

What might happen if Meena beats her children?

- The law says that people cannot beat children and this law applies to parents.
- Someone might report her to the police or the Department.
- Communities, Child Protection and Family Support is a part of government that looks into reports of child abuse and neglect.
- If Meena's children are being seriously hurt, the Department is likely to take action to stop this.
- The Department can make a range of requests to protect a child and control parenting arrangements depending on the situation.
- In very serious situations the Department can take children away from a home where they are unsafe.

How can Meena teach her children how to behave without beating them?

- She can talk to them calmly about the rules she has, such as not playing on the road and not talking to strangers.
- She can set strict rules with consequences, such as taking away a favourite thing.
- Parents should always remember to reward their child's good behaviour.

How can Meena get help with her parenting troubles?

- She can call the [Ngala Parenting Line](#) Monday to Sunday 8am to 8pm on **(08) 9368 9368** (metro) and **1800 111 546** and ask for advice. If the Department is involved Meena is entitled to be consulted by the child protection worker investigating the issue.
- Meena can also call Legal Aid WA for legal advice in this situation.
- Meena can find appropriate childcare for her children. There are different types of childcare which suit parents' different needs.

Emphasise key messages

- The government recognises cultural differences in parenting, however, the best interests of the child always come first. Beating children is against the law.
- If the Department of Communities, Child Protection and Family Support is involved in your parenting they should work with you to help solve your parenting problems.
- Call Legal Aid WA or your community legal centre if you have legal problems or have to go to court.

Further questions and discussion

- Does anyone have any questions?

If you are not a lawyer you can provide referral information to the group. Individual legal issues which require legal assessment or advice should be referred to the **Legal Aid WA Infoline** on **1300 650 579**

for information and referral or the closest community legal centre (<http://www.communitylaw.net/>) or Legal Aid WA office.

Possible discussion points and referral information

Leaving older children in charge

- If your child is left alone without a 'carer', they must be old enough to take action in an emergency. They must know what to do and where to get help. Leaving small children alone is never a good idea. For more information: http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/leaving_children_home_alone.html.

Complaining about Department of Communities, Child Protection and Family Support (CCPFS)

- Contact the **CCPFS Complaints Management Unit (CMU)** on **(08) 9222 2594** or **1800 013 311**.
- If your complaint cannot be resolved by the CMU you can contact the **Ombudsman Western Australia** on **(08) 9220 7555** or **1800 117 000** (country free call).

Reporting abuse or neglect of children

- To report concerns that are life threatening ring **WA Police 000**.
- To report concerns about a child's wellbeing contact **Communities Child Protection and Family Support Central Intake Team** on **1800 273 889** or after hours contact **Crisis Care** on **(08) 9223 1111** or **1800 199 008** country free call.

Support for families with children in care

- The **Family Inclusion Network of Western Australia Inc.** (Fin WA Inc.) provides advocacy and support services to parents and family members who have had their children placed in 'out of home care', that is, foster care or relative care. Contact FIN WA Inc on **(08) 9328 6434**.

Parenting phone service

- **Ngala Parenting Line** offers phone advice and support to parents and carers of children up to 18 years of age. This is a free call-back service Monday to Sunday 8am to 8pm on **(08) 9368 9368** (metro) and **1800 111 546** (regional): <https://www.ngala.com.au/request-a-call-from-the-ngala-parenting-line/>

Parenting information

- Ngala website has online information on a range of topics for children 0-18 and also details of courses, groups and services throughout WA: <https://www.ngala.com.au/>
- **Raising children:** the Australian parenting website: http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/leaving_children_home_alone.html.
- Publications with information about protecting children can be found on the **Department of Communities Child Protection and Family Support** website at: <http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/Resources/Pages/Publications.aspx>.

Childcare information

- Information for parents and carers about different childcare services: <http://www.mychild.gov.au/>

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