



GUIDE 7: YOUTH PROTECTION RISK MANAGEMENT

This guide provides information on how Defence can create a safe environment for youth and ensure compliance with relevant policies and regulations to manage risk. It is important for Defence personnel to understand the unique nature of risks that youth engagement presents when planning a youth engagement activity or program.

This guide aims to assist personnel to:

- a. identify youth protection hazards
- b. implement suitable mitigation strategies, and
- c. apply appropriate risk management in the delivery of youth engagement and development activities

Defence is committed to providing a youth safe environment in Defence programs, community engagement and the workplace. Regularly reviewing potential youth protection hazards helps foster a culture of ongoing improvement. This process helps to identify new risks and ensures that existing hazards are managed appropriately.

This guide should be read in conjunction with the Defence [Youth Manual](#).

Identifying and mitigating hazards

Youth protection hazards can vary and include environmental, operational, and cultural risks. The hazards listed in the tables in this guide are examples and may not cover every possible risk. It is important for commanders, managers and supervisors to review and assess risks specific to their youth programs and activities.

[Table 1](#) within Enclosure 1 offers examples of hazards and [Table 2](#) within Enclosure 2 offers mitigation strategies to assist in safely planning and managing youth engagement activities.

Youth protection risk assessment

A risk assessment must be completed prior to all youth engagement activities. Groups and Services should use existing Defence risk assessment templates and forms as outlined in their respective Service Work Health Safety Management System (WHSMS).

This guide serves as a youth protection supplement to a Standing Risk Assessment and should be used to identify and evaluate hazards and risks specific to each youth engagement activity or program.

If a Standing Risk Assessment is not available, the template provided below can be used. This document must be reviewed and approved by an authorising officer.

[Youth Risk Assessment Template](#)

Further assistance

For further information and assistance contact youth.protection@defence.gov.au

Enclosures:

1. [Table 1 - Hazards](#)
2. [Table 2 – Mitigation strategies](#)



Enclosure 1

Table 1 – Hazards

Hazard	Potential Sources
Accidental harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unsafe physical environment• Unsuitable staff, contractors, or volunteers• Inadequate or inappropriate supervision• Improper youth-on-youth behaviour• Unsafe arrival and departure procedures for youth• Failure to respond adequately to youth protection events/incidents, including providing support to victims, perpetrators, families, and personnel• Failure to adapt the youth-safe environment to accommodate individual diversity requirements
Physical abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use of physical punishment or physical assault, such as pushing or hitting
Psychological / emotional abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inappropriate verbal or symbolic acts, such as bullying, intimidation, threats, isolation, or ignoring
Sexual Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exposing youth to, or involving them in, sexual acts• Direct or indirect sexual exploitation• Grooming
Abuse of power	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inappropriate or unethical use of power or authority to harass, bully, or discriminate
Exposure to prolonged trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inadequate support provided following a youth protection incident• Support services are not well known or utilised• Staff are not trained in trauma-informed practices or respond inappropriately to victims of abuse
On-line grooming	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Misuse of online communication channels, such as messaging applications, emails, or other social media platforms
Neglect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of supervision or failure to meet the specific needs of youth, including not providing necessities such as food, drink, shelter, or medical attention• Youth are unaware of their rights and responsibilities
Cultural abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of cultural respect• Exposure of youth to racism or other forms of vilification



Enclosure 2

Table 2 - Mitigation strategies

Area	Mitigation Strategies
Safe environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide personnel with youth protection education and training according to their level of contact with youth.• Manage identified risks, including minimising situations where a youth may be unsupervised.• Minimise one-to-one interactions between adult personnel and youth.• Model acceptable youth protection behaviours to embed behavioural and cultural change.• Regularly assess physical environments for youth protection risks.• Choose buildings or spaces that are well lit, open, and visible to multiple people when planning youth-related activities.• Adopt a continuous improvement approach to youth protection breaches.
Safe recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Include Defence's commitment to youth protection in recruitment documentation.• Ensure personnel obtain and maintain mandatory Working with Children / Working with Vulnerable People / Police checks in accordance with Defence policy and legislation.• Include youth protection-specific questions when interviewing and conducting reference checks for youth-related work roles.
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Familiarise personnel with Defence's youth protection policies.• Inform youth about their rights and responsibilities, including codes of conduct.• Inform youth, their parents/guardians, and other community members on how to access information on how Defence ensures youth safety.• Ensure feedback and confidential complaint mechanisms are in place and accessible.• Collaborate with transgender and gender-diverse individuals, and their parents or guardians, to find mutually acceptable outcomes that can be reasonably accommodated in youth engagement activities.• Remain mindful of behaviour and language when interacting with youth.• Use individual management plans for youth engagement participants with additional needs, clearly outlining expectations, appropriate mitigation strategies, and situational responses.
Responding to issues and disclosures	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Train personnel who interact with youth to recognise the signs of abuse and understand how to appropriately respond to disclosures of abuse.• Ensure personnel are aware of their obligation to listen to and respect youth concerns.• Complete youth protection training and report incidents in accordance with Defence Youth Manual protocols.• Encourage diversity leaders to network with their counterparts to share and implement practical solutions that support inclusivity.• Provide Defence personnel with access to information about services and support which are available.