

WHS essentials for early childhood services

Work health and safety in one short guide: who has to do what, how to manage a risk, the hazards most services deal with, what to report and who to call.

From [Yaga Smart](#), led by an Early Childhood Teacher, WHS-Qualified, Trainer and Assessor. Last updated 31 October 2026.

How to use it

1. Read it with your leadership team, and check the laws for your state or territory.
2. Ask your team which three hazards worry them most.
3. Fill in the action table at the end, and review it at your next team meeting.

Who has to do what

Every state and territory has the model WHS laws, with some local changes, except Victoria, which has its own occupational health and safety laws. This guide follows the model laws. Approved codes of practice aren't law, but following one will usually meet your duties, and a court can use one to decide what was reasonably practicable.

The service

Usually called the PCBU, the person conducting a business or undertaking. It must keep workers safe, and others the work affects, such as children, families and visitors, so far as is reasonably practicable. That includes psychological health, and it must consult workers.

Officers

People who make decisions affecting the whole business or a substantial part of it, such as company directors. They must use due diligence to make sure the service meets its duties. The test is the decisions a person makes, not their job title.

Workers

Everyone who works at the service, including casuals, contractors, students and volunteers. They must take reasonable care of themselves and others, follow reasonable instructions and cooperate with reasonable policies.

Manage a risk in four steps

Consult your workers, and any health and safety representatives, at every step.

STEP 1

Identify hazards

Walk the rooms and the yard, read your incident records, and ask your team what worries them. Include psychological hazards.

STEP 2

Assess the risk

Ask what could happen, how bad it would be and how likely it is. Skip this if the hazard and the way to control it are already widely understood.

STEP 3

Control the risk

Remove it if you can. If you can't, reduce it as far as is reasonably practicable, starting with the strongest control in the table below.

STEP 4

Review

Check the control works in practice, and look again after an incident, a change, or when your team raises it.

Choose the strongest control you can

These run from strongest to weakest. Administrative controls and protective equipment come last, because they leave the hazard in place and rely on people getting it right every time.

Control	What it means	In a service
Eliminate	Get rid of the hazard.	Repair the cracked path. Take the wobbly shelf off the wall.
Substitute	Use something safer.	Swap glass storage jars for plastic. Choose a ready-to-use cleaner, so nobody has to mix concentrate.
Isolate	Separate people from it.	Gate off the laundry. Rope off the yard while the ground is being repaired.
Engineer	Change the equipment or layout.	Install a height-adjustable change bench. Put wheels on heavy toy storage.
Administrative	Change how the work is done.	Rotate who works in the heaviest rooms. Have two people move the climbing frame.
Protective equipment	Protect the person.	Disposable gloves for nappy changes. Non-slip shoes for wet areas.

Hazards most services deal with

Hazard	Where it shows up	What helps
Lifting and floor-level work	Getting toddlers on and off change benches, settling children in cots, long stretches on the floor or on child-size chairs, and shifting outdoor equipment.	Pull-out steps where it's safe for toddlers to climb, adult-height seats and kneeling pads, wheels instead of carrying, and rotating people out of the heaviest rooms.
Slips, trips and falls	Water play spills, wet bathroom floors, loose mats, cluttered storerooms and reaching for high displays.	Mop up as you go, secure or remove loose mats, check outdoor paths after rain, and keep a stable step stool for high jobs.
Infectious disease	Nappy changes, body fluids and close care of unwell children.	Handwashing, gloves and the exclusion periods in Staying Healthy (6th edition). Encourage the vaccines the Australian Immunisation Handbook recommends for early childhood staff: influenza, pertussis and hepatitis A, plus MMR and varicella if non-immune.
Pregnancy, injury or illness	Infection risks in pregnancy, rooms with a lot of lifting, and existing injuries.	Talk with the worker and agree adjustments together. Don't assume what someone can or can't do, and follow what their doctor has advised.
Chemicals	Sanitisers, disinfectants and laundry products.	Keep products in labelled containers, hold a safety data sheet for each hazardous chemical, store them where children can't reach, follow the mixing instructions, and wear the gloves the label calls for.
Electrical	Frayed leads, power boards under benches, washing machines, dryers and kitchen appliances.	Pull damaged items from use straight away and report them, test safety switches, and have faults fixed by a licensed electrician.
Sun and heat	Outdoor play, yard duty and hot rooms.	Shade, hats, sunscreen, water and rotating outdoor duties.
Psychosocial hazards	Workload, missed breaks, low support, conflict, aggression and distressing events.	Manage them like any other risk. Start with our psychosocial hazard checklist .

A serious incident can mean two notifications

WHS law and the Education and Care Services National Law have separate reporting duties. If a child is seriously hurt, both can apply.

Tell	What	How fast
Your WHS regulator	A death, a serious injury or illness, or a dangerous incident that arises from your work. It can involve a worker, a child or anyone else.	Immediately after you become aware of it
Your education regulatory authority	Serious incidents involving a child, including a death, a serious injury, illness or trauma, an emergency that emergency services attended, and a child who is missing, or locked in or out.	Within 24 hours, through the NQA IT System

Under the model laws, leave the site as it is until an inspector arrives or says otherwise, unless you need to help someone or make it safe, and keep a record of the incident for at least five years. Victoria has its own rules, so check with WorkSafe Victoria. Changes to the model law **published in December 2025** add to this list, including some violent incidents and worker absences of 15 or more days. They apply only once your state or territory adopts them. The ACT made similar changes on 19 November 2025, so ask your regulator what applies now.

Emergencies and injuries

- ☐ Your emergency plan is easy to find, tells workers and visitors what to do, and is reviewed regularly
- ☐ Emergency and evacuation procedures are rehearsed every three months, and each rehearsal is recorded
- ☐ First aid kits are stocked, and someone with a current first aid qualification is always there with children
- ☐ Injuries and near misses are recorded, and followed up with the team
- ☐ Injured workers know how to make a workers' compensation claim, and your insurer is told promptly
- ☐ A return-to-work plan is agreed with the worker and fits what their doctor has advised

Records to keep

- ☐ Risk assessments and hazard actions, with owners and dates
- ☐ Incident and near miss records, and any notifications you made
- ☐ Consultation records, and what you told staff afterwards
- ☐ Induction and training records
- ☐ Safety data sheets and your chemical register
- ☐ Equipment maintenance and electrical checks

Who to call to report an incident

Where	WHS regulator	Incident line
NSW	SafeWork NSW www.safework.nsw.gov.au	13 10 50
Victoria	WorkSafe Victoria www.worksafe.vic.gov.au	13 23 60
Queensland	Workplace Health and Safety Queensland www.worksafe.qld.gov.au	1300 362 128
South Australia	SafeWork SA www.safework.sa.gov.au	1800 777 209
Western Australia	WorkSafe WA www.worksafe.wa.gov.au	1800 678 198
Tasmania	WorkSafe Tasmania www.worksafe.tas.gov.au	1300 366 322, or (03) 6166 4600 from outside Tasmania
Northern Territory	NT WorkSafe worksafe.nt.gov.au	1800 019 115
ACT	WorkSafe ACT www.worksafe.act.gov.au	13 22 81, or 0419 120 028 after hours

These are the lines each regulator lists for reporting incidents, checked on their websites on 31 October 2026. Some also ask for a written notice, and each website explains how to notify. For general questions, see [Safe Work Australia's contact list](#).

Your first three hazards

Hazard	Risk rating	What we'll change	Who owns it	By when	Did it help?

In an emergency, call 000.

Written by Yaga Smart. Includes information from the model WHS laws and guidance published by Safe Work Australia (© Commonwealth of Australia), summarised and changed by us, plus [ACECQA's Guide to the National Quality Framework](#), and the health guidance linked above. [Read the source](#). Checked 31 October 2026.

Important: please read

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