Policy Statement:

The Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (the department) has a legislative responsibility to take action when aware of alleged harm or alleged risk of harm to a child and reasonably suspects the child is in need of protection. A child is in need of protection if the child has suffered, is suffering, or is at unacceptable risk of suffering significant harm and does not have a parent able and willing to protect the child from harm.

The department also has a legislative responsibility to take action when it is reasonably suspected an unborn child will be at risk of harm after the child is born, by having an authorised officer investigate to assess the likelihood that the child will need protection after the child is born or to offer help and support to the pregnant woman.

ASC is a model of working with families, in partnership with ASC funded service providers, or other agencies or non-government services as co-responders, to assess and respond to children and families to increase safety.

Following post-notification information gathering, the department will determine use of a support or investigative response. Both will involve assessment of the level of harm to the child and the risk of future harm. Both may occur in partnership with co-responders, with support intervention generally provided by the department and a secondary sector provider. Support responses may meet the needs of children and families where parenting coping and functioning impacts on children’s safety. Investigative responses will be required when criminal charges or forensic evidence-gathering skills are required, in these circumstances an ASC co-response may not be appropriate. ASC does not alter the role of the Queensland Police Service or Recognised Entities, as set out in the Child Protection Act 1999.

The ASC model aims to ensure children and families are provided with the right service, at the right time, in the right place to meet their safety needs.

Principles:

The safety, wellbeing and best interests of a child are paramount.
A child has a right to be protected from harm or risk of harm.
A child’s family has the primary responsibility for the child’s upbringing, protection and development. The preferred way of ensuring a child’s safety and wellbeing is through supporting the child’s family. If a child does not have a parent who is able and willing to protect the child, the State is responsible for protecting the child.
In protecting a child, the State should only take action that is warranted in the circumstances.
The State is responsible for ensuring that children in need of protection receive protection and care services that ensure their safety and promote their wellbeing.

The State is responsible for ensuring that children and families receive the family support services that they need in order to decrease the likelihood of the children becoming in need of protection.

The Chief Executive has the primary responsibility for investigating, assessing and responding to allegations of harm to children, including by making plans for their protection and care.

Each service provider should contribute, within the provider’s own sphere of responsibility, to assessing and meeting the protection and care needs of children and supporting their families.

Children in need of protection, and children who may become in need of protection, and their families should receive coordinated services that meet their needs in a timely and effective way.

Because a child’s safety, wellbeing and best interests are paramount, their protection and care needs take precedence over the protection of an individual’s privacy.

Objectives:

The objective of an ASC co-response is to determine if a child is in need of protection and provide children and families with the right service, at the right time, in the right place, to increase safety.

Key aspects of providing an ASC co-response leading to the right service include:

- proportional responses to concerns for children’s safety and wellbeing.
- culturally responsive service delivery to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- integrated responses to domestic and family violence.
- coordinated and partnered assessment and service delivery.

Key aspects of providing an ASC co-response at the right time include:

- enhancing access to early support to keep children safely at home.
- timely responses to enable rigorous and balanced assessment.

Key aspects of providing an ASC co-response at the right place include:

- delivering an investment in place-based services across Queensland’s vast geographical and demographic variances.
- maximising service system investment and capacity through more efficient service integration and triaging processes.

The benefits of providing an ASC response include:

- improved quality of responses, specialist advice, evidence gathering and analysis.
- streamlined access to support services, and provision of services that increase safety, reducing re-entry and re-substantiation of harm.
- increased co-responses and maximising secondary sector service system engagement and investment to protect children and support families.
Scope:

The scope of the ASC model is assessment and service provision following notification that a child may be in need of protection, with the ASC funded service provider performing as the conduit to establish connections and link a child and family to ongoing support.

Roles and Responsibilities:

When investigating and assessing notifications of harm, or alleged risk of harm, Child Safety can partner with ASC funded service providers, and in some circumstances government partner agencies or a non-government organisation, to:

- effectively engage the child and their family
- assess whether the child is in need of protection
- prevent future harm to children
- increase safety, belonging and wellbeing through intervention.

This partnership is an ASC co-response.

Where identified as appropriate during an Investigation and Assessment, Child Safety can refer matters to ASC funded service providers, or partner with other co-responders. The Senior Team Leader and Child Safety Officer will work together to identify responses that are suitable for an ASC co-response and where identified seek to engage the most suitable co-responder. The Senior Practitioner may also be consulted.

An ASC co-response may have more than one co-responder, if appropriate to the child and family's needs, such as:

- an ASC funded service provider
- a government partner agency
- a non-government organisation.

The role of the co-responder will be to partner with the Child Safety Officer to assist in the assessment process through engaging with the family and enable, support and inform the response provided to the child and their family.

Where the co-responder is the funded ASC service provider their role will be to assist the child and their family to receive the support and services they need to increase safety and decrease the likelihood of the child entering out-of-home care. The ASC funded service provider is to determine the most suitable service/s for a child and their family and act as the conduit to make the connection and link families with ongoing support.

Where the ASC co-responder is a government partner agency, or a non-government organisation, they will service the family via consent and within the boundaries of their role. ASC co-responders, who are not funded, may be limited by their organisational capacity and/or scope of their service agreement.

ASC co-responders can only engage with the family when there is consent. If the family does not consent, contact with the ASC funded service provider must cease and only Child Safety will continue the assessment (including with the QPS and Recognised Entity involvement, where appropriate).
The Child Safety Officer, as an authorised officer with statutory delegations under the Child Protection Act 1999 (CPA), will retain responsibility for the Investigation and Assessment. Where it is not possible to preserve a child’s safety at home by supporting the child’s family, Child Safety will take ongoing intervention to protect the child, either with parental agreement or by court order.

**Authority:**

*Child Protection Act 1999 sections 6, 14, 21A, 186, 187, 188 and Chapter 5A.*

**Delegations:**

As per statutory delegations, including:
- Executive Director, Operations, Service Delivery and Practice
- Regional Executive Director
- Regional Director, Child and Family Services
- Regional Director, Child, Family and Community Services
- Manager, Child Safety Service Centre
- Manager, Child Safety After Hours Service
- Senior Practitioner, Child Safety Service Centre
- Senior Team Leader, Child Safety Service Centre
- Senior Team Leader, Child Safety After Hours Service
- Child Safety Officer, Child Safety Service Centre
- Child Safety Officer, Child Safety After Hours Service
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Office: Operations, Service Delivery and Practice
Help Contact: Director of Operational Policy

Links:
- *Child Protection Act 1999*
- Investigation and Assessment Policy 386-6
- *Child Safety Practice Manual*
- Assessment and Service Connect Operational Policy Guidelines

Michael Hogan
Director-General