

INSIGHT | COMPLIANCE

The 24-Hour Rule

What the new reporting timeframe really means — and the five-minute test that tells you if your service is ready.

McArthur Early Childhood Education | The Practitioner's Guide to the NQF

From 1 September 2025, services have 24 hours — not seven days — to notify the regulatory authority of an allegation, incident, or circumstance involving physical or sexual abuse of a child at the service. The reform is short to describe and significant to operationalise. Most services have updated their policy. Fewer have stress-tested the pathway.

Why the change matters

The shorter timeframe is the most visible part of a deeper shift: from a reactive child protection mode (investigate after the fact) to a child safety culture (prevent and respond at speed). It places real pressure on services to design pathways that work outside business hours, across roles, and without depending on a single person being reachable.

The five-minute test

Ask any educator on your team, without warning:

1. If a child disclosed something concerning to you at 4:45pm on Friday, what would you do in the next 60 minutes?
2. Who would you contact, in what order, by what channel?
3. If your nominated supervisor's phone is off, what is the next step?
4. Where is the notification submitted, and who has the credentials?
5. What goes in the file before you leave the building?

READ THE RESULT HONESTLY

If even one educator pauses on any of the five questions, the gap is in the system, not the educator. The 24-hour clock starts at the disclosure, not at the supervisor finally answering the phone.

What good looks like

- A named primary and backup pathway, written down, posted, and practised.
- Out-of-hours protocol with a documented secondary contact.
- A factual record opened immediately — observable facts only, no characterisations.
- Mandatory reporting obligations actioned in parallel, never as a substitute for regulatory notification.

- Family, child, and staff care wrapped around the process — not after it.

Three traps to avoid

1. Treating the 24-hour clock as elastic. It is not. It runs from awareness, not from the next business day.
2. Assuming "the director will handle it." The pathway must work when the director is on leave, on a plane, or unreachable.
3. Conflating mandatory reporting with regulatory notification. They are separate obligations, often to different bodies, with different timeframes. Both must be met.

This article is part of The Practitioner's Guide to the NQF — M^cArthur's editorial series for the early childhood education sector. For the full whitepaper and webinar replay, visit www.mcarthur.com.au/insights.