Mandatory Reporting Policy
and Procedures for Identifying and Responding to Possible Child Abuse

Statement

A broad range of professional groups are identified in the Children Youth and Families Act 2005 (CYFA) as mandatory reporters. Mandated staff members must make a report to Child Protection as soon as practicable after forming a belief on reasonable grounds that a child or young person is in need of protection from significant harm as a result of physical injury or sexual abuse, and the child’s parents are unable or unwilling to protect the child.

The following professionals are prescribed as mandatory reporters under section 182 of the CYFA:
- primary and secondary school teachers and principals (including students in training to become teachers)
- registered medical practitioners (including psychiatrists)
- nurses (including school nurses)
- police.

There may be times when two or more mandated staff members, for example a teacher and a principal, have formed a belief about the same child or young person on the same occasion. In this situation it is sufficient for only one of the mandated staff members to make a report. The other staff member is obliged to ensure that the report has been made and that all of the grounds for their own belief were included in the report made by the other staff member.

Non-mandated staff members

Section 183 of the CYFA states that any person, who believes on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection, may report their concerns to Child Protection. This means that any person, including non-mandated school staff, is able to make a report to Child Protection when they believe that a child or young person is at risk of harm and in need of protection, and the child’s parents are unable or unwilling to protect the child.

Forming a belief on reasonable grounds

A person may form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection after becoming aware that a child or young person’s health, safety or wellbeing is at risk and the child’s parents are unwilling or unable to protect the child.

There may be reasonable grounds for forming such a belief if:
- a child or young person states that they have been physically or sexually abused
- a child or young person states that they know someone who has been physically or sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves)
- someone who knows the child or young person states that the child or young person has been physically or sexually abused
- a child shows signs of being physically or sexually abused.
- the staff member is aware of persistent family violence or parental substance misuse, psychiatric illness or intellectual disability that is impacting on the child or young person’s safety, stability or development
- the staff member observes signs or indicators of abuse, including non-accidental or unexplained injury, persistent neglect, poor care or lack of appropriate supervision
- a child’s actions or behaviour may place them at risk of significant harm and the child’s parents are unwilling or unable to protect the child.
What is child abuse?

Child abuse can include physical abuse, sexual abuse, grooming, emotional or psychological harm, neglect or family violence.

It doesn’t have to involve physical contact or force. Child abuse can include:

- talking to a child in a sexually explicit way
- grooming a child for future sexual activity
- forcing a child to watch pornography
- being witness to family violence
- failing to provide a child with an adequate standard of nutrition, supervision or medical care to the extent that the development of the child is placed at.

Signs of possible child abuse

**PHYSICAL INDICATORS**

- bruises, welts, cuts/grazes or burns (especially those on back, bottom, legs, arms and inner thighs or in unusual configurations and may resemble an object)
- internal injuries and bone fractures not consistent with the explanation offered
- any injury to the genital or rectal area (e.g. bruising, bleeding, infection or anything causing pain to go to the toilet)
- wearing clothes unsuitable for weather conditions to hide injuries
- sexually-transmitted diseases and/or frequent urinary tract infections
- appearing consistently dirty and unwashed and/or inappropriately dressed for weather conditions
- being consistently hungry, tired and listless
- having unattended health problems and lack of routine medical care.

**BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS**

- disclosure of abuse and/or drawings or writing which depicts violence and abuse
- habitual absences from school without reasonable explanation
- significant and unexplained delays in emotional, mental or physical development
- regressive or unusual changes to behaviour (e.g. sudden decline in academic performance, nervousness, depression, withdrawal, hyperactivity, aggression, bedwetting)
- drug or alcohol misuse, suicide or self-harm, harm to others or animals
- an inconsistent or unlikely explanation for an injury, or inability to remember the cause
- reluctance to go home and/or a wariness or fear of a parent/carer
- unusual fear of physical contact with adults
- persistent and age-inappropriate sexual activity (e.g. excessive masturbation or rubbing genitals against adults, promiscuity)
- poor self-care or personal hygiene
- an unusually close connection with an older person
- possessing expensive gifts or money (e.g. a new mobile phone given to them by a “friend”)
- taking on a caretaker role prematurely, trying to protect other family members.
Reporting a belief

Staff members, whether or not mandated, need to report their belief when the belief is formed in the course of undertaking their professional duties. A report must be made as soon as practicable after forming the belief and on each occasion on which they become aware of any further reasonable grounds for the belief.

If one staff member has a different view from another staff member about making a report and the staff member continues to hold the belief that a child is in need of protection, that person is obliged to make a report to Child Protection.

See Appendix A: FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS, DISCLOSURES & SUSPICIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

Protecting the identity of the reporter

Confidentiality is provided for reporters under the CYFA. The CYFA prevents disclosure of the name or any information likely to lead to the identification of a person who has made a report in accordance with legislation, except in specific circumstances.

The identity of a reporter must remain confidential unless:

- the reporter chooses to inform the child, young person or family of the report
- the reporter consents in writing to their identity being disclosed
- a court or tribunal decides that it is necessary for the identity of the reporter to be disclosed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child
- a court or tribunal decides that, in the interests of justice, the reporter is required to attend court to provide evidence.

Information provided during a protective investigation may be used in a court report if the risks to the child or young person require the case to proceed to court. In these circumstances, the source of the information may be required to provide evidence to the court.

If Child Protection decides that the report is about a significant concern for the wellbeing of a child, they may refer the report to a community-based child and family service and disclose the identity of the reporter to that service. However, the CYFA provides that neither Child Protection nor the community-based child and family service may disclose the reporter’s identity to any other person without the reporter’s consent.

Professional protection for reporters

If a report is made in good faith:

- it does not constitute unprofessional conduct or a breach of professional ethics on the part of the reporter
- the reporter cannot be held legally liable in respect of the report.

This means that a person who makes a report in accordance with the legislation will not be held liable for the eventual outcome of any investigation of the report.

Failure to report

A failure by mandated professionals and staff members to report a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection from significant harm as a result of physical or sexual abuse may result in the person being prosecuted and a court imposing a fine under the CYFA.
Making a report to Child Protection

The CYFA allows for two types of reports to be made in relation to significant concerns for the safety or wellbeing of a child – a report to Child Protection or a referral to Child FIRST.

A report to Child Protection should be considered if, after taking into account all of the available information, the staff member forms a view that the child or young person is in need of protection because:

- the harm or risk of harm has a serious impact on the child’s immediate safety, stability or development
- the harm or risk of harm is persistent and entrenched and is likely to have a serious impact on the child’s safety, stability or development
- the child’s parents cannot or will not protect the child or young person from harm.

Where during the course of carrying out their normal duties, a school staff member forms the belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection, the staff member must make a report to Child Protection regarding this belief and the reasonable grounds for it as soon as practicable.

Staff members may form a professional judgement or belief, in the course of undertaking their professional duties based on:

- warning signs or indicators of harm that have been observed or inferred from information about the child
- legal requirements, such as mandatory reporting
- knowledge of child and adolescent development
- consultation with colleagues and other professionals
- professional obligations and duty-of-care responsibilities
- established protocols
- internal policies and procedures in an individual licensed children’s service or school.

Upon receipt of a report, Child Protection may seek further information, usually from professionals who may also be involved with the child or family, to determine whether further action is required.

In most circumstances, Child Protection will inform the reporter of the outcome of the report. When the report is classified by Child Protection as a Wellbeing Report, Child Protection will, in turn, make a referral to Child FIRST.

Any person who is registered as a teacher under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006, or any person who has been granted permission to teach under that Act, including principals, is mandated to make a report to Child Protection. In the course of undertaking their professional duties, mandated staff members are required to report their belief, when the belief is formed on reasonable grounds, that a child is in need of protection from significant harm as a result of sexual abuse or physical injury.

School policy and procedures stipulate how teaching staff fulfil their duty of care towards children and young people in their school.

Teachers are encouraged to discuss any concerns about the safety and wellbeing of students with the principal or a member of the school leadership team. If a principal or member of the leadership team does not wish to make a mandatory report, this does not discharge the teacher’s obligation to do so if they have formed a reasonable belief that abuse may have occurred. If the teacher’s concerns continue, even after consultation with the principal or member of the leadership team, that teacher is still legally obliged to make a mandatory report of their concerns.

Information about the identity of a person making a report to Child Protection must be kept confidential unless the reporter consents to the disclosure of their identity. If the staff member wishes to remain anonymous, this information should be conveyed at the time that the reporter makes the mandatory report.
The role of school staff

School staff have a duty of care to protect and preserve the safety, health and wellbeing of children and young people in their care and staff must always act in the best interests of those children and young people. If a staff member has any concerns regarding the health, safety or wellbeing of a child or young person it is important to take immediate action.

Note: The role of investigating an allegation of child abuse rests solely with Child Protection and/or Victoria Police.

The roles and responsibilities of staff in supporting children and young people who are involved with Child Protection may include acting as a support person for students, attending Child Protection case plan meetings, observing and monitoring students’ behaviour, and liaising with professionals.

Providing Ongoing Support

As per the Four Critical Actions for Schools Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse, Goornong Primary School will support children impacted by abuse. This may include:

- Referral to wellbeing professionals.
- The development of a Student Support Plan and/or Student Safety Plan in consultation with wellbeing professionals.

Confidentiality

Staff must respect confidentiality when dealing with a case of suspected child abuse and neglect, and may discuss case details and the identity of the child or the young person and their family only with those involved in managing the situation.

When a child or young person has moved to another school, professional judgement should be exercised as to what information needs to be passed on. This will be guided by usual procedures for passing on information about a child’s general wellbeing or special needs, and the role of the school in any ongoing care plans.

Interviews at Victorian schools

Child Protection may conduct interviews of children and young people at school without parental knowledge or consent. However, a child will be interviewed at a Victorian school only in exceptional circumstances and if it is in the child’s best interests to proceed in this manner. Child Protection will notify the school of any intention to interview a child or young person. This may occur regardless of whether the school is the source of the report to Child Protection.

When Child Protection practitioners arrive at the school, the principal or their nominee should ask to see their identification before allowing Child Protection to have access to the child or young person.

Support persons

Children and young people should be advised of their right to have a supportive adult present during interviews. If a child is too young to understand the significance of the interview, a staff member should make arrangements for a supportive adult to attend with the child.

A staff member may be identified as a support person for the child or young person during the interview. Prior to the commencement of the interview, the Child Protection practitioner should always authorise the staff member to receive information regarding Child Protection’s investigation.

This may occur verbally or in writing using the relevant Child Protection proforma.

Independent persons must refrain from providing their opinions or accounts of events during interviews. A principal or their delegate may act as an independent person when the child or young person is to be interviewed, unless they believe that doing so will create a conflict of interest.
Advising parents, carers or guardians

Staff do not require the permission of parents, carers or guardians to make a report to Child Protection, nor are they required to tell parents, carers or guardians that they have done so.

It is the responsibility of Child Protection to advise the parents, carers or guardians of the interview at the earliest possible opportunity. This should occur either before, or by the time the child arrives home.

Ensuring that a Child Protection interview takes place

The school does not have the power to prevent parents, carers or guardians from removing their children from the school and should not attempt to prevent the parents, carers or guardians from collecting the child. If a parent/carer or guardian removes a child before a planned interview has taken place, the principal and/or their nominee should contact Child Protection or Victoria Police immediately.

Staff Training

Staff will be informed of Mandatory Reporting requirements as part of their initial induction to the school and will be provided with supporting documentation in their staff handbook.

Updates will take place annually as part of the Performance and Development/Staff meeting rotation.

References:


Evaluation:

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FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS
Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

PROTECT

1. RESPONDING TO AN EMERGENCY
If there is no risk of immediate harm go to Action 2.
If a child is at immediate risk of harm you must ensure their safety by:
- separating alleged victims and others involved
- administering first aid
- calling 000 for urgent medical and/or police assistance to respond to immediate health or safety concerns
- identifying a contact person at the school for future liaison with Police.

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- separating alleged victims and others involved
- administering first aid
- calling 000 for urgent medical and/or police assistance to respond to immediate health or safety concerns
- identifying a contact person at the school for future liaison with Police.

2. REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES
As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed you must report all incidents, suspicions and disclosures of child abuse as soon as possible. Failure to report physical and sexual child abuse may amount to a criminal offence.

Q: Where does the source of suspected abuse come from?

WITHIN THE SCHOOL

VICTORIA POLICE
You must report all instances of suspected child abuse involving a school staff member, contractor or volunteer to Victoria Police.

Government schools:
- School Principal and/or leadership team
- Employee Conduct Branch
- DET Security Services Unit

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS
- School Principal and/or leadership team
- Diocesan education office

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS
- School Principal and/or school chairperson

WITHIN THE FAMILY OR COMMUNITY

DHHS CHILD PROTECTION
You must report to DHHS Child Protection if a child is considered to be:
- in need of protection from child abuse
- at risk of being harmed or has been harmed and the harm has had, or is likely to have, a serious impact on the child's safety, stability or development.

VICTORIA POLICE
You must also report any instances of suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police.

DHHS CHILD PROTECTION
You must report to DHHS Child Protection if a child is considered to be:
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VICTORIA POLICE
You must also report any instances of suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police.

GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS
- School Principal and/or leadership team
- DET Security Services Unit

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS
- School Principal and/or leadership team
- Diocesan education office

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS
- School Principal and/or school chairperson

3. CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS
Your Principal must consult with DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers. They may advise:
- not to contact the parent/carers (e.g., in circumstances where the parents are alleged to have engaged in the abuse, or the child is a mature minor and does not wish for their parent/carer to be contacted)
- to contact the parent/carers and provide agreed information (this must be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day of the incident disclosure or suspicion).

4. PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT
Your school must provide support for children impacted by a abuse. This should include the development of a Student Support Plan in consultation with wellbeing professionals. This is an essential part of your duty of care requirements.

If you believe that a child is not subject to abuse, but you still hold significant concerns for their wellbeing, you must still act.

This may include making a referral or seeking advice from Child FIRST (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support), or to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police.

CONTACT

DHHS CHILD PROTECTION
- North Division: 1300 864 9777
- South Division: 1300 865 755
- East Division: 1300 360 391
- West Division (Rural): 1800 075 599
- West Division (Metrop): 1300 864 9777

AFTER HOURS
- After hours, weekends, public holidays: 13 13 78

CHILD FIRST
- www.dhs.vic.gov.au
- VICTORIA POLICE
- 000 or your local police station

DET SECURITY SERVICES UNIT
- (03) 5589 6266

STUDENT INCIDENT AND RECOVERY UNIT
- (03) 9573 2934

EMPLOYEE CONDUCT BRANCH
- (03) 9573 2856

DIOCESAN OFFICE
- Melbourne: (03) 9877 0128
- Ballarat: (03) 5377 7115
- Sale: (03) 6922 6600
- Sandhurst: (03) 5643 2377

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS
- VIC: (03) 1825 7200
A step-by-step guide to making a report to Child Protection or Child FIRST

Protective concerns
You are concerned about a child because you have:
- received a disclosure from a child about abuse or neglect
- observed indicators of abuse or neglect
- been made aware of possible harm via your involvement in the community external to your professional role.

At all times remember to:
- record your observations
- follow appropriate protocols
- consult notes and records
- consult with appropriate colleagues if necessary
- consult with other support agencies if necessary

STEP 1
RESPONDING TO CONCERNS

1. If your concerns relate to a child in need of immediate protection, or you have formed a belief that a child is at significant risk of harm:
   **Go to Step 4**

2. If you have significant concerns that a child and their family need a referral to Child FIRST for family services:
   **Go to Step 3**

3. In all other situations:
   **Go to Step 2**

**Refers to Appendix 2: Definitions of child abuse and indicators of harm in the Protecting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.”

**STEP 2
FORMING A BELIEF ON REASONABLE GROUNDS

1. Consider the level of immediate danger to the child.
   - Ask yourself:
     a. Have I formed a belief that the child has suffered or is at risk of suffering significant harm?
     b. Am I confident about the child’s safety and the parent’s ability to protect the child?
     - YES/NO

2. If you answered yes to a) or b):
   **Go to Step 4**

3. If you have significant concerns that a child and their family need a referral to Child FIRST for family services:
   **Go to Step 3**

**STEP 3
MAKING A REFERRAL TO CHILD FIRST

Child Wellbeing Referral
1. Contact your local Child FIRST provider:
   - See over for contact list for local Child FIRST phone numbers.
   - Have notes ready with your observations and child and family details.

**STEP 4
MAKE A REPORT TO CHILD PROTECTION

Mandatory/Protective Report
1. Contact your local Child Protection Intake provider immediately:
   - For over for contact list for local Child Protection Intake numbers.
   - For After Hours Child Protection Emergency Services, call
   **131 278**
   - Have notes ready with your observations and child and family details.
   - Non-manualised staff members who believe a child is in need of protection are able to report their concerns to Child Protection

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**Office for Children and Licensed Children’s Services:**

| **METROPOLITAN REGIONS** | Eastern | 1300 580 555 |
|                        | Northern | 1300 680 700 |
|                        | Western | 1300 680 700 |
|                        | Southern | 1800 580 550 |
| **RURAL REGIONS** | Barwon South Western | 1800 372 700 |
|                  | Gippsland | 1800 362 555 |
|                  | Grampians | 1800 592 555 |
|                  | Humpty Doo | 1300 662 555 |
|                  | Loddon Mallee | 1800 662 555 |

**Important information for government schools:**

Principals of Victorian Government schools must report all incidents to the Emergency and Security Management Unit on 03 9485 6266.

Victorian Government schools should contact the Student Critical Incident Advisory Unit (SCIAU), Student Wellbeing Division, for advice and support when responding to allegations of student sexual assault or inappropriate sexual behaviour.

The SCIAU can be contacted on 03 9485 3266.

Victorian Government School Principals should refer to the Benchmark – Guidelines for Managing Student Sexual Assault.

For further information refer to Protecting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people – A joint protocol of the Department of Human Services Child Protection, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Licensed Children’s Services and Victorian Schools.