

Protecting Children — Reporting and other legal obligations

Audience: School Community

If you need an interpreter or other help to understand this policy please contact the Deputy Principal on 5623 5833.

Policy

The purpose of this policy is to:

- ensure school staff are aware of and comply with their legal responsibilities to protect the safety and wellbeing of children and young people
- explain the process following a report to Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Child Protection

Summary

School staff have a range of legal obligations with respect to protecting children and young people from abuse.

- School staff must be aware of and comply with their legal obligations with respect to reporting suspected child abuse and providing ongoing appropriate support.
- School staff must follow the Four Critical Actions (Appendix 5 or 6) where there is an incident, disclosure or suspicion of child abuse/sexual assault.
- Where a school staff member has reported a concern to DFFH Child Protection, but they continue to have concerns for the child after DFFH Child Protection has closed the case, they may escalate the matter through DFFH complaints management processes.

Details

School staff play a vital role in protecting children from harm and are well placed to observe signs or behaviours that may indicate risks of child abuse.

School staff must act, by following the Four Critical Actions, as soon as they witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a reasonable belief that a child has, or is at risk of being abused.

Fulfilling the roles and responsibilities contained in the procedures of this document does not displace or discharge any other obligations that arise if a person reasonably believes that a child is at risk of child abuse.

Recognising different types of child abuse

Types of child abuse include:

- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- grooming
- family violence
- emotional abuse
- neglect

For information, refer to: Appendix 3

Making a report or referral — the Four Critical Actions

Refer to the section below on 'Reporting obligations where there is a concern that a child is being abused' for information on the legal reporting obligations of all school staff.

School staff must follow the Four Critical Actions when responding to an incident, disclosure or suspicion of child abuse (see Appendix 5 or 6)

Critical Action 1: Responding to an emergency

If there is not risk of immediate harm go to Action 2.

If a child is at immediate risk of harm school staff 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

School staff may also need to maintain the integrity of the potential crime scene and preserve evidence.

Critical Action 2: Reporting to authorities/referring to services

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed school staff must report all incidents, suspicions and disclosures of child abuse as soon as practicable. Failure to report physical and sexual child abuse may amount to a criminal offence.

If the source of suspected abuse comes from within the school, then do the following.

Victoria Police

School staff must report all instances of suspected child abuse involving a school staff member, contractor or volunteer to Victoria Police (call 000 or your local police station). School staff must also report internally to:

- Respective Head of School or Deputy Principal/Principal

All allegations of 'reportable conduct' must also be reported as soon as possible the Respective Head of School or Deputy Principal/Principal.

If the source of suspected abuse comes from within the family or community, then do the following.

DFFH Child Protection

School staff must report to DFFH 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 and the parents have not protected or are unlikely to protect the child.

School staff must also report internally to:

- Respective Head of School or Deputy Principal/Principal

Victoria Police

School staff must also report all instances of suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police (call 000 or your local police station).

School staff must also report internally to:

- Respective Head of School or Deputy Principal/Principal

Other concerns

If a school staff member believes that a child is not subject to abuse, but they still hold significant concerns for the child's wellbeing the school staff member must still act. This may include making a referral or seeking advice from:

- Child FIRST / the Orange Door (in circumstances where the school staff member believes the family is open to receiving support)
- The Lookout has a service directory, information, and guidance to help you respond to family violence
- Family violence victims/survivors can be referred to 1800 Respect for counselling, information and a referral service: 1800 737 732
- DFFH Child Protection
- Victoria Police — call 000 or your local police station

Critical Action 3: contacting parents/carers

The Respective Head of School or Deputy Principal/Principal must consult with DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police (call 000 or your local police station) to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers. They may advise:

- not to contact the parents/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 parents/carers and provide agreed information (this must be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion)
- how to communicate with all relevant parties with consideration for their safety

Critical Action 4: providing ongoing support

The school must provide support for children impacted by abuse. This can include the development of a student support plan in consultation with wellbeing professionals. This is an essential part of the school's duty of care requirements.

Strategies may include development of a safety plan, direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals and support services.

School staff must follow the Four Critical Actions every time they become aware of a further instance or risk of abuse. This includes reporting new information to authorities.

Reporting obligations where there is a concern that a child is being abused

For information on how to report a suspicion, disclosure or incident of abuse, see the Four Critical Actions (Appendix 5 and 6) and 'How to Make a Mandatory Report' contained within this document (p.5).

Failure to disclose

All adults must report to Victoria Police where they form a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child **under the age of 16**.

Failure to disclose the information may be a criminal offence unless you have a 'reasonable excuse' or have an 'exemption' from doing so.

If you are an adult that reasonably believes that a sexual offence has been committed against a child under the age of 16 by another adult, then you must call Victoria Police on 000 or your local police station.

For more information, visit the Department of Justice and Community Safety website: Failure to disclose offence.

Report student sexual offending

If you witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a suspicion that a student is a victim of a student sexual offending, or a student has engaged in student sexual offending you must act immediately by following the Four Critical actions (Appendix 6).

Failure to protect

Principals or school leadership staff, who become aware that an adult associated with the school (such as an employee, contractor, volunteer or visitor) poses a risk of sexual abuse (including through grooming) to a child under the care of the school, must take all reasonable steps to remove or reduce that risk.

This may include, for example, removing the adult from child-related work pending investigation. Failure to do so may be a criminal offence.

This applies to any staff member in a position of authority (e.g. Heads of School, Deputy Principal/Principal).

For more information, visit the Department of Justice and Community Safety website: Failure to protect offence.

Reportable Conduct Scheme

The school must notify the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) as soon as possible after becoming aware of an allegation of reportable conduct.

There is an allegation of reportable conduct where a person has a reasonable belief that there has been:

- a sexual offence, sexual misconduct or physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of a child, or
- behaviour causing significant emotional or psychological harm to a child, or
- significant neglect of a child, or
- misconduct involving any of the above

The school will report allegations of 'reportable conduct' raised against employees (and contractors, volunteers, allied health workers and other office holders) who are 18 years or over to the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP).

For more information refer to the Reportable Conduct Scheme.

Mandatory reporting

A mandatory reporter must report to the DFFH Child Protection as soon as practicable if, in the course of practising their profession or carrying out their duties, they form a belief on reasonable grounds that:

- a child (**aged under 17**) has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical and/or sexual abuse, and
- the child's parents have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from harm of that type

It may be a criminal offence not to report in these circumstances. 'If in doubt, report'.

Mandatory Reporters are:

- registered medical practitioners
- nurses
- midwives
- registered teachers and early childhood teachers
- principals of government and non-government schools
- school counsellors
- police officers
- out of home care workers (other than voluntary foster and kinship carers)
- early childhood workers
- youth justice workers
- registered psychologists
- people in religious ministry*

This means that, at St Paul's Anglican Grammar School, the following people are Mandatory Reporters:

- all teachers
- the Principal
- medical practitioners
- nurses
- school counsellors
- registered psychologists
- early childhood workers
- persons in religious ministry*

*"Person in religious ministry" is defined by the CYFA to mean "a person appointed, ordained or otherwise recognised as a religious or spiritual leader in a religious institution". This definition includes a chaplain, priest, pastor, minister, brother and nun.

Application to Students Aged 17 or Over

The legislative requirements for *Mandatory Reporting to Child Protection* apply only with respect to students aged 16 or under. Therefore, a reasonable belief that a student aged 17 or over is in need of protection as a result of physical or sexual abuse cannot be reported to Child Protection.

A reasonable belief that a student aged 17 years or older has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm as a result of physical injury or sexual abuse should instead be reported to the Police. Reporting to Police for students aged over 18 (for Mandatory Reporting NOT sexual assault which must always be reported) can only occur if the student consents to the report, or, if they do not consent, to lessen or prevent a serious or imminent threat to an individual's life, health, safety or welfare. For more information, refer to Information Sharing with Consent, Information Sharing Without Consent and Reporting to Police.

Internal reporting procedures

It is the School's policy that all child safety incidents and concerns involving a student, including those involving students aged 17 and over, must be reported internally to the respective Head of School or in their absence the Deputy Head or the Deputy Principal/Principal. Therefore, even if an external report is not possible, staff members have the same internal reporting obligations with respect to a reasonable belief of physical or sexual abuse of a student aged 17 or over as they do for students aged 16 or under.

Any child protection report made to any agency or the Police will be noted (deidentified) on the School's Child Protection Incident Register by either the relevant Head of School or the Deputy Principal. Summary data of these reports (deidentified) will be reported to the School Board Risk Committee on a regular basis.

Child in need of therapeutic treatment

Any person who believes on reasonable grounds that a child over 10 but under 18 years of age has been exhibiting sexually abusive behaviours and may be in need of therapeutic treatment may make a report to DFFH Child Protection.

School staff must also report student sexual offending to the Victoria Police.

For more information, refer to: Identify and Respond to Student Sexual Offending (DET).

Significant concerns for the wellbeing of a child

All concerns about the wellbeing of a child (or unborn child) should be taken seriously and acted upon. Any adult can make a referral to Child FIRST/The Orange Door if they:

- have a significant concern for a child's wellbeing
- the issue of concern has a low-to-moderate impact on the child
- the child's immediate safety is not compromised
- believe that the child and/or family will act on the referral and be supportive of it

School staff must contact Victoria Police if:

- there is any concern for a child's immediate safety and/or
- a child is partaking in any risk-taking activity that is illegal and extreme in nature or poses a high risk to the child or any other person

School staff can contact DFFH Child Protection if:

- after consideration of all available information you form a view that the child is in need of protection and
- you believe that the child's parents/carers will not be open to support from family services to address their child's wellbeing

For contact details visit:

- Child FIRST Child and family services
- The Orange Door
- The Lookout service directory — for information, and guidance to help you respond to family violence
- 1800 RESPECT— for family violence victims/survivors to be referred to counselling and information
- DFFH Child Protection — visit 'Making a report to child protection'
- Victoria Police — call 000 or your local police station
- Appendix 1

How to Make a Mandatory Report to Child Protection

Whenever there are concerns that a child is in immediate danger the Police should be called on 000.

Under the CYFA, Mandatory Reports must be made to a 'protective intervenor'. Protective intervenors are defined in the CYFA as the Secretary of Child Protection (or their delegate) and all Police officers.

If you have contacted the Police, either as a result of Responding to an Emergency or Reporting to Police, then you have made your Mandatory Report.

If you have not contacted Police, you must report to Child Protection. You must do this by:

- during business hours (8:45am-5:00pm, Monday to Friday), telephoning the Child Protection intake service for the local government area where the child resides, see Appendix 1.
- after hours, telephoning Child Protection on 13 12 78.

Reports to Child Protection cannot be made via the Child Protection website or email, as staff who monitor the Child Protection website are not delegated officers of the Child Protection Secretary.

You should provide as much of the following information as you can. The respective Head of School will provide guidance in this regard. **See below for school confidential document storage requirements.**

- details – the child's or young person's name, age and address; parents/carers names, addresses and phone numbers.
- indicators of harm – the reason for believing that the injury or behaviour is the result of abuse or neglect
- reason for reporting – the reason why the call is being made now
- safety assessment – assessment of immediate danger to the child or children. For example, information may be sought on the whereabouts of the alleged abuser or abusers
- description – description of the injury or behaviour observed
- child's whereabouts – the current whereabouts of the child or young person
- other services – your knowledge of other services involved with the family
- family information – any other information about the family
- cultural characteristics – any specific cultural or other details that will help to care for the child, for example, cultural origins, interpreter, or disability needs.
- Support/counselling provide/to be provided
- Planned follow up with student and/or family, as appropriate.

Document storage requirements

Staff **must** document their internal report on **PROTECT Recording your actions: Responding to suspected child abuse - A Template for Victorian Schools or Student Sexual Offending Record Keeping Template** (see the Child Safety Record Keeping on Policy Connect or your respective Head of School for a copy).

The report should be recorded in a **confidential Pastoral Care Record** (subject: Student Wellbeing) and under the 'confidential' tab on the record the comment 'record on Synergetic'. The completed template (see above) is then to be handed to or emailed to the Executive Assistant of the Principal or Deputy Principal for filing under 'confidential' on Synergetic. This record is not to be uploaded to MyStPauls.

What happens when you make a report to DFFH Child Protection?

Confidentiality and professional protections

When you make a report, your identity as a reporter must remain confidential unless:

- you choose to inform the child, young person or parent of the report
- you consent in writing to your identity being disclosed
- a court or tribunal decides that it is necessary for your identity to be disclosed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child
- a court or tribunal decides that you in the interests of justice the evidence needs to be given

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

The process once you report to DFFH Child Protection

Intake

When you make a report to DFFH Child Protection, your report will be received by the intake team. Intake determines the appropriate response and provides advice to reporters including advice about where children and families can access support services. Intake will decide whether your report should proceed to referral or investigation.

Investigation

If your report is classified as a protective intervention report and/or a therapeutic treatment report, it will proceed to investigation by DFFH Child Protection. An investigation establishes if a child is in need of protection as defined by the law. An investigation involves interviews with the child and parents.

Requests for information

DFFH Child Protection, Child FIRST/The Orange Door, and/or Victoria Police may request information from school staff about the child or family to investigate a report and assess the risk or wellbeing concerns of the child.

When sharing information with DFFH Child Protection, school teachers, principals, kindergarten teachers and any person in charge of an education service may disclose information to Child Protection in good faith in accordance with the Children Youth and Families Act 2005. This disclosure of information does not constitute unprofessional conduct or a breach of professional ethics, or expose the person to any liability.

Before providing student/parent information to DFFH or Victoria Police, over the phone, staff are advised to ask for an email from anyone calling to request such information, in order to verify their identity. The email string should show their place of employment.

Interviews

As part of an investigation, DFFH Child Protection and/or Victoria Police may conduct interviews of children at the school without the parent/carer's knowledge or consent. Child Protection would only interview children at school where it is in the best interests of the child.

No student should attend such an interview without a trusted member of school staff present.

Decision

After an investigation has been undertaken, DFFH Child Protection will decide whether the report has been substantiated and protective intervention is required.

Witness summons

If DFFH Child Protection makes a protection application in the Children's Court, school staff might be required to produce documents or give evidence in court if requested. This is called a subpoena or a witness summons. If such documents are required by the courts, all names pertaining to other students or staff are to be redacted.

Protection order phase

If the court finds that the child is in need of protection and that an order is required to promote the child's ongoing safety and development, they will grant a protection order.

The primary role of the Child Protection practitioner during this phase is to administer the protection order made by the Children's Court and continue to engage with the child and family to address the protective concerns.

Support for the child or young person

Before, during, and after the DFFH Child Protection process, school staff must provide ongoing support for children impacted by abuse. School staff can support students by:

- developing a student support plan in consultation with wellbeing professionals
- acting as a support person for the child
- attending DFFH Child Protection case planning meetings
- observing and monitoring the child's behaviour
- referring to and/or liaising with wellbeing professionals

Escalating concerns

Where a school staff member continues to have concerns about a child after DFFH Child Protection has closed the case, the school can escalate the matter by:

- using DFFH Child Protection's complaints management process

Training obligations

School staff will annually review the Protecting Children – Reporting and Other Legal Obligations document. The review will involve the completion of a electronic training module or quiz and staff participation will be recorded by the respective Head of School.

What if Child Protection, or the Police, contact you for information on a student or want to come on campus to interview a student?

Staff must verify the identity of any person/s seeking information about a student/family of the school, before providing assistance. The respective Head of School should be contacted and will advise staff of the appropriate approach based on specific circumstances. However, in general:

- Verify the identity of the person seeking information (eg. sight ID in person, ask for an email to be sent when phone calls are made or ask for information that only they could know if legitimate)

- Contact the family of the student involved (if they do not pose a threat/are not part of the complaint) and ask if they would like to attend to be part of the interview.
- Offer a staff member in place of a parent to attend an interview on campus.
- Never allow a student to attend an interview on campus without a staff member present (preferably offer them a choice in this regard).
- Never allow another student to be the support person in such an instance, unless you have parental permission and a member of school staff is still in attendance.

Other legal obligations relating to suspicions, disclosures or incidents of child abuse

Duty of care

All school staff have a duty of care to take reasonable steps to protect children under their care from harm that is reasonably foreseeable. In relation to suspected child abuse, reasonable steps may include (but are not limited to):

- acting on concerns and suspicions of abuse as soon as practicable
- seeking appropriate advice or consulting with other professionals or agencies
- reporting the suspected child abuse to appropriate authorities such as Victoria Police and DFFH Child Protection (refer to Four Critical Actions)
- arranging counselling and/or other appropriate welfare support for the child
- providing ongoing support to the child and young person
- sharing information with other school staff who will also be responsible for providing ongoing support to the child.

Child Safe Standards

All schools are required to comply with the Child Safe Standards and Ministerial Order 1359 — Child Safe Standards, to create and maintain a child safe organisation. For information on the Child Safe Standards, refer to Child Safe Standards online.

Related policies

- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy
- Child Safety Code of Conduct

Relevant legislation

- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)
- Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)
- Ministerial Order 1359 — Child Safe Standards

Policy History and Schedule

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Appendix 1

KEY CONTACTS

ISV – (03) 9825 7200

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing Child Protection (DFFH)

South Division intake

Cardinia, Casey, Bass Coast, Baw Baw, East Gippsland, Latrobe, South Gippsland, Wellington.

Phone number: **1300 655 795** (8.45am – 5.00pm Monday to Friday)

After hours: 131278

Child First/Orange Door

- Baw Baw - 1800 319 354
- Cardinia – 1800 271 170
- Casey – 1800 271 170
- East Gippsland – 1800 512 358
- La Trobe - 1800 319 354
- South Gippsland – 1800 319 354
- Wellington – 1800 512 358

COUNSELLING/SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

The Lookout

The Lookout is a Victorian Government initiative in partnership with the Domestic Violence Resources Centre Victoria, providing information, evidence-based resources and services to help professionals respond to family violence (including professionals in mainstream services, like schools).

The Lookout includes a service directory, with a lookup function, where you can enter a postcode and identify locally available family violence support services.

www.thelookout.org.au

Safe Steps

Safe steps offers at no cost to women, their children (family and friends) living with family violence, access to professional support through a comprehensive range of services to enable them to become – and stay – free from violence.

<http://www.safesteps.org.au/>

1800 015 188 (24/7 advice line)

1800 RESPECT

1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732), is a 24 hour, seven day a week National Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence hotline. Victims of family violence and/or sexual assault are encouraged to talk or chat online to a counsellor from the service.

www.1800respect.org.au

The Centre Against Sexual Assault

There are 15 Centres Against Sexual Assault, which work to ensure that women, children and men who are victim/survivors of sexual offending have access to comprehensive and timely support and intervention to address their needs.

<http://www.casa.org.au/>

1800 806 292

Gatehouse Centre, Royal Children's Hospital

Provides support and assistance to children and young people affected by sexual offending or problem sexual behaviours.

<https://www.rch.org.au/gatehouse/>

Children's Protection Society

Provide advice and support to children and families to help them break out of the cycle of abuse, neglect, poverty and disadvantage through a creative portfolio of programs, resources and services.

<https://www.cps.org.au/>

03 9450 0900

Australian Childhood Foundation

Provide recognised programs that counsel and support children to recovery; help professionals who work with children to better support at risk children; raise awareness of the causes and consequences of abuse.

<http://www.childhood.org.au/home/>

1800 176 453

Djirra

Djirra is an Aboriginal community controlled organisation, providing support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence and sexual assault. They work directly with families affected by violence.

<https://djirra.org.au/>

1800 105 303

Child Wise

Child Wise is Australia's leading international child protection charity committed to the prevention and reduction of sexual abuse and exploitation of children around the world.

<http://www.childwise.org.au/>

03 9695 8900

Headspace

Headspace is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation providing early intervention mental health services to 12- 25 year olds, along with assistance in promoting young peoples' wellbeing. This covers four core areas: mental health, physical health, work and study support and alcohol and other drug services.

Information and services for young people, their families and friends as well as health professionals can be accessed through this website, headspace centres, online counselling service eheadspace, and post-vention suicide support program headspace School Support.

<http://headspace.org.au/>

Appendix 2

STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING A DISCLOSURE

When managing a disclosure of abuse, it is important that you respond in an appropriate and supportive manner. All disclosures of abuse must be taken seriously and addressed immediately by following the [Four Critical Actions](#).

Disclosures from a student

It is the role of school staff members to listen and respond appropriately to a child's concerns. When a disclosure of abuse is made and/or you are concerned that a child has been abused or is at risk of being abused, you must help the child to understand that you need to seek assistance for them and cannot keep the discussion and/or their disclosure confidential between you and the student.

This should be done in language appropriate to the student's age and stage of development. For example:

- To a younger student: 'I need some help to support you and am not going to be able to keep what you have told me between you and me, I will need to tell ...[who you will tell].....to work out what to do to support you'
- To an older student: 'The information you have given me has made me very concerned for your welfare and I will need to share this information with my manager to identify how we may be able to support you. I may also need to talk to people who work in the child safety area, to help keep you safe.'

In instances where the abuse involves a family member (i.e. family violence) it may be appropriate to reassure the child that sharing this information is an important part of making their family safer and that you will be talking with other professionals who will help identify the next steps.

You must keep clear and comprehensive notes relating to incidents, disclosures and allegations of child abuse. You must keep such notes whether or not you decide to make a report. It is strongly recommended that you do this by using the [Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: Template \(see Appendix 5\)](#). If you do not use the template, you must still ensure you are making an effort to collect all the information that is required by the template. This may be critical for further investigations and/or legal proceedings.

The information below includes advice on how best to manage a disclosure and what to avoid.

When managing a disclosure, staff should:

- listen to the student and allow them to speak
- stay calm and use a neutral tone with no urgency and where possible use the child's language and vocabulary (you do not want to frighten the child or interrupt the child)
- be gentle, patient and non-judgmental throughout
- highlight to the student it was important for them to tell you about what has happened
- assure them that they are not to blame for what has occurred
- do not ask leading questions, for example gently ask, "What happened next?" rather than "Why?"
- be patient and allow the child to talk at their own pace and in their own words
- do not pressure the child into telling you more than they want to, they will be asked a lot of questions by other professionals and it is important not to force them to retell what has occurred multiple times
- reassure the child that you believe them and that disclosing the matter was important for them to do

- use verbal facilitators such as, “*I see*”, restate the child’s previous statement, and use non-suggestive words of encouragement, designed to keep the child talking in an open-ended way (“*what happened next?*”)
- tell the child in age appropriate language you are required to report to the relevant authority to help stop the abuse, and explain the role of these authorities if appropriate (for a young child this may be as simple as saying “I will need to talk to people to work out what to do next to help you”).

When managing a disclosure, staff should AVOID:

- displaying expressions of panic or shock
- asking questions that are investigative and potentially invasive (this may make the child feel uncomfortable and may cause the child to withdraw)
- going over the information repeatedly (you are only gathering information to help you form a belief on reasonable grounds that you need to make a report to the relevant authority)
- making any comments that would lead the student to believe that what has happened is their fault
- making promises to the child about what will occur next or that things will be different given the process can be unpredictable and different for each child depending on their circumstances (instead reassure them that you and others will do your best to help).

Disclosures from a parent/carer or sibling

There may be circumstances where a student’s sibling or parent/carer discloses abuse. For example a student’s parent or carer may disclose family violence (noting that if a child’s parent or carer is experiencing family violence it is highly likely that the child is experiencing abuse).

In this circumstance it is important to draw on the same strategies that you would for a student (i.e. listen, be non-judgemental, patient and do not apply pressure). In relation to experiences of family violence, it is particularly critical to remain non- judgemental, avoid apportioning blame to the victim/s and highlight that everyone has the right to feel safe.

This can be done by focusing questions to determine what the risk of harm may be and what (if any) supports and interventions are in place to protect the wellbeing of the child and avoiding statements like “why don’t you leave”.

For example, you could use questions to explore the victim’s view about their level of risk and risk to their child, such as ‘Do you think the violence will continue? Is the violence getting worse?’

It is also important to remember that many victims of family violence experience fear for their safety (and the safety of their children) in disclosing their experiences. They may have been threatened by the perpetrator of violence, or threats made about their children’s lives.

Forming a reasonable belief

If you witness, suspect, or receive a disclosure of child abuse including exposure to family violence, you will need to determine whether you have formed a ‘reasonable belief’ or a ‘belief on reasonable grounds’ that a child has or is being abused or is at risk of being abused.

A reasonable belief is a deliberately low threshold:

- so that people are encouraged to report suspected abuse to the relevant authorities and agencies, enabling authorities to investigate the allegations and take further action to prevent or stop any further abuse
- which does not require proof, but does require something more than a mere rumour or speculation
- and is met if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds.

Forming a belief on reasonable grounds may include:

- a child stating that they have been abused
- any person telling you they believe someone has been abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves)
- physical indicators of abuse such as non-accidental or unexplained injuries; persistent neglect, or inadequate care and supervision lead you to believe that the child has been abused (see Appendix 3)
- behavioural indicators of abuse lead you to believe that the child has been abused (see Appendix 3)
- other signs such as family violence, parental substance misuse, psychiatric illness or intellectual disability that is impacting on the child's safety, stability or development.

Appendix 3

IDENTIFYING SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE

CRITICAL INFORMATION

As a school staff member:

- it is critical to be able to recognise the physical or behavioural signs of child abuse (in many circumstances they may be the only indication that a child is subject to abuse)
- you may be the best-placed or only adult in a position to identify and respond to suspected abuse.

If indicators lead you to form a reasonable belief that a child is being abused, you must follow the Four Critical Actions. These actions will support you to immediately report your suspicion to DFFH Child Protection, and/ or to Victoria Police.

Trigger warning

This section includes explicit descriptions of abuse and may be distressing to engage with for some staff members.

If you need to talk to someone it is recommended that you speak to your school leadership team about arranging appropriate support. You can also talk to your GP or another allied health professional.

St Paul's school staff can also contact the Employee Assistance Program on 1800 242 696.

As a school staff member, you play a critical role in protecting children from child abuse. In some cases you may be the best- placed, or only adult in a child's life who is in a position to identify and respond to signs that a:

- child is being abused, or is at risk of abuse
- school community member (including a school staff member) may be a perpetrator of child abuse.

This section will help you to understand the different types of abuse and recognise the possible physical and behavioural indicators of:

- physical child abuse
- child sexual abuse
- grooming
- family violence
- emotional child abuse
- neglect.

When identifying child abuse, it is critical to remember that:

- some instances of child abuse will fall across multiple categories (i.e. family violence may involve physical, sexual and/or emotional child abuse)
- the trauma associated with child abuse can significantly impact upon the wellbeing and development of a child
- all concerns about the safety and wellbeing of a child, or the conduct of a staff member, contractor or volunteer must be acted upon as soon as possible.

If physical and/or behavioural indicators lead you to suspect that a child has or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse, regardless of the type of abuse, you must respond as soon as practicable by following the Four Critical Actions.

PHYSICAL CHILD ABUSE

CRITICAL INFORMATION

Physical child abuse is any non-accidental infliction of physical violence on a child by any person.

If you suspect that a child has been or is being physically abused, or is at risk of physical abuse, you must respond by following the [Four Critical Actions](#).

What is physical child abuse?

Physical child abuse can consist of any non-accidental infliction of physical violence on a child by any person. Examples of physical abuse may include beating, shaking or burning, assault with implements and female genital mutilation.

PHYSICAL indicators of physical child abuse include (but are not limited to):

- bruises or welts on facial areas and other areas of the body, e.g. back, bottom, legs, arms and inner thighs
- bruises or welts in unusual configurations, or those that look like the object used to make the injury, e.g. fingerprints, handprints, buckles, iron or teeth
- burns from boiling water, oil or flames or burns that show the shape of the object used to make them, e.g. iron, grill, cigarette
- fractures of the skull, jaw, nose and limbs (especially those not consistent with the explanation offered, or the type of injury possible at the child's age of development)
- cuts and grazes to the mouth, lips, gums, eye area, ears and external genitalia
- bald patches where hair has been pulled out
- multiple injuries, old and new
- effects of poisoning
- internal injuries.

What are the behavioural indicators of physical child abuse?

BEHAVIOURAL indicators of physical child abuse include (but are not limited to):

- disclosure of an injury inflicted by someone else (parent, carer or guardian), or an inconsistent or unlikely explanation or inability to remember the cause of injury
- unusual fear of physical contact with adults
- aggressive behaviour
- disproportionate reaction to events
- wearing clothes unsuitable for weather conditions to hide injuries
- wariness or fear of a parent, carer or guardian
- reluctance to go home
- no reaction or little emotion displayed when being hurt or threatened
- habitual absences from school without reasonable explanation
- overly compliant, shy, withdrawn, passive and uncommunicative
- unusually nervous, hyperactive, aggressive, disruptive and destructive to self and/or others
- poor sleeping patterns, fear of the dark or nightmares and regressive behaviour, e.g. bed-wetting
- drug or alcohol misuse, suicidal thoughts or self-harm.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

CRITICAL INFORMATION

Child sexual abuse:

- is when a person uses power or authority over a child to involve them in sexual activity
- can include a wide range of sexual activity and can include exposing a child to pornography

- does not always involve physical contact or force.

You must follow the Four Critical Actions if you suspect that a:

- child has been or is being sexually abused, or is at risk of sexual abuse
- school staff member, contractor or volunteer may be engaging, or are at risk of engaging in sexual behaviour with a child/children.

Unwanted sexual behaviour toward a student by a child 10 years or over can constitute a sexual offence and is referred to as student-to-student sexual offending. All incidents, suspicions and disclosures of student sexual offending must be responded to by following the Four Critical Actions.

What is child sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse:

- is when a person uses power or authority over a child to involve them in sexual activity
- can include a wide range of sexual activity including fondling the child's genitals, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or other object, or exposure of the child to pornography.

Child sexual abuse may not always include physical sexual contact and can also include non-contact offences, for example:

- talking to a child in a sexually explicit way
- sending sexual messages or emails to a child
- exposing a sexual body part to a child
- forcing a child to watch a sexual act (including showing pornography to a child)
- having a child pose or perform in a sexual manner (including child sexual exploitation).

Child sexual abuse does not always involve force. In some circumstances a child may be manipulated into believing that they have brought the abuse on themselves, or that the abuse is an expression of love, through a process of grooming.

What is child sexual exploitation?

Child sexual exploitation is also a form of sexual abuse where offenders use their power (physical, financial or emotional) over a child to sexually or emotionally abuse them.

It often involves situations and relationships where young people receive something (food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money etc.) in return for participating in sexual activities.

Child sexual exploitation can occur in person or online, and sometimes the child may not even realise they are a victim.

Who is most at risk of child sexual abuse?

Any child can be victim to sexual abuse, however children who are vulnerable, isolated and/or have a disability are much more likely to become victims, and are disproportionately abused.

Who are the common perpetrators of child sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse is most commonly perpetrated by someone who is known to, and trusted by the child, and often someone highly trusted within their families, communities, schools and/or other institutions.

Perpetrators can include (but are not limited to):

- a family member (this is known as intra family abuse and can include sibling abuse)
- a school staff member, coach or other carer

- a peer/child 10 years or more in age*
- a family friend or stranger via a forced marriage (where a student is subject to a marriage without their consent, arranged for by their immediate or extended family - this constitutes a criminal offence and must be reported).

**Unwanted sexual behaviour toward a student by a person 10 years or over can constitute a sexual offence and is referred to as student-to-student sexual offending.*

Please note that a child who is under 10 years of age is not considered capable of committing an offence. Any suspected sexual behaviours by children under 10 is referred to as problem sexual behaviour.

What are the physical and behavioural indicators of child sexual abuse?

PHYSICAL indicators of sexual abuse include (but are not limited to):

- injury to the genital or rectal area, e.g. bruising, bleeding, discharge, inflammation or infection
- injury to areas of the body such as breasts, buttocks or upper thighs
- discomfort in urinating or defecating
- presence of foreign bodies in the vagina and/or rectum
- sexually-transmitted diseases
- frequent urinary tract infections
- pregnancy, especially in very young adolescents
- anxiety-related illnesses, e.g. anorexia or bulimia.

BEHAVIOURAL indicators of sexual abuse include (but are not limited to):

- disclosure of sexual abuse, either directly (from the alleged victim) or indirectly (by a third person or allusion)
- persistent and age-inappropriate sexual activity, e.g. excessive masturbation or rubbing genitals against adults
- drawings or descriptions in stories that are sexually explicit and not age-appropriate
- fear of home, specific places or particular adults
- poor/deteriorating relationships with adults and peers
- poor self-care or personal hygiene
- complaining of headaches, stomach pains or nausea without physiological basis
- sleeping difficulties
- regressive behaviour, e.g. bed-wetting or speech loss
- depression, self-harm, drug or alcohol abuse, or attempted suicide
- sudden decline in academic performance, poor memory and concentration
- engaging in sex work and/or sexual risk-taking behaviour
- wearing layers of clothing to hide injuries and bruises.

How can I identify perpetrators of child sexual abuse?

In addition to identifying the physical and behavioural signs of abuse within children, you can play a critical role in identifying signs that a member of the school community may be engaging in child sexual abuse, or grooming a child for the purpose of engaging in sexual activity.

Most critically you must follow the Four Critical Actions if you:

- feel uncomfortable about the way an adult interacts with one or more children
- suspect that the adult may be engaging in sexual abuse of one or more children
- suspect that the adult is grooming the child/children for the purpose of engaging in sexual activity
- reasonably believe that the adult is at risk of sexual activity with one or more children.

You must report suspected abuse, or risk of abuse regardless of any concerns about the risk to the reputation of the suspected perpetrator or school. A failure to report can result in criminal charges and your report could prove critical to protecting children in your care.

What are the behavioural indicators for perpetrators of child sexual abuse?

In many cases the signs that an adult is sexually abusing a child or grooming a child with the intent of sexually abusing them may not be obvious. However, there are a number of signs to look for.

BEHAVIOURAL indicators for perpetrators of child sexual abuse include (but are not limited to):

Family member (adult)

- attempts by one parent to alienate their child from the other parent
- overprotective or volatile relationship between the child and one of their parents/ family members
- reluctance by the child to be alone with one of their parents/family members.

Family member (sibling)

- the child and a sibling behaving like they are in an intimate relationship
- reluctance by the child to be alone with a sibling
- embarrassment by siblings if they are found alone together.

School staff member, coach or other carer

- touching a child inappropriately
- bringing up sexual material or personal disclosures into conversations with a student/s
- inappropriately contacting the student/s, e.g. calls, emails, texts, social media
- obvious or inappropriate preferential treatment of the student/s (making them feel “special”)
- giving of gifts to a student/s
- having inappropriate social boundaries, e.g. telling the potential victims about their own personal problems etc.
- offering to drive a student/s to or from school
- inviting themselves over to their homes, calling them at night
- befriending the parents themselves and making visits to their home
- undermining the child’s reputation (so that the child won’t be believed).

GROOMING

CRITICAL INFORMATION

- Grooming is when a person engages in predatory conduct to prepare a child for sexual abuse at a later time. Grooming can include communicating and/or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent/carer.
- If you suspect that a child is being groomed, you must follow the Four Critical Actions.

What is grooming?

Grooming is a criminal offence and occurs when an adult engages in predatory conduct to prepare a child for sexual abuse at a later time. Grooming can include communicating and/or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent/carer.

Sometimes it is hard to see when someone is being groomed until after they have been sexually abused, because some grooming behaviour can look like “normal” caring behaviour.

Examples of grooming behaviours may include:

- giving gifts or special attention to a child or their parent or carer (this can make a child feel special or indebted to an adult)
- controlling a child through threats, manipulation, force or use of authority (this can make a child fearful to report unwanted behaviour)
- making close physical contact, such as inappropriate tickling and wrestling

- openly or pretending to accidentally expose the victim to nudity, sexual material and sexual acts (this in itself is classified as child sexual abuse but can also be a precursor to physical sexual assault).

What is online grooming?

Grooming includes online grooming. It occurs when an adult uses electronic communication (including social media) in a predatory fashion to try to lower a child's inhibitions, or heighten their curiosity regarding sex, with the aim of eventually meeting them in person for the purposes of sexual activity. This can include online chats, sexting, and other interactions. Any incidents of suspected grooming must be reported by following the follow the [Four Critical Actions](#).

Online grooming can also precede online child exploitation, a form of child exploitation where adults use the internet or a mobile to communicate sexual imagery with or of a child (e.g. via a webcam). Any incidents of suspected child exploitation must be reported.

What are the behavioural indicators that a child may be subject to grooming?

BEHAVIOURAL indicators that a child may be subject to grooming include (but are not limited to):

- developing an unusually close connection with an older person
- displaying mood changes (hyperactive, secretive, hostile, aggressive, impatient, resentful, anxious, withdrawn, depressed)
- using street/different language; copying the way the new 'friend' may speak; talking about the new 'friend' who does not belong to his/ her normal social circle
- possessing jewellery, clothing or expensive items given by the 'friend'
- possessing large amounts of money which he/she cannot account for
- using a new mobile phone (given by the 'friend') excessively to make calls, videos or send text messages
- being excessively secretive about their use of communications technologies, including social media
- frequently staying out overnight, especially if the relationship is with an older person
- being dishonest about where they've been and whom they've been with
- using drugs; physical evidence includes spoons, silver foil, 'tabs', 'rocks'
- assuming a new name; being in possession of a false ID, stolen passport or driver's license provided by the 'friend' to avoid detection
- being picked up in a car by the 'friend' from home/school or 'down the street'.

FAMILY VIOLENCE

CRITICAL INFORMATION

- Family violence can include physical violence or threats, verbal abuse, emotional and physical abuse, sexual abuse and financial and social abuse.
- If you suspect that a child is exposed to family violence (including witnessing family violence), or is at risk of family violence you must follow the [Four Critical Actions](#).

What is family violence?

The *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic) defines family violence as behaviour by a person towards a family member where the behaviour:

- is physically or sexually abusive
- is emotionally or psychologically abusive
- is economically abusive
- is threatening or coercive OR
- in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person.

A child can be the victim to any of these behaviours. Family violence also includes behaviour that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, any of these behaviours.

A child or young person might be a victim of family violence in the following ways:

- being hit, yelled at, or otherwise directly abused
- being injured
- being sexually abused
- experiencing fear for self
- experiencing fear for another person, a pet or belongings
- seeing, hearing or otherwise sensing violence directed against another person
- seeing, hearing or otherwise sensing the aftermath of violence (such as broken furniture, smashed crockery, an atmosphere of tension)
- knowing or sensing that a family member is in fear
- being told to do something (such as to be quiet or to 'behave') to prevent violence
- being blamed for not preventing violence
- attempting to prevent or minimise violence
- attempting to mediate between the perpetrator and another family member
- being threatened or co-opted by the perpetrator into using violent behaviour against another family member
- being co-opted into supporting the perpetrator or taking their side
- being isolated or socially marginalised in ways that are directly attributable to the perpetrator's controlling behaviours.

Family violence is predominantly (although not always) perpetrated by men against women and children.

Children most commonly experience family violence through a partner or ex-partner of the mother. A child (or children) may also be the target of the behaviour (including a direct or indirect attack on the mother-child relationship), or may witness the behaviours, or the effects of the behaviours.

Family violence can have devastating impacts on children

Experiences of family violence create significant risks to a child's social, emotional, psychological and physical health and wellbeing. The longer a child experiences family violence, the greater the impact can be.

Action must be taken to protect the child, and to limit their trauma and support their recovery. As a school staff member you may be in the best position to identify that a child may be experiencing family violence and to take steps to protect the child by following the Four Critical Actions.

Family violence in our communities

Unfortunately the incidence of family violence is high. Family violence is one of the most significant and serious issues facing our communities, with a devastating impact on the health and wellbeing of many Victorians.

It occurs within all social, cultural and economic groups, although some groups experience greater barriers to accessing help and support. Women are particularly vulnerable to family violence during pregnancy. Family violence does not necessarily end if the relationship ends. In fact the family violence may not only continue, but may increase in frequency and severity (especially during the period where action is taken to leave or end the relationship).

What are the physical indicators of family violence?

PHYSICAL indicators of family violence in children include (but are not limited to):

- speech disorders

- delays in physical development
- failure to thrive (without an organic cause)
- bruises, cuts or welts on facial areas, and other parts of the body including back, bottom, legs, arms and inner thighs
- any bruises or welts (old or new) in unusual configurations, or those that look like the object used to make the injury (such as fingerprints, handprints, buckles, iron or teeth)
- fractured bones, especially in an infant where a fracture is unlikely to have occurred accidentally
- poisoning
- internal injuries.

What are the behavioural indicators of family violence?

BEHAVIOURAL indicators of family violence include (but are not limited to):

- violent/aggressive behaviour and language
- depression and anxiety and suicidal thoughts
- appearing nervous and withdrawn, including wariness or distrust of adults
- difficulty adjusting to change
- psychosomatic illness
- bedwetting and sleeping disorders
- 'acting out', such as cruelty to animals
- extremely demanding, attention-seeking behaviour
- participating in dangerous risk-taking behaviours to impress peers
- overly compliant, shy, withdrawn, passive and uncommunicative behaviour
- taking on a caretaker role prematurely, trying to protect other family members
- embarrassment about family
- demonstrated fear of parents, carers or guardians, and of going home
- disengagement from school (absenteeism, lateness and/or school refusal) and/or poor academic outcomes
- parent-child conflict
- wearing long-sleeved clothes on hot days in an attempt to hide bruising or other injury
- becoming fearful when other children cry or shout
- being excessively friendly to strangers.

For older children and young people indicators can also include:

- moving away/running away from home
- entering a relationship early to escape the family home
- entering into other violent and/or unsafe relationships
- involvement in risk taking and/or unlawful activity
- alcohol and substance misuse.

Identifying family violence in parents/carers

As a school staff member you will likely have contact with a child's parents/carers. Through interactions with parents and carers you may identify signs, or receive a disclosure that a child is experiencing family violence (noting that if a parent is experiencing family violence, it is highly likely that their child is also impacted).

You should always respond to any reasonable suspicion or belief that a child may be experiencing family violence by following the Four Critical Actions.

Key indicators that a family member is experiencing violence include:

- nervous, ashamed or evasive behaviour
- describing their partner as controlling or prone to anger
- appearing to be uncomfortable or anxious in the presence of their partner
- being accompanied by their partner, who does most of the talking
- having physical signs of violence such as bruising

- giving an unconvincing explanation of injuries that they (or their child) have sustained
- suffering anxiety, panic attacks, stress and/or depression.

Some alleged perpetrators of family violence may also be subject to court orders, including Family Violence Intervention Orders.

EMOTIONAL CHILD ABUSE

CRITICAL INFORMATION

- Emotional child abuse occurs when a child is repeatedly rejected, isolated or frightened by threats.
- If you suspect that a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, emotional or psychological harm, you must follow the [Four Critical Actions](#).

What is emotional abuse?

Emotional child abuse occurs when a child is repeatedly rejected, isolated or frightened by threats.

It also includes hostility, derogatory name-calling and put-downs, and persistent coldness from a person, to the extent that the child suffers, or is likely to suffer, emotional or psychological harm to their physical or developmental health.

What are the physical and behavioural indicators of emotional child abuse?

PHYSICAL indicators of emotional abuse include (but are not limited to):

- speech disorders such as language delay, stuttering or selectively being mute (only speaking with certain people or in certain situations)
- delays in emotional, mental or physical development.

BEHAVIOURAL indicators of emotional abuse include (but are not limited to):

- overly compliant, passive and undemanding behaviour
- extremely demanding, aggressive and attention-seeking behaviour or anti-social and destructive behaviour
- low tolerance or frustration
- poor self-image and low self-esteem
- unexplained mood swings, depression, self-harm or suicidal thoughts
- behaviours that are not age-appropriate, e.g. overly adult, or overly infantile
- fear of failure, overly high standards, and excessive neatness
- poor social and interpersonal skills
- violent drawings or writing
- lack of positive social contact.

NEGLECT

CRITICAL INFORMATION

- Serious neglect includes a failure to provide the child with an adequate standard of nutrition, medical care, clothing, shelter or supervision to the extent that the health or physical development of the child is significantly impaired or placed at serious risk.
- If you suspect that a child is experiencing serious neglect, you must follow the [Four Critical Actions](#).
- If you are concerned that a child may be experiencing neglect that is not “serious” you should refer the family to local community based services as appropriate **UNLESS** the suspected neglect is committed in the school, where you should follow the actions detailed [below](#).

What is neglect?

Neglect includes a failure to provide the child with an adequate standard of nutrition, medical care, clothing, shelter or supervision.

In some circumstances the neglect of a child:

- can place the child's immediate safety and development at serious risk, or
- may not immediately compromise the safety of the child but is likely to result in longer term cumulative harm.

The law differentiates between three different levels of neglect:

- 'Minor' neglect is low-level neglect that is trivial or temporary
- 'Significant' neglect is medium-level neglect that causes harm to a child that is more than trivial or temporary
- 'Serious' neglect is the highest level of neglect. It involves the continued failure to provide a child with the basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, shelter, hygiene, medical attention or adequate supervision, to the extent that the child's health, safety and/or development is, or is likely to be, jeopardised. Serious neglect can also occur if an adult fails to adequately ensure the safety of a child where the child is exposed to extremely dangerous or life-threatening situations.

Please **see below** for guidance on what actions to take for each level of neglect.

Neglect committed by school staff, volunteers and contractors

Neglect of a child can be committed by parents or carers, but it can also be committed by those that work within the school, such as teachers, school staff, contractors or volunteers. Under the Reportable Conduct Scheme, a principal must notify the Employee Conduct Branch if school staff, contractors or volunteers engage in neglectful conduct that is 'significant'. This covers significant neglect that occurs within the school environment, as well as significant neglect by staff, contractors or volunteers that happens outside the school. That means that neglect by school members that is either significant or serious must be reported to the Employee Conduct Branch under the scheme.

Regardless of whether they are 'serious' or 'significant', concerns that a child is experiencing neglect must be responded to. The below table provides guidance for principals on how to report neglect, depending on the severity.

Minor/low levels of neglect

Committed by school staff, volunteers or contractors

Actions

Manage locally

Examples

- A child is accidentally left out in the rain and cold for a short period of time
- A teacher forgets to supervise a particular area of the school grounds for half an hour, and no harm comes to the children there.

Committed by other community members

Actions

Manage locally

- Refer child and family to local community based services if appropriate.
- Refer child and family to Child FIRST/Orange Door if appropriate.

Examples

- A carer fails to give a child pain medication for a minor headache
- A parent forgets to provide a child with their lunch on a single occasion.

Significant/medium levels of neglect

Committed by school staff, volunteers or contractors

Actions

If appropriate, refer child and family to local community based services.

Refer child and family to Child FIRST/Orange Door.

If a principal remains concerned for a child's welfare, they can follow the Four Critical Actions.

Examples

- A first aid officer fails to examine or treat a child's bleeding cuts and bruises from falling over at school
- A teacher's 5 year old child (who does not attend the school) is seen playing near a busy highway on several occasions without adult supervision.

Committed by other community members

Actions

If appropriate, refer child and family to local community based services.

Refer child and family to Child FIRST/Orange Door.

If a principal remains concerned for a child's welfare, they can follow the Four Critical Actions.

Examples

- A carer leaves an 8 year old child alone for hours without supervision
- A parent does not provide their child with fresh clothes for a week at a time
- A carer consistently forgets to give a child prescribed medication for the attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Serious/high levels of neglect

Committed by school staff, volunteers or contractors

Actions

Follow the Four Critical Actions, including reporting to:

- Victoria Police
- Employee Conduct Branch (government schools)
- DET Security Services Unit (government schools)
- Diocesan Education Office (Catholic schools, see below).

Examples

- A teacher is overheard saying that he frequently gets his 6 year old child to look after his 12 month old when he goes out for drinks for hours after work
- A staff member responsible for providing anticonvulsant medication to a child with epilepsy on a week-long school camp fails to do so for the entire week.

Committed by other community members

Actions

Follow the Four Critical Actions, including reporting to:

- DFFH Child Protection
- DET Security Services Unit (government schools).

Examples

- A carer allows a child in their care to inject illegal drugs in their home and does not intervene
- A parent regularly does not provide warm clothing or closed shoes for a child during winter
- A child's home environment is filthy or hazardous and there is animal or human faeces or urine, and decomposing food in the house.

What are the physical and behavioural indicators of neglect?

PHYSICAL indicators of neglect include (but are not limited to):

- appearing consistently dirty and unwashed
- being consistently inappropriately dressed for weather conditions
- being at risk of injury or harm due to consistent lack of adequate supervision from parents

- being consistently hungry, tired and listless
- having unattended health problems and lack of routine medical care
- having inadequate shelter and unsafe or unsanitary conditions.

BEHAVIOURAL indicators of neglect include (but are not limited to):

- gorging when food is available or inability to eat when extremely hungry
- begging for or stealing food
- appearing withdrawn, listless, pale and weak
- aggressive behaviour, irritability
- involvement in criminal activity
- little positive interaction with parent, carer or guardian
- poor socialising habits
- excessive friendliness towards strangers
- indiscriminate acts of affection
- poor, irregular or non-attendance at school
- staying at school for long hours and refusing or being reluctant to go home
- self-destructive behaviour
- taking on an adult role of caring for parent.

Reporting a Child Safety Concern

LISTEN

- If possible move to a suitable environment, free from distractions
- Be calm and patient – allow the young person to be heard
- Let the young person use their own records
- Avoid ‘quizzing’ the young person about the full details
- Don’t be afraid of saying the ‘wrong’ thing. Listening supportively is more important than what you say

RESPOND/ REASSURE

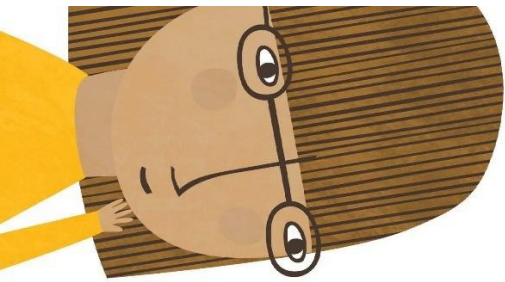
- Your response will depend on whether it has been a public, private or third part disclosure
- Reassure the young person that it is okay that they have told you what’s been happening
- Address any concerns about their safety
- Reassure the young person that they are not at fault and not the cause of any distress they may feel
- Acknowledge their bravery and strength
- Avoid making promises you can’t keep – manage the young person’s expectations
- Explain to the young person that in order for them to be safe you will need to report their experience to someone else

NOTIFY

- Contact a Child Protection Champion and/or Head of School
- They will discuss your concerns and support you but cannot influence your decision over reporting
- Contact Child FIRST / Orange Door (Latrobe and Baw Baw 1800 319 354) for advice, they will help you decide who to contact next
- In case of emergency or if a child is in immediate danger contact 000 or the local police. Otherwise contact Child Protection Crisis Line (13 12 78 after hours), or DFFH South Division Intake (1800 655 795 Weekdays 8:45am – 5:00pm)

FOLLOW UP

- Keep records/PCRs and notes from observations and phone conversations and place in student’s file (see Protecting Children – Reporting and other Legal Obligations Policy for guidance)
- Stay in contact with CPC and HOS for any further developments on the case
- DFFH / Child FIRST / Orange Door won’t necessarily inform the school regarding progress once the report has been made
- Seek advice and support for yourself where necessary from your CPC, HOS or the Employment Assistance Program, Lifeworks (1300 361 008)



FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

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.
- Where necessary you may also need to maintain the integrity of the potential crime scene and preserve evidence.

2 REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES / REFERRING TO SERVICES

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, volunteer or visitor to Victoria Police.

You **must also** report internally to:

- GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**
School principal and/or leadership team
- Employee Conduct Branch
- DET Incident Support and Operations Centre
- CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**
School principal and/or leadership team
- Diocesan education office.
- INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**
School principal and/or school chairperson
- Commissioner for Children and Young People on **1300 782 978**.

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 all instances of suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police.

You **must also** report internally to:

- GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**
School principal and/or leadership team
- DET Incident Support and Operations Centre
- CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**
School principal and/or leadership team
- Diocesan education office.
- INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**
School principal and/or chairperson.

All allegations of 'reportable conduct' **must** be reported as soon as possible to:

- GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**
Employee Conduct Branch
- Diocesan education office
- CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**
Diocesan education office
- INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**
Commissioner for Children and Young People on **1300 782 978**.

You **must also** report internally to:

- GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**
School principal and/or leadership team
- DET Incident Support and Operations Centre
- CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**
School principal and/or leadership team
- Diocesan education office.
- INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**
School principal and/or chairperson.

YOU MUST TAKE ACTION

- You **must** act by following the Four Critical Actions, as soon as you witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a reasonable belief* that a child has, or is at risk of being abused.
- * A reasonable belief is a deliberately low threshold. This includes authorities to investigate and take action.

As a school staff member, you play a **critical role** in protecting children in your care.

- You **must** act if you form a suspicion/ reasonable belief, even if you are unsure and have not directly observed child abuse (e.g. if the victim or another person tells you about the abuse).
- It is strongly recommended that you use the **Responding to Suspected Child Abuse template** to keep clear and comprehensive notes, even if you make a decision not to report.

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 parents/care (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 parents/carers and provide agreed information (this must be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion)
- how to communicate** with all relevant parties with consideration for their safety.

4 PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

Your school **must** provide support for children impacted by 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. Strategies may include development of a safety plan, direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals and support.

OTHER CONCERNS

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/The Orange Door (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support)
- DHHS Child Protection
- Victoria Police.

CONTACT

<p>DHHS CHILD PROTECTION</p> <p>AREA</p> <p>North Division 1300 684 977</p> <p>South Division 1300 655 795</p> <p>East Division 1300 860 391</p> <p>West Division (Rural) 1800 075 599</p> <p>West Division (Metrol) 1300 684 977</p> <p>AFTER HOURS</p> <p>After hours weekends, public holidays 13 12 78</p> <p>CHILD FIRST</p> <p>https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/referral-and-support/teams</p> <p>ORANGE DOOR</p> <p>https://www.vic.gov.au/familyviolence/the-orange-door.html</p>	<p>VICTORIA POLICE</p> <p>000 or your local police station</p> <p>DET INCIDENT SUPPORT AND OPERATIONS CENTRE</p> <p>1800 126 126</p> <p>INCIDENT MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT UNIT</p> <p>1800 126 126</p> <p>EMPLOYEE CONDUCT BRANCH</p> <p>(03) 9537 2995</p> <p>DIOCESAN OFFICE</p> <p>Melbourne (03) 9267 0228</p> <p>Bairat (03) 5397 7195</p> <p>Sale (03) 5622 6600</p> <p>Sandhurst (03) 5443 2377</p>	<p>INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS VICTORIA</p> <p>(03) 9823 7200</p> <p>THE LOOKOUT</p> <p>The LOOKOUT has a service directory, information and evidence based guidance to help you respond to family violence. http://www.lookout.vic.edu.au</p> <p>Family violence victims/survivors can be referred to 1800 Respect for counselling, information and a referral service: 1800 737 732</p>
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PROTECT

FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Responding to Student Sexual Offending

PROTECT



YOU MUST TAKE ACTION

- As a school staff member, you play a **critical role** in protecting children in your care.
- You **must act** by following the 4 critical actions as soon as you witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a suspicion that a student is a victim of a student sexual offending and/or a student has engaged in sexual offending.
 - You **must act** even if you are unsure and have not directly observed student sexual offending (e.g. if a victim, or another person tells you about the offence).
 - You **must use** the **Responding to Student Sexual Offending Templates** to keep clear and comprehensive notes.

1 IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO AN INCIDENT

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.

Where necessary you may also need to maintain the integrity of the potential crime scene and preserve evidence.

2 REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed you **must** report incidents, suspicions and disclosures of student sexual offending as soon as possible.

VICTORIA POLICE

All instances on **000**

DHHS CHILD PROTECTION

- If you believe that:
- the victim's parent/carers are unable or unwilling to protect the child
 - the student who is alleged to have engaged in the student sexual offending is:
 - aged over 10 and under 15 years and may be in need of therapeutic treatment to address these behaviours
 - may be displaying physical and behavioural indicators of being the victim of child abuse*.

You must identify a contact person at the school for future liaison with Victoria Police and/or Child Protection and seek advice about contacting parents/carers (see **Action 3**).

*See the **Four Critical Steps for Schools: Responding Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse** for further guidance in these circumstances.

3 CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

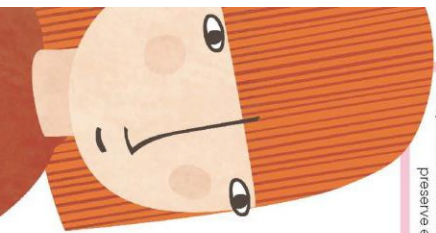
Your Principal **must** consult with **Victoria Police** or **DHHS Child Protection** to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers of all impacted students. They may advise:

- not to contact the parents/carers** (e.g. in circumstances where contacting the parents/carers is likely to adversely affect a **Victoria Police** investigation or where the student is a mature minor) and has requested that their parent/carer not be notified)
- to contact the parents/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 students who are victim to a student sexual offence AND students who have engaged in a sexual offence. This is an essential part of your duty of care requirements.

This support should include the development of a **Student Support Plan** in consultation with wellbeing professionals, outlining support strategies. Strategies may include the development of a safety plan, direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals.



CONTACT	
DHHS CHILD PROTECTION AREA	CHILD FIRST www.dhrs.vic.gov.au
North Division 1300 664 977 South Division 1300 655 795 East Division 1300 960 391 West Division (Rural) 1800 075 599 West Division (Metro) 1300 664 977	VICTORIA POLICE 000 or contact your local police station
AFTER HOURS After hours, weekends, public holidays 13 12 78	DET SECURITY SERVICES UNIT (03) 9589 6266
	STUDENT INCIDENT AND RECOVERY UNIT (03) 9651 3622
	EMPLOYEE CONDUCT BRANCH (03) 9637 2595
	DIOCESAN OFFICE Melbourne (03) 9267 0228 Ballarat (03) 5337 7195 Sale (03) 5622 6600 Sandhurst (03) 5443 2377
	INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS VICTORIA (03) 9825 1200