



Procedures for Responding to/ Reporting Suspected Child Abuse

Reporting Obligations

Protection for children and young people is based upon the belief that each person is made in the image and likeness of God and that the inherent dignity of all should be recognised and fostered.

Catholic schools are entrusted with the holistic education of the child, in partnership with parents, guardians and caregivers who are the primary educators of their children.

In Victoria, a joint protocol, Protecting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, involving the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Child Protection, The Department of Education and Training (DET), the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and licensed children's services, exists to protect the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

All teachers, other staff, parish priests, and governing authorities of Our Lady's Primary School must understand and abide by the professional, moral and legal obligations to implement child protection and child safety policies, protocols and practices.

School Procedure

The actions Our Lady's will take to respond to an allegation of child abuse include but are not limited to the following:

- 1) Refer to Department of Education & Training documents: ***PROTECT Identifying and responding to All Forms Of Abuse in Victorian Schools*** & ***PROTECT Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: A Template for All Victorian Schools*** [PROTECT document](#)
- 2) Follow the procedures outlined in the ***PROTECT Critical Actions for Schools; Responding to Incidents , Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse (Appendix 1)*** document [PROTECT Critical Actions for Schools](#)

- 3) Protect any child connected to the alleged child abuse until the allegation is resolved; and
- 4) Create, secure and retain records of the allegation of child abuse and the school's response to it.

Types of Child Abuse

The definition of child abuse is outlined in Section 3 of the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005.

This definition includes any act committed against a child involving a sexual offence or an offence under Section 49B(2) of the Crimes Act 1958. It also includes the infliction of physical harm or serious emotional or psychological harm as well as the serious neglect of a child. Though mandatory reporting only covers physical and sexual abuse, making a report to DHHS Child Protection may also be necessary for other types of harm to a child. Significant harm may relate to:

- physical injury
- sexual abuse
- emotional or intellectual development
- physical development or health
- abandonment or parental incapacity.
-

Mandatory Reporting

Mandatory reporting is a legal requirement under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic) (Act) and the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) (Act) to protect children from harm relating to physical injury and sexual abuse. A child, for the purpose of the relevant parts of the Act, is any person 17 years of age or younger. School personnel mandated under this Act who, in the course of carrying out their duties, form a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection from physical harm, and that the child's parents are unwilling or unable to protect the child, must report that belief to DHHS Child Protection. A subsequent report must be made on each occasion on which the mandatory reporter becomes aware of further reasonable grounds for the belief. If a belief is formed by any adult that a child or young person has been a victim of or is in danger of sexual abuse then a report must be made to Victoria Police.

Child Protection Reporting Obligations for Our Lady's Primary School

Reporting Child Protection Concerns

All school staff who believe on reasonable grounds that a child or young person is in need of:

- protection from physical harm **must** report their concerns to DHHS Child Protection
- protection from sexual abuse **must** report their concerns to Victoria Police
- protection from harm that is not believed to involve physical harm or sexual abuse - are encouraged to report their concerns to DHHS Child Protection.
- If it is believed a child (between ages of 10-15) is in need of therapeutic treatment because he or she has exhibited sexually-abusive behaviours - are encouraged to report their concerns to DHHS Child Protection or Child FIRST

Child Protection is the Victorian Government Agency, provided by the DHHS, which protects children at risk of significant harm. Child Protection has statutory powers and can use these to protect children.

Child FIRST is the Family Information Referral Support Team run by a registered community service in a local area that can receive confidential referrals about a child of concern. It does not have any statutory powers to protect a child but can refer matters to family services.

Victoria Police has the responsibility to investigate sexual abuse of children, young people and adults.

New Criminal Offences to Improve Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

Three new criminal offences have been introduced as a response to The Betrayal of Trust report, Victoria. (November 2013)

- ***Failure to disclose offence***, which requires adults to report to police a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed against a child (effective 27 October 2014). *Any staff member* who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria by an adult against a *child under 16* must disclose that information to police. Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence and applies to *all adults* in Victoria.
- ***Failure to protect offence***, which applies to people within organisations who knew of a risk of child sexual abuse by someone in the organisation and had the authority to reduce or remove the risk, but failed to do so. Any staff member in a position of authority who becomes aware that an adult associated with their organisation (such as an employee, contractor, volunteer,

sport coach or visitor) poses a risk of sexual abuse to a child *under 16* who is in the care or supervision of the organisation must take all reasonable steps to reduce or remove that risk. Failure to take reasonable steps to protect a child in the organisation from the risk of sexual abuse from an adult associated with the organisation is a criminal offence (effective 1 July 2015)

- **Grooming offence**, which targets communication with a child or their parents with the intent of committing child sexual abuse. The offence applies to communication with children *under 16 years*. Grooming can be conducted in person or online, for example via interaction through social media, web forums and emails. (effective 9 April 2014)

Making a Report

In case of emergency or if a child is in life-threatening danger contact Triple Zero (000) or the local police station.

Alternatively, to report concerns about the immediate safety of a child within their family unit to DHHS Child Protection, call the local Child Protection Intake Provider (see DHHS Child Protection contacts). If after hours call the Child Protection Crisis Line on 13 12 78.

The information below describes the information to include when making a mandatory report about child abuse or child protection concerns.

Step 1: Keep comprehensive notes that are dated and include the following information:

- a description of the concerns (e.g. physical injuries, student behaviour)
- the source of those concerns (e.g. observation, report from child or another person)
- the actions taken as a result of the concerns (e.g. consultation with the principal, report to DHHS Child Protection etc.).

Step 2:

- Discuss any concerns about the safety and wellbeing of students with the principal or a member of the school management team.
- The individual staff member should then make their own assessment about whether they should make a report about the child or young person and to whom the report should be made.

Step 3: Gather the relevant information necessary to make the report. This should include the following information:

- full name, date of birth and residential address of the child or young person
- the details of the concerns and the reasons for those concerns
- the individual staff member's involvement with the child or young person
- details of any other agencies which may be involved with the child or young person.

Step 4: Make a report to the relevant agency:

- To report concerns which are life-threatening **phone 000 or the local police station.**
- To find the nearest Victoria Police Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Team contact your local police station. Visit the [Victoria Police website](#) for local contact numbers.
- To report concerns about the immediate safety of a child within their family unit to DHHS Child Protection:
 - Call your **local Child Protection** Intake provider immediately, [Child Protection](#)
 - For **After Hours Child Protection Emergency** Services, call **13 12 78.**
 - To report concerns to [DHHS Child Protection](#), contact your local child protection office

Step 5: Make a written record of the report including the following information:

- the date and time of the report and a summary of what was reported
- the name and position of the person who made the report and the person who received the report.

Step 6:

- Notify relevant the principal and Catholic Education Melbourne (Wellbeing Unit) staff of a report to DHHS Child Protection or Child FIRST.
- School staff can seek further assistance by contacting the Catholic Education Melbourne Wellbeing & Community Partnerships Unit.

Step 7:

- In the case of international students, the principal must notify the International Education Division of the Department of Education and Training on (03) 9637 2990 to ensure that appropriate support is arranged for the student.
- In the case of Koorie students, the principal must notify the Diocese or Regional Office (as appropriate) to ensure the regional Koorie support officer can arrange appropriate support for the student.

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

Appendix 1:

FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

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.
- You **must** act if you form a suspicion/ reasonable belief, even if you are unsure and have not directly observed child abuse (eg, 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.

*A reasonable belief is a deliberately low threshold. This enables authorities to investigate and take action.

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 Operatives Centre

■ **CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**
School principal and/or leadership team

■ Diocesan education office.

■ **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**
School principal and/or school chairperson

■ Commission for Children and Young People on **1300 782 978**.

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

- **GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**
Employee Conduct Branch
- **CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**
Diocesan education office
- **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**
Commission 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 Operatives Centre
- **CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**
School principal and/or leadership team
- Diocesan education office.
- **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**
School principal and/or 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 parents/carer (eg, 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 parents/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.

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

CONTACT

<p>DHHS CHILD PROTECTION AREA North Division 1300 664 977 South Division 1300 656 795 East Division 1300 360 391 West Division (Rural) 1800 075 529 West Division (Metrol) 1300 664 977</p> <p>AFTER HOURS After hours, weekends, public holidays: 13 12 78</p> <p>CHILD FIRST https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/inferral_and_support_team/</p> <p>ORANGE DOOR https://www.vic.gov.au/familyviolence/the-orange-door.html</p>	<p>VICTORIA POLICE 000 or your local police station</p> <p>DET INCIDENT SUPPORT AND OPERATIONS CENTRE 1800 126 126</p> <p>INCIDENT MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT UNIT 1800 126 126</p> <p>EMPLOYEE CONDUCT BRANCH (03) 9637 2595</p> <p>DIOCESAN OFFICE Melbourne (03) 9267 0228 Ballarat (03) 5337 7135 Sale (03) 5822 8600 Sandhurst (03) 5443 2377</p>	<p>INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS VICTORIA (03) 9825 7200</p> <p>THE LOOKOUT The LOOKOUT has a service directory, information, and evidence based guidance to help you respond to family violence: http://www.lookout.org.au Family violence victims/survivors can be referred to 1800 Respect for counselling, information and a referral service: 1800 737 732.</p>
---	--	---



Policy Review

**Annual evaluation to occur to ensure policy, practices & processes are up-dated and effective.
Last updated: March 2020**

