

<b>Procedure</b>	<b>Child Safety Responding and Reporting Procedure</b>
<b>Person Responsible</b>	Principal
<b>Staff Involved</b>	Teachers, Administration Officer, Youth Worker
<b>Frequency of Performance</b>	As required
<b>Related Documents</b>	Mandatory Reporting Policy Child Safe Report Template Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy Reportable Conduct Scheme Policy Duty of Care Policy Privacy Policy Child Safe Code of Conduct PROTECT Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse PROTECT Guide: Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools, DET, 2018

## 1. Introduction

All staff (teaching and non-teaching), volunteers and contractors working with our students have a moral and legal obligation and a duty of care to report any incidents, disclosures, or suspicions of child abuse.

Child abuse includes any instance of physical or sexual abuse (including grooming), emotional or psychological harm, serious or significant neglect and family violence involving a child or young person.

This procedure describes the process for responding and reporting on an incident, disclosure, or suspicion of child abuse of any Student within the care and authority of the College.

This procedure should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- The Mandatory Reporting Policy
- Child Safe Report Template
- [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse](#)
- [PROTECT Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#)

## 2. Definitions

<b>Child/Children</b>	Means children and young people up to the age of 18 years
<b>The College</b>	Djerriwarrh Community College
<b>Parents/Guardians</b>	Refers to parents, guardians, stepparents and/or carers as listed in the Enrolment Application Form in connection to a student enrolled at the College
<b>Staff</b>	Refers to all employed staff, contractors, and volunteers of the College
<b>Community members</b>	Refers to other students, parents, guardians, carers and family members of college students and visitors to the College

## 3. Contact information

24-hour Services	
Victoria Police	000
Department of Health and Human Services Child Protection (DHHS)	131 278

Other services	
Child FIRST/Orange Door, Melton	1300 138 180
Commission for Children and Young People	1300 782 978

## 4. General procedures

The College will follow the Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse (Four Critical Actions) when responding to incidents, disclosures, and suspicions of child abuse.

The Four Critical Actions are:

1. [Responding to an emergency](#)
2. [Reporting to authorities/referring to services](#)
3. [Contacting parents/guardians](#)
4. [Providing ongoing support](#)

If you believe that a student is not subject to abuse, but you still hold significant concerns for their wellbeing, you should discuss your concerns with the Principal or Child Safety Officer or contact DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police for advice.

Nothing in this procedure prevents a staff member or any other person from reporting to the relevant authorities if they form a reasonable belief that a student is at risk of abuse.

#### **4.1 Witnessing an incident**

If you witness an incident where you believe a student has been subject to or may be at risk of abuse, including exposure to family violence, you must take immediate action to protect the safety of student(s) involved.

Follow the Four Critical Actions as soon as possible.

You must make detailed notes of the incident including actions taken using the Child Safe Report Template and ensure that those notes are kept and stored securely in a locked cabinet or under password protection.

As soon as possible, you must report the incident to the principal and/or the Child Safe Officer.

#### **4.2 Forming a suspicion/reasonable belief**

All suspicions that a student has been or may be in danger of being abused must be taken seriously. This includes abuse that is suspected to have occurred outside of school grounds and hours. If you form a reasonable belief that a student has been, or may be at risk of being abused, you must act, even if you have not directly witnessed the abuse.

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 student stating that they have been abused
- any person telling you they believe someone has been abused (sometimes the student 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 student has been abused
- behavioural indicators of abuse lead you to believe that the student has been abused
- other signs such as family violence, parental substance misuse, psychiatric illness or intellectual disability that is impacting on the student's safety, stability, or development.

### 4.3 Disclosure

If a student discloses that they have been, are being, or are in danger of being abused, you must treat the disclosure seriously and take immediate action by following the Four Critical Actions.

If another student or adult discloses that they believe another student has been, is being, or is at risk of being abused, you must also treat these disclosures seriously and take immediate action by following the Four Critical Actions.

When managing a disclosure, you 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 student's language and vocabulary (you do not want to frighten or interrupt them)
- 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 student to talk at their own pace and in their own words
- do not pressure the student 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 student that you believe them and that disclosing the matter was important for them to do
- use verbal facilitators such as, "I see", restate the student's previous statement, and use non-suggestive words of encouragement, designed to keep the student talking in an open-ended way ("what happened next?")
- tell the student you are required to report to the relevant authority to help stop the abuse, and explain the role of these authorities

When managing a disclosure, you should AVOID:

- displaying expressions of panic or shock
- asking questions that are investigative and potentially invasive (this may make the student feel uncomfortable and may cause them 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 student about what will occur next or that things will be different given the process can be unpredictable and different for each person depending on their circumstances (instead reassure them that you and others will do your best to help).

## 5. Action 1: Responding to an Emergency

If a student has just been abused or is at immediate risk of harm, you must take reasonable steps to protect them. These may include:

- separating the alleged victim and others involved, ensuring both parties are supervised by a school staff member
- arranging and providing urgent medical assistance where necessary by:
  - administering first aid assistance
  - calling 000 for an ambulance and following any instructions from emergency service officers/paramedics
- Calling 000 for urgent police assistance if the person who is alleged to have engaged in the abuse poses an immediate risk to the health and safety of any person. You should also identify a contact person at the College for future liaison with police.

Take reasonable steps to preserve the environment, the clothing, other items, and potential witnesses until the police or other relevant authorities arrive on the premises.

## 6. Action 2: Reporting to authorities

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

### Within the school

If the source of suspected abuse comes from a person within the school (this includes any forms of suspected child abuse involving a staff member, contractor, volunteer, or Council member, whether or not the conduct is alleged to have occurred within the course of the person's employment or engagement with the school) you must:

- Contact Victoria Police
- report as soon as possible internally to Principal
- record detailed notes including actions taken using the Child Safe Report Template

### Within the family or community

If the source of suspected abuse comes from within the family or community, you must:

- report to DHHS Child Protection if a student is considered to be:
  - in need of protection due to child abuse; or
  - at risk of being harmed (or has been harmed) and the harm has had, or is likely to have, a serious impact on the student's safety, stability, or development; and
  - the student's parents/guardians have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the student from the harm.

- report suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police
- report internally to the principal
- record detailed notes including actions taken using the Child Safe Report Template

You must identify a contact person at the College for future liaison with Victoria Police and/or DHHS Child Protection and seek advice about contacting parents/guardians.

### **6.1 Other concerns**

If you believe that a student 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

You must record your concerns and actions taken using the Child Safe Report Template.

### **6.2 How to proceed if you are advised not to report**

In some circumstances, the principal and/or Child Safe Officer may advise you not to proceed with reporting suspected abuse.

Regardless of this advice, if you hold a reasonable belief that a student has been or is at risk of being abused you must still make a report to DHHS Child Protection and/or Victoria Police. This report may be critical in protecting a student from abuse.

If you fail to report, you may not discharge your duty of care and in some circumstances, you may be subject to criminal charges.

If you decide not to report, it is strongly recommended that this decision should be documented within the Child Safe Report Template.

### **6.3 Making additional reports**

You must make a new report in any circumstance where you become aware of any further reasonable grounds for the belief. Every report is critical to protecting a student by building evidence and enabling authorities to gain a clearer understanding of the risks.

This means that you must make a report to protect a student even if:

- DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police were previously involved or are already involved with the student and/or their family
- you are aware that another party, such as a family member, has already raised concerns with the relevant authorities.

Additional reports must be recorded using the Child Safe Report Template.

## 6.4 When other staff form the same belief

Once you form a reasonable belief that a student has been, or is at risk of being abused, your obligation to report is separate from the obligations or actions of other people.

In addition, it is important to consider that other people may not have access to the specific detail you have. The information you provide through your report may assist the relevant authority to take further action to protect the student.

However, there may be times when other staff members, for example another teacher or the principal, have formed a belief about the same student on the same occasion and based on the same information. In this situation, it is sufficient that only one staff member makes a report.

If it is decided that the other person will make a report, it is your responsibility to ensure that they have made the report and that all the grounds for their own belief were included in the report they made.

In the case where another person makes a report, you should still record detailed notes including the name of the other person reporting using the Child Safe Report Template.

In instances where two staff members form different views about whether or not to make a report, if one staff member continues to hold a reasonable belief that a child needs protection, then they should make a report.

## 7. Action 3: Contacting parents/guardians

In many cases where it is suspected that a student has been, or is at risk of being abused, it is extremely important that parents/guardians are notified as soon as possible (as long as this is agreed to by Police and/or DHHS so as not to place the student at further risk or impede an investigation).

This enables parents/guardians to take steps to:

- prevent or limit their student's exposure to further abuse
- ensure that the student receives the support that they require.

There are some circumstances where contacting parents/guardians may place a student or adult at greater risk.

The principal must consult with DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police to determine what information can be shared with parents/guardians. They may advise:

- **TO CONTACT** the parents/guardians and provide agreed information (this must be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day of the incident, disclosure, or suspicion).
- **NOT TO CONTACT** the parents/guardians (e.g., in circumstances where the parents/guardians are alleged to have engaged in the abuse, or the student is a mature minor and does not wish their parents/guardians to be contacted).

## **8. Action 4: Providing ongoing support**

In addition to reporting suspected abuse, as a staff member you have a critical role in supporting students impacted by abuse and have a duty of care to ensure that students feel safe and are supported at school.

The principal is responsible for ensuring students are supported during interviews at school conducted by Victoria Police or DHHS Child Protection and you may be required to respond to subpoenas to attend court.

Students will be referred to the College's Youth Worker who will work with the Principal and Parents/Guardians (if appropriate) to develop a Student Support Plan.

The Youth Worker may also refer the student to external wellbeing professionals and community services which may include:

- Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASA), who provide expert support for victims of sexual assault
- family violence services
- headspace, who provide tailored support for young people whose mental health is impacted by exposure to abuse.

It is important to remember that other students may be impacted as well. The principal will work with the Youth Worker and teachers to ensure that all students are offered support.

## **9. Support for staff**

It can be stressful for staff to be involved in responding to and supporting students affected by abuse. The College will provide the following support for reporters:

- External supervision for teaching staff
- Employee Assistance Program – Northwest Psychological Services
- Internal debriefing with Principal (optional)
- Process review
- Further training where required

## **10. Report student sexual offending**

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

- Victoria Police on 000 (all instances)
- DHHS Child Protection if you believe that:
  - the victim's parent/s 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 18 years, is exhibiting sexually abusive behaviours, and may need therapeutic treatment to address these behaviours.
- the student who is alleged to have engaged in the student sexual offending may be displaying physical and behavioural indicators of being the victim of child abuse.
- Also report internally to:
  - School principal and/or leadership team (all instances)
  - Independent schools: School principal and/or school chairperson.

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

Staff should use the Responding to Suspected Student Sexual Offending Template to document any incident, disclosure, or suspicion that a student is victim to, or has engaged in student sexual offending.

### **Contacting parents/guardians**

The principal must consult with Victoria Police or DHHS Child Protection to determine what information can be shared with parents/guardians. 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).

### **Providing ongoing support**

The College will 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 our duty of care requirements.

This support will 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.

## **11. Responding to complaints or concerns**

There may be concerns or complaints about the College's management of an incident, in particular by parents/guardians. This is a very stressful time for parents/guardians, and concerns that they have not been dealt with fairly may quickly escalate.

The principal must consider whether the complaint raises any concerns about unreported abuse and/or risk of abuse. You must follow the Four Critical Actions if any new information comes to light which leads you to believe that a child may be subject to, or at risk of any unreported abuse.

## 12. Process of review

The principal will organise a review of the reporting process between 4-6 weeks after an incident, suspicion, or disclosure of abuse.

This will support staff and the College to continue to protect children in your care and to reflect on your processes and the need for any follow-up actions.

## 13. Additional contact information

<b>24 hour Services</b>	
Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASA) – Emergency Counselling & Support Line	1800 806 292
1800 Respect	1800 737 732
Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre	1800 015 188 (03) 9322 3555
Kid's Help Line	1800 551 800

<b>Other services</b>	
Child FIRST/Orange Door, Melton	1300 138 180
Department of Health and Human Services Child Protection, Northern and western suburban LGA	1300 664 977
Australian Childhood Foundation	1800 176 453
Child Wise	1800 991 099
Children's Protection Society	(03) 9450 0900
Commission for Children and Young People	1300 782 978
Gatehouse Centre for Child Sexual Assault (provides outreach Melton Council Youth Services & Djerriwarrh Health Services, Melton Community Health Centre)	9am-5pm: (03) 9345 6391 AH crisis care: (03) 9345 5522
Office of the e-Safety Commissioner	1800 880 176
Victims of Crime Help Line: 7 days, 8am-11pm	1800 819 817
Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency (VACCA)	(03) 9287 8800
Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)	(03) 9411 9411
Victorian Aboriginal Education Association	(03) 9481 0800

## 14. Issuance and approval

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