

# Mandatory Reporting Policy

## 1. Introduction

Djerriwarrh Community College (the College) is an independent specialist senior secondary school based in Melton. We deliver the Victorian Pathway Certificate (VPC) and VCE Vocational Major Certificate (VM) for students aged 15-19 years. We provide a safe and inclusive learning environment for young people who may have been disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from education. The College is committed to supporting students to reach their individual personal, social, and educational potential.

Djerriwarrh Community College (the College) is committed to creating and maintaining a school in which all Students are safe from harm and to providing a safe and inclusive environment for all young people from all cultures and linguistically diverse backgrounds and those with a disability.

We understand and implement our duty of care to all students, and we undertake reasonable measures of the proper supervision and protection so that no student faces risks, injury, or harm.

All College School Council members, staff, volunteers, and contractors have a responsibility to prevent child abuse and respond appropriately to allegations.

The College will comply with Ministerial Order No. 1359: Implementing the Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools and School Boarding Premises and the Victorian Child Safe Standards.

## 2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all staff and members of our school community understand the various legal and other reporting obligations related to child safety that apply to Djerriwarrh Community College

## 3. Scope

The policy applies to all College staff, volunteers, contractors, and School Council members.

## 4. Definitions

<b>Child abuse</b>	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• any act committed against a child involving a sexual offence or an offence under section 498(2) of the <i>Crimes Act 1958</i> (grooming).</li><li>• the infliction, on a child, of physical violence or serious emotional or psychological harm.</li><li>• serious neglect of a child.</li></ul>
--------------------	---

<b>Child safety</b>	Encompasses matters related to protecting all children from child abuse, managing the risk of child abuse, providing support to a child at risk of child abuse, and responding to incidents or allegations of child abuse.
<b>College</b>	Djerriwarrh Community College, 235 Station Road, Melton, 3337
<b>Contractors</b>	Include, but not limited, to maintenance and building personnel, consultants, casual teachers, tutors, sports coaches and cleaners.
<b>Parent/guardian</b>	Includes parents, guardians, stepparents and/or carers as listed in the Enrolment Application Form.

## 5. Responsibilities

Child safety and protection is everyone's responsibility. At Djerriwarrh Community College, School Council members staff, volunteers and contractors have a shared responsibility for contributing to the safety and protection of children.

## 6. Communication

This Mandatory Reporting Policy is available on the College website, Compass and hard copies can be obtained from College Reception.

## 7. Policy

### 7.1 Definition of a child

The Guide for Creating a Child Safe Organisation by the Commission for Children and Young People (2022) provides the following definition:

The words 'child' and 'children' in this guide refer to children and young people up to the age of 18 years.

This definition is consistent with the national framework, Creating Safe Environments for Children – Organisations, Employees and Volunteers, the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012*, the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* and the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*.

Refer also to Appendix A – Children and Young People

### 7.2 Child safety obligations

College staff members play an especially critical role in protecting children (including identifying, responding, and reporting child abuse) and must meet a range of legal obligations to do so.

### 7.3 Minimum standards for school registration

Registered schools must meet the requirements of the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* and the *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017* (the Regulations).

Schedule 4, Clause 12 of the Regulations, state that a registered school must ensure that:

- the care, safety and welfare of all students attending the school is in accordance with any applicable State and Commonwealth laws; and
- all staff employed at the school are advised of their obligations under those laws.

### 7.4 Ministerial Order No. 1359 - Child Safe Standards

All Victorian schools must comply with Ministerial Order No. 1359: Implementing the Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools and School Boarding Premises in order to be registered and remain registered with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA).

The Order came into effect on 1 July 2022 and specifies how every Victorian school must:

- embed a culture of ‘no tolerance’ for child abuse, and
- comply with the prescribed 11 minimum Child Safe Standards.

In meeting the requirements of the Order, schools must be inclusive of the needs of all children, particularly students who are vulnerable due to age, family circumstances, abilities, or indigenous, cultural, or linguistic background, international students, students who are unable to live at home and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTIQ+) students.

### 7.5 Child safety and protection

All children and young people have the right to protection in their best interests.

The College understands the important role our school plays in protecting children and young people from abuse including:

- physical abuse.
- sexual abuse (including sexual exploitation).
- family violence.
- emotional abuse.
- neglect (including medical neglect).
- grooming.

The staff at Djerriwarrh Community College are required by law to comply with various child safety reporting obligations. We also recognise the diversity of the students at our school and take account of their individual needs and backgrounds when considering child safety.

## 7.6 Mandated reporters

Under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, the following are mandatory reporters in Victoria:

- registered teachers and early childhood teachers.
- school principals.
- out of home care workers (excluding voluntary foster and kinship carers).
- early childhood workers.
- school counsellors.
- police officers.
- registered medical practitioners.
- nurses.
- midwives.
- youth justice workers.
- registered psychologists; and
- people in religious ministry.

At schools, mandatory reporters include:

- Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registered teachers, including principal class.
- Staff who have been granted permission to teach by the VIT.
- Youth workers; and
- School counsellors.

A 'school counsellor' is defined as "a person employed or engaged (other than on a voluntary basis), to provide direct support to school students, at or directly connected with a school, for mental, emotional or psychological wellbeing."

A school counsellor includes the following:

- Student support staff, including Education Support Staff.
- Primary Welfare Officers.
- Mental health practitioners in secondary schools.
- Student Wellbeing Coordinators; and
- School-based health and wellbeing staff, including allied health staff, such as social workers, speech pathologists, youth workers and school counsellors.

Refer to Appendix B for the full list of mandatory reporters as defined in the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*.

## 7.7 Mandatory Reporting

All mandatory reporters must make a report to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Child Protection as soon as practicable if, during the course of carrying out their professional roles and responsibilities, they form a belief on reasonable grounds that:

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

A mandatory reporter who fails to comply with this legal obligation may be committing a criminal offence. It is important for all staff the College to be aware that they are legally obliged to make a mandatory report on each occasion that they form a reasonable belief that a child needs protection, and they must make a mandatory report even if the principal does not share their belief that a report is necessary.

At our school, all mandated school staff must undertake the *Mandatory Reporting and Other Obligations eLearning Module* annually. We also require all other staff to undertake this module, even where they are not mandatory reporters.

## 7.8 Reportable Conduct Scheme

The Reportable Conduct Scheme is a child protection scheme that requires Victorian education providers to notify the Commission for Children and Young People if there is an allegation of 'reportable conduct' made against one of its employees (including a principal, teacher, or non-teaching staff member), contractors, volunteers, or School Council members.

For more information about Reportable Conduct, refer to the Reportable Conduct Scheme Policy.

## 7.9 Criminal Offences

The Victorian Government has introduced criminal offences to protect children from sexual abuse. Under these reforms a failure to report or act in relation to suspected child sexual abuse can now constitute a criminal offence.

### **Failure to disclose.**

The failure to disclose child sexual abuse offence requires that any adult (aged 18 and over) who holds a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria by an adult against a child (aged under 16) disclose that information to police (unless they have a reasonable excuse).

The offence differs from mandatory reporting under the *Child, Youth and Families Act 2005* because:

- it applies to all adults, not just certain professionals who work with children.
- it is limited to the reporting of sexual abuse. Mandatory reporters are required to report suspected physical and sexual abuse.

- it requires the person to report a suspected crime to police, rather than reporting a concern about a child needing protection to DFFH (Child Protection); and
- the suspected sexual offence must be reported even if the child's parents are acting to protect the child.

### **Reasonable belief**

A 'reasonable belief' is not the same as having proof. A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds.

A reasonable belief is more than suspicion. There must be some objective basis for the belief. However, it is not the same as having proof and does not require certainty.

For example, a 'reasonable belief' might be formed when:

- a child state that they have been sexually abused.
- a child states that they know someone who has been sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves).
- someone who knows a child states that the child has been sexually abused.
- professional observations of the child's behaviour or development leads a professional to form a belief that the child has been sexually abused.
- signs of sexual abuse lead to a belief that the child has been sexually abused.

### **Reasonable excuse**

Reasonable excuse is defined by law and includes:

- fear for the safety of any person including yourself or the potential victim (but not including the alleged perpetrator or an organisation); or
- where the information has already been disclosed, for example, through a mandatory report to DFFH Child Protection.

Additional exemptions apply where:

- the victim is aged 16 years or over and requests confidentiality.
- the person is a child when they formed a reasonable belief.
- the information would be privileged.
- the information is a confidential communication disclosed to a counsellor or a registered medical practitioner (e.g., in a school context, this exemption may apply to a psychologist or a social worker who engages in a counselling relationship with the victim of a sexual offence).
- the information is in the public domain.
- police officers are acting in the course of their duty.

## **Failure to protect**

The failure to protect criminal offence requires a person in a position of authority to reduce or remove the risk of sexual abuse of a child by an adult associated with their organisation.

A person in a position of authority in the organisation will commit the offence if they know of the risk of abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently failed to do so.

For more information about the failure to protect offence, refer to the Reportable Conduct Scheme Policy.

## **Grooming**

Grooming is a criminal offence under the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic). This offence targets predatory conduct undertaken by an adult to prepare a child, under the age of 16, to engage in sexual activity 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.

### **7.10 Reporting obligations**

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 protect them from reasonably foreseeable harm and 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.

All College employed staff (teaching and non-teaching), volunteers and contractors must:

- act as soon as they witness an incident, receive a disclosure, or form a reasonable belief that a student has, or is at risk of being abused, neglected, or exploited.
- act if they form a suspicion or reasonable belief, even if unsure and have not directly observed child abuse (e.g., if the victim or another person tells you about the abuse);
- make sufficient enquiries to form a reasonable belief and to determine a child's immediate needs.
- report any observations or suspicions of concerning behaviour that are in breach of this Policy and/or the Child Safety Code of Conduct or any other child safe related policy.

If a staff member, volunteer or contractor believes that a student is not subject to abuse, but still holds significant concerns for their wellbeing they must still act. This may include making a referral or seeking advice from Child First (in circumstance where the family are open to receiving support) or to DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police.

It is important to note that even if other people, including the Principal or Child Safety Officers, do not share the same view, the staff member, volunteer or contractor is still required to make a report on each occasion they form a view that a student is at risk.

Where another mandated reporter undertakes to make the report, staff, volunteers, and contractors are required to confirm that the report is made.

Refer to Appendix C for further information on forms of abuse.

Processes for making a report are documented in the associated procedure: Child Safety Responding and Reporting Procedure.

### **7.11 Responding to an Emergency – Immediate Harm**

If a student is at immediate risk of harm College, staff must ensure their safety by:

- Separating the alleged victim(s) and others involved.
- Administering first aid if required.
- 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 the Police.
- Maintaining the integrity of the potential crime scene and preserve evidence.

### **7.12 Responding to incidents, disclosures, or suspicions of child abuse**

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 outlines steps to take and services to refer to depending on the assessment of the child's situation. Staff, volunteers, and contractors must follow the Four Critical Actions, including reporting to Victoria Police or DFFH Child Protection, or referring to other services like Child FIRST, to ensure that they fulfil their duty of care obligations

**The Four Critical Actions are:**

1. Responding to an emergency
2. Reporting to authorities
3. Contacting parents/carers
4. Providing ongoing support

The steps to be taken for each action are described in the Child Safety Responding and Reporting Procedure.

### 7.13 Ongoing support

The College understands that our duty of care and moral and legal obligations to our students is ongoing for the duration of their enrolment.

The College will provide ongoing support for children impacted by abuse. This support may include:

- referral to wellbeing professionals and other specialised services.
- the convening of a student support group
- creation of a safety plan for individual student to ensure ongoing protection and outline clear processes for them to follow to ensure safety.
- development of support plans; and
- continued monitoring of students and their families (if applicable).

### 7.14 Confidentiality

Under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, your identity as a reporter remains confidential unless:

- you choose to inform the child and/or the child's parents or guardians of the notification yourself.
- you consent in writing to your identity as the notifier being disclosed by family services.
- the court decides that it needs the information provided in your report in order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child; or
- the court decides that it is satisfied that the interests of justice require that the evidence be given.

Under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, the identity of a person who makes a report to DFFH Child Protection or Child FIRST should remain confidential.

The *Crimes Act 1958* also provides that the identity of persons who report their reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under the age of 16 years to Victoria Police should remain confidential.

This will usually mean that if there are court proceedings in relation to the child or young person, your identity as a reporter will not be disclosed, unless:

- the Court specifically permits your identity to be disclosed, or
- you consent in writing to the disclosure of your identity.

In all cases, a report made in good faith to DFFH Child Protection, Child FIRST or Victoria Police:

- does not for any purpose constitute unprofessional conduct or a breach of professional ethics on the part of the person making the report; and
- does not make the person making the report subject to any liability.

### 7.15 Staff support and training

The College recognises that staff and volunteers will require support and training to ensure that they understand their legal obligations and have the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively manage an incident, disclosure or suspicion in a sensitive and respectful manner while ensuring that they meet all reporting requirements.

At Djerriwarrh Community College, all teaching staff and the principal have received formal training in:

- Mandatory reporting
- Mental Health First Aid, and
- First Aid.

All staff, (teaching and non-teaching), volunteers and contractors (where applicable), are required to undertake/participate in the following training annually:

- Mandatory Reporting and Other Obligations eLearning Module
- Djerriwarrh Community College Child Safety and Wellbeing policy and procedure refresher/update

All staff are given opportunities to undertake relevant additional training that may be offered by external providers.

The following resources are also made available to all staff:

- Child Safety Responding and Reporting Procedure
- Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse poster (located in staff offices and copies provide upon request)
- Guide: Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools, DET, 2018
- Child Safe Report Template

All staff are encouraged to discuss any concerns they have regarding a Student with a Child Safety Officer.

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
- Process review
- Further training where required

## 7.16 Contact information

24 hour Services	
Victoria Police	000
Department of Families ,Fairness and Housing Child Protection	131 278
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
Kid's Help Line	1800 551 800

Other services	
Orange Door, Melton	1800271046
Department of Families, Fairness and Housing Child Protection, Northern and western suburban LGA	1300 664 977
Australian Childhood Foundation	1800 176 453
Child Wise	1300381581
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)	(03) 9345 6391 AH crisis care 1800577011
Office of the e-safety Commissioner	1800 880 176
Victims of Crime Help Line: 7 days, Open 8am-11pm Monday to Friday, 8am-5pm Saturday, Sunday and public holidays	1800 819 817 or Text:0427767891
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

## 8. Review

This policy is regularly reviewed for overall effectiveness and to ensure compliance with all child protection related laws, regulations and standards.

## 9. Associated documents and legislation

<b>Associated policies and procedures</b>	<p>Child Safety Responding and Reporting Procedure.</p> <p>Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy</p> <p>Reportable Conduct Scheme Policy</p> <p>Duty of Care Policy</p>
<b>Other associated documents</b> <b>Internal</b>	<p>Child Safe Code of Conduct</p> <p>Child Safe Report Template</p>
<b>Relevant legislation</b>	<p><i>Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)</i></p> <p><i>Child Wellbeing and Safety Regulations 2017 (Vic)</i></p> <p><i>Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)</i></p> <p><i>Crimes Act 1958 (amended 2014) (Vic)</i></p> <p><i>Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)</i></p> <p><i>Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Vic)</i></p> <p><i>Worker Screening Act 2020 (Vic)</i></p> <p><i>Worker Screening Regulations 2021 (Vic)</i></p> <p><i>Ministerial Order No. 1359: Implementing the Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools and School Boarding Premises</i></p>
<b>Other associated documents</b> <b>External</b>	<p>PROTECT Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse poster (located in staff offices and copies provide upon request)</p> <p>PROTECT Guide: Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools, DET, 2018</p> <p>VRQA Guidelines to the Minimum Standards and Requirements for School Registration</p>

## 10. Issuance and approval

<b>Document No:</b>	041	<b>Version no:</b>	3.4	<b>Classification:</b>	Welfare
<b>Document owner:</b>	Principal	<b>Authorised by:</b>	School Council		
<b>Issue date:</b>	16 May 2025	<b>Review date:</b>	16 May 2027		

## **Appendix A: Children and young people**

From the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*:

**Child** means

- (a) in the case of a person who is alleged to have committed an offence, a person who at the time of the alleged commission of the offence was under the age of 18 years but of or above the age of 10 years but does not include any person who is of or above the age of 19 years when a proceeding for the offence is commenced in the Court; and
  - (aa) in the case of a proceeding under the Family Violence Protection Act 2008, a person who is under the age of 18 years when an application is made under that Act; and
  - (ab) in the case of a proceeding under the Personal Safety Intervention Orders Act 2010, a person who is under the age of 18 years when an application is made under that Act; and
  - (ac) in the case of an application for a declaration under Division 4 of Part 7 of the National Domestic Violence Order Scheme Act 2016, a person who is under the age of 18 years when the application is made; and
  - (ad) in the case of a person in respect of whom a therapeutic treatment order or therapeutic treatment (placement) order may be made, a person who is of or above the age of 10 years and under the age of 18 years when the order is made; and
  - (ae) in the case of section 354A, a person who is of or above the age of 10 years and under the age of 18 years when the person appears as an accused in a criminal proceeding; and
- (b) in any other case, a person who is under the age of 17 years or, if a protection order, a child protection order within the meaning of Schedule 1 or an interim order within the meaning of that Schedule continues in force in respect of him or her, a person who is under the age of 18 years.

From the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*:

**Child** means a person who is under the age of 18 years.

From the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012*

**Child** means a person who is under the age of 18 years.

From the *Ministerial Order No. 1359: Implementing the Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools and School Boarding Premises and the Victorian Child Safe Standards..* In this Order: child has the same meaning as in the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005.

Child means a child or young person who is under the age of 18 years.

## Appendix B: Mandatory reporters

From the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*

### 182 Who is a mandatory reporter?

(1) The following persons are mandatory reporters for the purposes of this Act—

- (a) a registered medical practitioner.
- (b) a nurse.
- B a) a midwife.
- (c) a person who is registered as a teacher or an early childhood teacher under the **Education and Training Reform Act 2006** or has been granted permission to teach under that Act.
- (d) the principal of a government school or a non-Government school within the meaning of the **Education and Training Reform Act 2006**.
- (e) a Police officer.
- (e a) a person in religious ministry.
- (f) on and from the relevant date, the approved provider or nominated supervisor of or a person with a post-secondary qualification in the care, education or minding of children who is employed or engaged by a children's service within the meaning of the **Children's Services Act 1996**;
- (fa) on and from the relevant date, the approved provider or nominated supervisor of, or a person with a post-secondary qualification in the care, education or minding of children who is employed or engaged by an education and care service within the meaning of the Education and Care Services National Law (Victoria);
- (g) on and from the relevant date, a person with a post-secondary qualification in youth, social or welfare work who works in the health, education or community or welfare services field and who is not referred to in paragraph (h);
- h) on and from the relevant date, a person employed under Part 3 of the **Public Administration Act 2004** to perform the duties of a youth and child welfare worker.
- (i) on and from the relevant date, a registered psychologist.
- (j) on and from the relevant date, a youth justice officer.
- (k) on and from the relevant date, a youth parole officer.
- (l) on and from the relevant date, a member of a prescribed class of persons.

- (2) In paragraph (f), (fa), (g), (h), (i), (j), (k) or (l) of subsection (1) ***the relevant date***, in relation to a person or class of persons referred to in that paragraph, means the date fixed for the purposes of that paragraph by an Order made by the Governor in Council and published in the Government Gazette.
- (3) In the case of subsection (1)(l), different dates may be fixed by Order in Council for the purposes of different prescribed classes of persons

#### **184 Mandatory reporting**

- (1) A mandatory reporter who, in the course of practising his or her profession or carrying out the duties of his or her office, position or employment as set out in section 182, forms the belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection on a ground referred to in section 162(1)(c) or 162(1)(d) must report to the Secretary that belief and the reasonable grounds for it as soon as practicable—
  - (a) after forming the belief; and
  - (b) after each occasion on which he or she becomes aware of any further reasonable grounds for the belief.

## Appendix C: Child abuse

The World Health Organization ([WHO], 2006, p. 9) defines child abuse and neglect as:

All forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.

Child abuse can be a single incident, but usually takes place over time. Child abuse includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and/or family violence.

Teachers and non-teaching staff, volunteers, and contractors play a critical role in protecting children from child abuse. In some cases, they may be the best-placed, or only, adult in a child or young person's life who is in a position to identify and respond to signs that a child/young person is being abused or is at risk of abuse or that a school community member (including a school staff member) may be a perpetrator of child abuse.

Staff, volunteers, and contractors should pay attention to:

- Physical signs of abuse or neglect – these could include bruises, burns, fractures (broken bones), frequent hunger, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or poor hygiene.
- Behavioural signs of abuse or neglect – these could include showing little or no emotion when hurt, wariness of their parents, alcohol or drug misuse, age-inappropriate sexual behaviour, stealing food, excessive friendliness to strangers or wearing long sleeves and trousers in hot weather (to hide bruises).
- Disclosure – if the student tells you they have been abused.

## Forms and indicators of child abuse

### Note:

The information provided here is an overview only. For detailed information on forms of child abuse and the physical and behavioural indicators, refer to:

[PROTECT Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#)

There are many indicators of child abuse and neglect. The presence of a single indicator, or even several indicators, does not prove that abuse or neglect has occurred. However, the repeated occurrence of an indicator, or the occurrence of several indicators together, should alert staff to the possibility of child abuse and neglect.

## Physical abuse

Physical child abuse is 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.

Indicators of physical abuse may include recurrent bruising, sprains, cuts and scratches; fractured or broken bones; lack of emotion; unlikely explanations for injuries; fear, nervousness or aggression.

## **Sexual abuse**

Child sexual abuse is when a person uses power or authority over a child to involve them in sexual activity and 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.

Many of the physical indicators of sexual abuse are only identifiable via a medical examination, for example sexually transmitted diseases, vaginal or anal bruising or scarring

Often the first indication the child gives is when they tell a person whom they trust that they have been sexually abused.

Behavioural indicators of sexual abuse may include suicidal and self-harm behaviour, regressive behaviour, or aggression

## **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/guardian.

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/guardian
- controlling a child through threats, manipulation, force, or use of authority
- making close physical contact, such as inappropriate tickling and wrestling

- making sexual comments or jokes

Grooming includes online grooming which 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.

## **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.

Indicators of emotional abuse may include low self-esteem, lack of trust in people, alcohol or drug abuse, self-harm, lack of social skills and attention seeking behaviour.

## **Family Violence**

Family violence is violence or abuse used by the perpetrator to exert control over members of the immediate or extended family. It includes behaviour which results in physical harm, sexual assault and/or psychological trauma, forced isolation, economic deprivation or behaviour that causes the victim to live in fear.

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.

Indicators of family violence may include injuries, absenteeism, change in behaviour, fear of conflict, depression, or fear of a parent.

## **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.

Indicators of neglect may include poor personal hygiene, inadequate or inappropriate clothing, hunger, tired or falling asleep at inappropriate times, frequent lateness, early arrival, or reluctance to leave school, drug and/or alcohol abuse in the home