



## Responding to Child Abuse

Signs of Child abuse may be accessed using

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/childprotection/Pages/identify.aspx>

- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- emotional abuse
- neglect
- medical neglect
- family violence
- human trafficking (including forced marriage)
- sexual exploitation (including pornography and prostitution).

### Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

#### **Critical Action 1: Ensure immediate safety**

##### **You must ensure immediate safety, by:**

- separating the alleged victim and others involved, ensuring all 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 be prepared to identify a contact person at the school for future liaison with police (**Noxia Angelides / Debbie Schmauder**)

## **Critical Action 2: Reporting of Child Abuse**

### **When the source of suspected abuse is within the school**

If the source of suspected abuse comes from within the school (this includes any forms of suspected child abuse involving a school staff member, contractor or volunteer) you must:

- contact Victoria Police via your local police station
- also report internally

### **Government schools must also:**

- report to your school principal/ leadership team
- report to the Department's Employee Conduct Branch and Security Services Unit, on (03) 9637 2934
- identify a contact person at the school for future liaison with Child Protection and Victoria Police and seek advice about contacting parents. ( **Noxia Angelides / Debbie Schmauder** )
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### **When the source of suspected abuse is within the family or community**

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

1. Report to DHHS Child Protection if a child is considered to be:
  - in need of protection due to 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.
2. Report suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police
3. Report internally to:
  - School Principal and/or leadership team (all instances), highlighting:
    - the details of the suspected child abuse or risk of abuse including the name of those involved
    - any immediate actions taken to protect the safety of the child
    - your report or intention to report to DHHS Child Protection, Victoria Police and/or Child FIRST (131278 or 000)
    - possible steps that can be taken to contact parents (if appropriate) and support the student

**Also report to:**

- Government Schools: DET Security Services Unit on  
(03) 9637 2934

**Abuse relating to international students - additional reporting**

If the incident, suspicion or disclosure relates to an international student you will most likely be required to make an additional report.

- Government schools: Contact the Department's International Education Division on (03) 9637 2990.

You must make a new report in any circumstance where you become aware of any further incidents, or disclosures, or a form a new suspicion that a child is a victim of offending, or has engaged in student sexual offending.

Every report is critical to protecting a child 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 child even if:***

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

**Action 3 Contacting Parents/Care Givers**

*Before contacting the child's parent, your Principal (or their delegate) must contact Victoria Police or Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Child Protection (depending on who the report has been made to).*

DHHS Child Protection will advise about whether it is appropriate to contact parents at this stage

***Permission not given to contact parents***

Your Principal (or delegate) will be advised **not to contact the parents** in circumstances where:

- the parents are alleged to have engaged in the abuse
- a disclosure to the parent may subject the child to further abuse
- the child is a mature minor (assessed to be sufficiently mature and intelligent to make such decisions on his or her own behalf) and have requested that their

parent/carer not be notified (in these circumstances ideally the child will nominate another responsible adult who can be contacted)

- the notification is likely to adversely affect the investigation of the incident by the relevant authorities

### ***Permission given to contact parents***

Where advised to be appropriate, schools should make sensitive and professional contact with parents as soon as possible on the day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion. This enables parents to take steps to:

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

### ***Guidance on contacting parents***

**The Principal and/or reporting staff member (ideally together)** should inform the parents/carers of the child impacted by the suspected child abuse.

During this conversation it is important to:

- remain calm
- be empathic to feelings
- validate concerns
- provide appropriate details of the incident, disclosure and/or suspicion of child abuse
- outline the action the school staff have taken to date
- inform them of who the incident, disclosure and/or suspicion has been reported to
- provide the name and contact phone number of DHHS Child Protection and/or the police officer who is investigating
- provide information on whether they are likely to be contacted by DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police (if known)
- inform them that the investigation may take some time and ask what further information they would like and how school staff can assist them
- assure them that school wellbeing staff can provide support to the child. Victorian Government school staff can make referrals to Student Support Services or other wellbeing staff based at the school
- invite the parents/carers to attend a Student Support Group meeting where a Student Support Plan can be prepared to ensure that appropriate support can be provided for their child

## **Action 4 – Providing Ongoing Support**

### ***Working together and planning support***

Providing holistic support to address the trauma and wellbeing issues associated with child abuse is best achieved through careful planning and working in partnership with wellbeing professionals, parents/carers and educators.

If a student is impacted by suspected abuse, and it is deemed appropriate, school staff must:

- establish regular communication between staff and the child's parent/guardian/carer (if this is appropriate) to discuss a child's progress wellbeing and the effectiveness of planned strategies
- convene a Student Support Group to plan ongoing monitoring, support, and follow-up of the child's health and wellbeing (Student Support Groups usually comprise school wellbeing staff, teachers, allied health professionals and where appropriate the student and/or their parent/carer)
- develop and implement a Student Support Plan, which documents the planned support strategies and includes timeframes for review (where possible, these support strategies should be informed by allied health and wellbeing professional with expertise in addressing child abuse and trauma).

### ***Engaging allied health and wellbeing professionals***

Where appropriate school staff should engage allied health and wellbeing supports and services to meet the wellbeing needs of the child impacted by abuse, including:

- wellbeing staff members
  - allied health and wellbeing professionals engaged by the student and families.
- Allied health and wellbeing professionals can provide:

- intensive support to children and their families
- critical input into Student Support Plans
- advice to school staff members on how to appropriately support the student.

### ***Government schools***

Government schools can:

- contact their Regional Office. To find your nearest office, see: [Regions](#)
- contact: [Student Support Services](#)

- refer to the Continuum of Supports for a description of the range of school based support services that may be locally available. For more information, see: [School Focused Youth Service](#)

### **Legal Obligations**

Please see your legal obligations outlined in Clayton North Child safety – Allegations of Abuse policy.

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1nfIyPIk\\_miCHAVleH210MwJBT3yJ0kuc](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1nfIyPIk_miCHAVleH210MwJBT3yJ0kuc)

***Please ensure you complete* PROTECT – Report – [Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse](#)**

Available at:

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1nfIyPIk\\_miCHAVleH210MwJBT3yJ0kuc](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1nfIyPIk_miCHAVleH210MwJBT3yJ0kuc)

### **Appendix 1.**

**When to contact CHILD FIRST (131278 )**

Child FIRST (Family Information, Referral and Support Team) is a community-based referral point into Family Services.

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

In addition to reporting suspected abuse to appropriate authorities, you should make a referral to Child FIRST if:

- you have a significant concern for a child's wellbeing
- your concerns have a low-to-moderate impact on the child
- the child's immediate safety is not compromised
- you/your school has discussed the referral with the family and they are supportive of it.

Examples of concerns that school staff should report to Child FIRST include instances when a child's care or development is significantly impacted on by:

- parenting problems
- family conflict or family breakdown
- pressure due to a family member's physical/mental illness, substance abuse, or disability
- vulnerability due to youth, isolation or lack of support
- significant social or economic disadvantage

#### When to contact VICTORIA POLICE

In addition to reporting suspected abuse to appropriate authorities, you must contact **Victoria Police on 000** if the:

- child's immediate safety is compromised
- child is partaking in any risk taking activity that is illegal and extreme in nature or poses a high risk to the child.

#### When to contact DHS (131278 )

In addition to reporting suspected abuse to appropriate authorities, you should contact DHHS Child Protection if you believe a child is in need of protection. This includes all concerns that:

- have a serious impact on a child's safety, stability or development, including abandonment, death or incapacity, extreme risk-taking behaviour, or harm to an unborn child

- are persistent and entrenched and likely to have a serious impact on a child's safety, stability or development
- relate to a parent/s who cannot or will not protect the child from significant harm
- include a belief that the family is likely to be uncooperative in seeking assistance