

Child Safe and Mandatory Reporting Policy and Guidelines

Application of Child Safe Standards and Mandatory Reporting at Mount View Primary School

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Policy Review Date	To be reviewed 2019

**POLICY
AND
CODE OF CONDUCT**

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

Mount View Primary School is committed to safety and wellbeing of all children and young people. This will be the primary focus of our care and decision making. Mount View Primary School has zero tolerance for child abuse.

Mount View Primary School is committed to providing a child safe environment where children and young people are safe, and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives. Particular attention will be paid to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children and children from culturally and / or linguistically diverse backgrounds, vulnerable children as well as the safety of children with a disability.

Every person involved in Mount View Primary School has a responsibility to understand the important and specific role he/ she plays individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children and young people is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make.

In its planning, decision-making and operations Mount View Primary School will:

1. Take a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to child safety;
2. Value and empower children to participate in decisions which affect their lives;
3. Foster a culture of openness that supports all persons to safely disclose risks of harm to children
4. Respect diversity in cultures and child rearing practices while keeping child safety paramount;
5. Provide written guidance on appropriate conduct and behaviour towards children;
6. Engage suitable people to work with children and have high quality staff and volunteer supervision and professional development;
7. Ensure children know who to talk with if they are worried or are feeling unsafe, and that they are comfortable and encouraged to raise such issues;
8. Report suspected abuse, neglect or mistreatment promptly to the appropriate authorities;
9. Share information appropriately and lawfully with other organisations where the safety and wellbeing of children is at risk
10. Ensure a risk prevention and minimisation approach
11. Take the legislative requirements seriously and ensure implementation
12. Value the input of and communicate regularly with families and carers

The school policies and guidelines in this document demonstrate our commitment and actions towards maintaining child safety. These policies and guidelines will be reviewed annually and communicated to the school community through the school website, newsletter and online staff room.

The school policies and guidelines will be reviewed annually and new staff will be informed as part of their induction.

Every staff member plays a critical role in protecting young children and is encouraged to understand, identify and report child safety matters. Staff will be informed and know how to respond to abuse or suspected abuse by applying the Four Critical Actions for Schools.

MANDATORY REPORTING POLICY

Rationale:

When teachers form a belief that a child may be at risk of harm due to sexual abuse or physical injury that results from abuse or neglect, they have a legal responsibility to notify the Department of Human Services.

Mount View Primary School must meet the mandatory reporting requirements of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* as well as meet the school's duty of care obligations to students.

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that children's rights to be safe are maintained and each child is protected against physical and sexual abuse, and neglect.

Definitions:

Child abuse/neglect

Child abuse and neglect occurs when a parent/guardian or any other person having the care of a child inflicts, or allows to be inflicted, physical injury or gross deprivation on the child that causes or creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, impairment of physical or emotional health or development, or creates or allows to be created a substantial risk of such injury. This definition includes sexual abuse and/or sexual exploitation of the child.

Children and young people have the right to be protected from abuse and neglect. When teachers form a belief that a child may be at risk of harm due to sexual abuse or physical injury that results from abuse or neglect, they have a legal responsibility to notify the Department of Human Services.

Mandatory reporting

Since 1993 teachers have been mandated to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the Department of Human Services Child Protection. As of July 2003, this was updated to include any person who is registered as a teacher or principal under the *Victorian Institute of Teaching Act 2001* or has been granted permission to teach under that Act. Any and all persons so described are mandated to report physical injury that results from abuse or neglect, and sexual abuse, to the Department of Human Services Child Protection.

This legal requirement to report child physical and sexual abuse arises from Section 184 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*. In summary:

If, in the course of his or her duties, a teacher or principal forms the belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection on the grounds that a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical injury or sexual abuse, and the child's parents have not protected or are unlikely to protect the child from harm of that type; the person must notify the Department of Human Services Child Protection of that belief and of the reasonable grounds for it, as soon as practicable -

After forming the belief and after each occasion on which he or she becomes aware of any further reasonable grounds or the belief.

Forming a belief

The *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* states that teachers must notify the Department of Human Services when they form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical injury or as a result of sexual abuse.

A belief is considered to be more than a suspicion. One may be considered to have formed a belief if one is more likely to accept rather than reject the suspicion that a child is at risk of harm from physical or sexual abuse.

Proof is not required that abuse has occurred or is likely to occur. A belief is sufficient. It is the role of the Department of Human Services to determine whether that belief should be investigated.

Reasonable grounds

Reasonable grounds can be thought of as the mechanism used for forming the belief. These include situations where:

- A child tells the teacher they have been abused
- Someone else tells the teacher (perhaps a relative, friend, neighbour or sibling of the child) that a child has been abused or is at risk of abuse.
- A child tells the teacher that they know someone who has been abused (often a child is referring to him or herself), and the teacher's own observation of a particular child's behaviour/injuries or their knowledge of children generally leads them to suspect that abuse is occurring.

Implementation

Any person who is registered as a teacher or principal under the *Victorian Institute of Teaching Act 2001* or has been granted permission to teach under that Act are mandated to report physical injury to any person 17 years of age or younger that results from abuse or neglect, and sexual abuse, to the Department of Human Services Child Protection.

Teachers will be informed annually of their legal responsibilities to report child abuse and neglect to the Department of Human Services and will be provided with information on how to recognise and respond to child abuse.

If a teacher suspects that a child is in need of protection from physical and/or sexual abuse it is essential that he/she document any concerns and observations in a confidential file. In all cases, teachers are advised to inform the principal of his or her concerns as early as possible. Over a period of time it may become apparent to the teacher that there are reasonable grounds on which to form a belief that the child needs protection.

Following a discussion with the Principal or Principal's nominee about his/her concerns and observations:

The teacher may form the belief that it is necessary to make a report. In this case the teacher must make a report to the Department of Human Services as soon as practicable. It is the responsibility of the individual teacher to ensure that this notification has occurred and that all reasonable grounds supporting the belief have been reported.

The teacher may continue to suspect that a child is in need of protection. In this case the teacher should continue to monitor and support the child.

Those involved in any process of consultation around mandatory reporting must maintain confidentiality regarding the child, the family, the notifier and any alleged perpetrator.

A teacher does not need permission from parents or caregivers to notify, nor do you need to inform them that you are notifying.

A teacher may notify the Department of Human Services Victoria of his/her belief without the prior knowledge of the Principal. It is strongly recommended that the teacher inform the Principal or Principal's nominee of his/her action as soon as practicable.

It may be necessary for the Department of Human Services to interview a child at school when a notification of abuse has been made. Such requests may be directed to the Principal or the Principal's nominee.

It is important to advise children or young people of their right to have a supportive adult present at such an interview. This may be the Principal or a teacher.

When Officers of Child Protection Victoria or the Police seek an interview with a child, the Principal should cooperate with the authorised agency.

The principal should:

- Arrange for the child to choose a supportive adult to be present.
- Follow the recommended procedures from the Department of Human Services.
- Ensure that arrangements are in order for any interview which is to take place at the school.
- Seek or offer appropriate pastoral support for the reporting staff member.
- Observe confidentiality at all times in the management of a mandatory reporting case.

CHILD SAFETY LEADER ROLE

Identified leader: Assistant Principal (Student Well Being and School Management)

The role of Child Safety Officer includes leadership support and the ability to direct other staff (where appropriate), to undertake the role effectively.

Broad areas of the role are to:

PROVIDE AUTHORITATIVE ADVICE

- Act as a source of support, advice and expertise to staff on matters of child safety.
- Liaise with the principal and school leaders to maintain the visibility of child safety.
- Lead the development of the school's child safety culture, including being a child safety champion and providing coordination in communicating, implementing, monitoring, enhancing and reporting on strategies to embed a culture of child safety.

RAISE AWARENESS

- Ensure the school's policies are known and used appropriately.
- Ensure the school's child safety policy is reviewed in the context of school self-evaluation undertaken as part of the school accountability framework.
- Ensure the child protection policy is available publicly and parents are aware of the fact that referrals about suspected abuse or neglect may be made and the role of the school in this.
- Be alert to the specific needs of children in need, those with special educational needs and young carers.
- Encourage among all staff a culture of listening to children and taking account of their wishes and feelings in any measures to protect them.

TRAIN

- Being authoritative in providing advice by:
 - keeping their skills up to date with appropriate training carried out every two years
 - having a working knowledge of how the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Community Service Organisations conduct a child protection case conference to be able to attend and contribute to these effectively when required to do so.

PROTECT

- Be able to keep detailed, accurate, secure written records of concerns and referrals.
- Ensure each member of staff has access to and understands the school's child safety policy and procedures, especially new and part time staff.
- Make sure staff are aware of training opportunities and the latest DHHS and DET policies and guidance.

PRINCIPAL CHECKLIST

Principals have primary responsibility for managing their school's response to incidents, disclosures and suspicions of child abuse.

As outlined in the *Minimum Standards for a Child Safe Environment, Ministerial Order No. 870- Child Safe Standards- Managing the risk of child abuse in schools*, it is a requirement that the school leadership team support and empower staff to make a report by having clear policies and procedures about:

- who a staff member can seek advice from regarding if and who to report to
- what arrangements are in place to relieve staff while they are making or deciding to make a report as soon as practicable
- what strategies are in place to support staff through the process of making a report
- maintaining written records.

See www.education.vic.gov.au/protect for further information.

PRINCIPALS CHECKLIST

Fulfilling your role when an incident, disclosure or suspicion of child abuse comes to your attention

If there is an incident, disclosure or suspicion of child abuse concerning a student or staff member at your school, as a Principal, you are responsible for:

Reporting and recording

- Ensuring that **the Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse** have been followed
- Ensuring that your staff complete the **Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: Template for all Victorian Schools**
- Undertaking the review process included within the template between 4-6 weeks after a report is made.

On-going communication

Ongoing liaison/communication with:

- DHHS Child Protection and Victoria Police
- Regional Office and SIRU if engaged (Government schools)
- Diocese education office (Catholic schools)
- School Board (Independent schools)
- Parents/carers of all impacted students (where appropriate, following advice from authorities)

If an international student is impacted:

- Liaison with International Education Division (Government schools)
- Liaison with VRQA (Catholic and Independent schools in some instances)

If an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Student is impacted:

- Liaison with Koorie Education Officer (Government schools)
- Liaison with Diocese education office (Catholic schools)

If a staff member is implicated:

- Liaison with Victoria Police
- Ongoing communication and action as set out by the Employee Conduct Branch (Government schools)

Providing on-going support

Overseeing the development of a short-term action plan for all children impacted by suspected abuse in consultation with:

- The Region and the Student Incident and Recovery Unit (government schools)

Ensuring ongoing education and support services are provided for all children involved via:

- Formation of a Student Support Group
- Developing, implementing and reviewing a **Student Support Plan** in partnership with children and their parents/carers, allied health workers and external support agencies where appropriate (this plan should list appropriate school-level and non-school based supports and should assist students in returning to school)
- Addressing concerns as they arise

Provision of school based wellbeing services

- Continued monitoring of the situation and the health and wellbeing of impacted children and staff members
- Ensuring the provision of ongoing support for the children, families and staff members involved.

Child Safety Code of Conduct

Mount View Primary School is committed to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. Our school community recognises the importance of, and a responsibility for, ensuring our school is a safe, supportive and enriching environment which respects and fosters the dignity and self-esteem of children and young people, and enables them to thrive in their learning and development.

This Code of Conduct aims to protect children and reduce any opportunities for child abuse or harm to occur. It also assists in understanding how to avoid or better manage risky behaviours and situations. It is intended to complement child protection legislation, Department policy, school policies and procedures and professional standards, codes or ethics as these apply to staff and other personnel.

The Principal and school leaders of Mount View Primary School will support implementation and monitoring of the Code of Conduct, and will plan, implement and monitor arrangements to provide inclusive, safe and orderly schools and other learning environments. The Principal and school leaders of Mount View Primary School will also provide information and support to enable the Code of Conduct to operate effectively.

All staff, contractors, volunteers and any other members of the school community involved in child-related work are required to comply with the Code of Conduct by observing expectations for appropriate behaviour below. The Code of Conduct applies in all school situations, including school camps and in the use of digital technology and social media.

Acceptable Behaviours

All staff, volunteers, contractors and school council members are responsible for supporting the safety of children by:

- adhering to the school's child safety policy and upholding the school's statement of commitment to child safety at all times
- taking all reasonable steps to protect students from abuse
- treating everyone in the school community with respect
- listening and responding to the views and concerns of children, particularly if they are telling you that they or another child has been abused or that they are worried about their safety/or the safety of another child
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Indigenous children
- promoting the cultural safety participation and empowerment of children with culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- promoting the safety, participation and empowerment of children with a disability
- ensuring as far as practicable that adults are not alone with a child
- reporting any allegations of child abuse and/or child safety concerns to the school's leadership
- understanding and complying with all reporting obligations as they relate to mandatory reporting and reporting under the Crimes Act 1958
- ensuring as quickly as possible that the child(ren) is/are safe if an allegation of child abuse is made

- reporting to the Victorian Institute of Teaching, any charges, committals for trial or convictions in relation to a sexual offence by a registered teacher, or certain allegations or concerns about a registered teacher.

Unacceptable Behaviours

All staff, volunteers, contractors and school council members must not:

- ignore or disregard any suspected or disclosed child abuse
- develop any 'special' relationships with children that could be seen as favouritism
- exhibit or initiate behaviours with children that may be construed as unnecessary physical contact
- put children at risk of abuse
- engage in open discussion of a mature or adult nature in the presence of children
- use inappropriate language in the presence of children
- express personal views on cultures, race or sexuality in the presence of children
- discriminate against any child, because of age, gender, race, culture, religion, vulnerability, sexuality, ethnicity or disability
- have any online contact with the child (including by social media, email, instant messaging etc) or their family unless necessary eg by providing families with e-newsletters or assisting students with their school work
- use any personal communication channels/device such as a personal email account
- exchange personal contact details such as phone number, social networking sites or personal email addresses with children
- photograph or video a child without the consent of the parent or guardians
- work with children whilst under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs consume alcohol or drugs at school or school events in the presence of children.

RESPONDING TO ABUSE OR SUSPECTED ABUSE

FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

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 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 (e.g. if the victim or another person tells you about the abuse).
- You **must** use the Responding to Suspected Child Abuse template to keep clear and comprehensive notes.

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

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.

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. Have notes ready with your observations, together with child and family details.

IF THE SOURCE OF SUSPECTED ABUSE IS FROM WITHIN THE SCHOOL:

VICTORIA POLICE

You must report all instances of suspected child abuse involving a school staff member, contractor or volunteer to Victoria Police.

You **must also** report **internally** to:

- School Principal and/or leadership team (Child Safety Officer)
- Employee Conduct Branch
- DET Security Services Unit

IF THE SOURCE OF SUSPECTED ABUSE IS FROM 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:

- School Principal and/or leadership team
- DET Security Services Unit

ACTION 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/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 parents/carers 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).

ACTION 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 etc.

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

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 (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support), or to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police.

CONTACTS

DHHS CHILD PROTECTION

AREA

883 Whitehorse Rd, Box Hill VIC 3128

Hours: Open today · 9am–5pm

Phone: (03) 9843 6000

AFTER HOURS

After hours, weekends, public holidays 13 12 78

STUDENT CRITICAL INCIDENT ADVISORY UNIT

Senior Advisor (03) 8392 9300

CHILD FIRST

www.dhs.vic.gov.au

VICTORIA POLICE

000 or contact your local police station

DET SECURITY SERVICES UNIT

(03) 9589 6266

STUDENT INCIDENT AND RECOVERY UNIT

(03) 9637 2934

EMPLOYEE CONDUCT BRANCH

(03) 9637 2595

FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse



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 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 (e.g. if the victim or another person tells you about the abuse).
- You **must** use the *Responding to Suspected Child Abuse* template to keep clear and comprehensive notes.

*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

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 or volunteer to Victoria Police.

You **must also** report **Internally** to:

GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

- School Principal and/or leadership team
- Employee Conduct Branch
- DET Security Services Unit

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

- School Principal and/or leadership team
- Diocesan education office

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

- School Principal and/or school chairperson

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
You **must also** report to:

- School Principal and/or leadership team
- DET Security Services Unit

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS
You **must also** report to:

- School Principal and/or leadership team
- Diocesan education office

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS
You **must also** report to:

- School Principal and/or chairperson

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 (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support), or to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police.

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 (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).

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.

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 9777 South Division 1300 655 795 East Division 1300 360 391 West Division (Rural) 1800 075 599 West Division (Metro) 1300 664 9777</p> <p>AFTER HOURS After hours, weekends, public holidays 13 12 78</p> <p>CHILD FIRST www.dhs.vic.gov.au</p> <p>VICTORIA POLICE 000 or your local police station</p>	<p>DET SECURITY SERVICES UNIT (03) 9589 6266</p> <p>STUDENT INCIDENT AND RECOVERY UNIT (03) 9637 2934</p> <p>EMPLOYEE CONDUCT BRANCH (03) 9637 2595</p> <p>DIOCESAN OFFICE Melbourne (03) 9267 0228 Ballarat (03) 5337 7135 Sale (03) 5622 6600 Sandhurst: (03) 5443 2377</p> <p>INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS VICTORIA (03) 9825 7200</p>
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SPOTTING THE WARNING SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE: FOR SCHOOL STAFF

A REASONABLE BELIEF

What do I do if I suspect (form a reasonable belief) a child is being abused?

You **MUST** take action as soon as you witness an incident, receive a disclosure or suspect that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused. You **MUST** act whenever you form a reasonable belief which means acting even if you are unsure and have not directly observed the abuse. Failure to act can be a criminal offence.

You **MUST** follow the Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse (see above)

WHEN SHOULD I ACT?

You **MUST** act even if you are unsure and have not observed the abuse.

You **MUST** following the Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse. Failure to act can be a criminal offence.

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

Child abuse can include physical abuse, sexual abuse, grooming, emotional or psychological harm, neglect or family violence.

It doesn't have to involve physical contact or force. Child abuse can include:

- talking to a child in a sexually explicit way
- grooming a child for future sexual activity
- forcing a child to watch pornography
- being witness to family violence
- failing to provide a child with an adequate standard of nutrition, supervision or medical care to the extent that their development of the child is placed at serious risk, or is significantly impaired.

WHO IS MOST LIKELY TO BE IMPACTED BY CHILD ABUSE?

Any child can be victim to child abuse, however children who are vulnerable, isolated and/or have a disability are disproportionately abused.

Abuse is often committed by someone the child knows well such as a family member or someone within the school setting. In fact, child abuse can be committed by any member of the community.

Regardless of who the perpetrator or victim is the trauma of child abuse can have devastating impacts upon a child's wellbeing and development that can last for the rest of their life.

This is why it is critical that we respond immediately to any form of suspected abuse within our school communities.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS THAT A CHILD HAS BEEN ABUSED?

The most common physical and behavioural indicators of child abuse are outlined below. This is not an exhaustive list.

If you feel uncomfortable about a child's physical presentation or behaviour, but have not directly witnessed or been told about abuse, or risk of abuse, you should still act.

You can seek further advice contact and if you form a reasonable belief that a child has been abused, is being abused, or is at risk of abuse then you **MUST** follow the [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse.](#)

COMMON PHYSICAL INDICATORS OF CHILD ABUSE

- bruises, welts, cuts/grazes or burns (especially those on back, bottom, legs, arms and inner thighs or in unusual configurations and may resemble an object)
- internal injuries and bone fractures not consistent with the explanation offered
- any injury to the genital or rectal area (e.g. bruising, bleeding, infection or anything causing pain to go to the toilet)
- wearing clothes unsuitable for weather conditions to hide injuries
- sexually-transmitted diseases and/or frequent urinary tract infections
- appearing consistently dirty and unwashed and/or inappropriately dressed for weather conditions
- being consistently hungry, tired and listless
- having unattended health problems and lack of routine medical care
- internal injuries

COMMON BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS OF CHILD ABUSE

- disclosure of abuse and/or drawings or writing which depicts violence and abuse
- habitual absences from school without reasonable explanation
- significant and unexplained delays in emotional, mental or physical development
- regressive or unusual changes to behaviour (e.g. sudden decline in academic performance, nervousness, depression, withdrawal, hyperactivity, aggression, bedwetting)
- drug or alcohol misuse, suicide or self-harm, harm to others or animals
- an inconsistent or unlikely explanation for an injury, or inability to remember the cause
- reluctance to go home and/or a wariness or fear of a parent/carer
- unusual fear of physical contact with adults
- persistent and age-inappropriate sexual activity (e.g. excessive masturbation or rubbing genitals against adults, promiscuity)
- poor self-care or personal hygiene
- an unusually close connection with an older person
- possessing expensive gifts or money (e.g. a new mobile phone given to them by a "friend")
- taking on a caretaker role prematurely, trying to protect other family members

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS THAT AN ADULT IS PERPETRATING ABUSE?

The most common indicators that an adult is abusing a child are outlined below. This is not an exhaustive list.

If you feel uncomfortable in any way about a relationship between an adult and a child (or inappropriate relationships between children such as siblings) you **MUST** still act by following the [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse.](#)

COMMON BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS OF ADULTS ABUSING CHILDREN

FAMILY MEMBERS (PARENTS, SIBLINGS, EXTENDED FAMILY)

- attempts by one parent to alienate their child from the other parent
- overprotective or volatile relationships
- reluctance by the child to be alone with one or more of their family members
- a child and a sibling behaving like boyfriend and girlfriend (embarrassment if they are found alone together)

OTHER ADULTS (EG. SCHOOL STAFF MEMBER, VOLUNTEERS, COACHES)

- touching a child inappropriately
- bringing up sexual material or personal disclosures into conversations with a child

- inappropriate contact with the child (e.g. calls, emails, texts, social media)
- obvious or inappropriate preferential treatment of the child (making them feel "special")
- giving inappropriate / expensive gifts to a child
- having inappropriate social boundaries (e.g. telling the child about their own personal problems).
- offering to drive a child to or from school
- inviting themselves over to their homes, calling them at night
- befriending the parents/carers of the child and making visits to their home
- undermining the child's reputation (so that the child won't be believed)

WHERE TO GO FOR FURTHER ADVICE?

- Your Principal or a member of the leadership team
- DHHS Child Protection on 131 278.
- Your local police station

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The advice contained within this factsheet is drawn from Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools this can be found at: www.education.vic.gov.au/protect

You must refer to this guidance to ensure you meet your obligations to protect children.

To familiarise yourself with this policy and to consider how it applies in different scenarios, visit www.education.vic.gov.au/protect

MORE SPECIFIC ADVICE – TYPES OF ABUSE

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 abuse
- sexual abuse
- grooming
- emotional or psychological harm
- neglect
- family violence.

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

- 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 practicable.

If physical and/or behavioural indicators lead you to suspect that a child has been or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse, you must respond as soon as practicable by following the Four Steps: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse.

If you believe that a student is not being abused, but you still hold concerns for their safety or wellbeing, refer to advice about responding to concerns about the wellbeing of a child (or unborn

child) to determine who to consult with, when to make a report and when to engage other wellbeing professionals.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

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 (FGM).

What are the physical indicators of physical child abuse?

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, suicide or self-harm

Please note that physical harm may also be caused by student fights and/or bullying.

SEXUAL ABUSE

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 (e.g. kissing or fondling a child in a sexual way, masturbation, oral sex or penetration) 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 in to 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.

For more information on sexting and the transmission of sexual images between students, see: [Bully Stoppers - Sexting](#)

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 victim, 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). See: **advice on identifying perpetrators of child sexual abuse**.

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 over*
- a family friend or stranger
- any person 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 to be capable of committing an offence. Any suspected sexual behaviour displayed by children under 10 is referred to as problem sexual behaviour.

What are the physical 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

What are the behavioural indicators of child sexual abuse?

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, prostitution or attempted suicide
- sudden decline in academic performance, poor memory and concentration
- promiscuity
- 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 for Schools if you

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

See:  [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse](#) |  [Word version](#) or see page 14

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 (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 boyfriend and girlfriend
- 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
- 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)

CRITICAL INFORMATION

- ***Grooming is when a person engages in predatory conduct to prepare a child for 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.***
- ***If you suspect that a child is being groomed, you must follow the  [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse](#) |  [Word version](#)***

GROOMING

What is grooming?



Grooming is when a person engages in predatory conduct to prepare a child for 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.

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, force or use of authority (this can make a child fearful to report unwanted behaviour)
- making close physical contact sexual, 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?

Online grooming is a criminal offence and 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  [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse](#) |  [Word version](#) or see page 14.

Online grooming can also precede online child exploitation, a form of sexual abuse 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 online child exploitation must be reported.

For more information about:

- child exploitation - new resources coming soon

- online grooming, see: [Bully Stoppers - Online Grooming](#)
- sexting and the transmission of sexual images between students, see: [Bully Stoppers - Sexting](#)



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' etc
- 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'

For information on the indicators to look for in suspected perpetrators, see: [Behavioural indicators for perpetrators of child sexual abuse](#)

CRITICAL INFORMATION

- *Emotional child abuse occurs when a child is repeatedly rejected, isolated or frightened by threats, or by witnessing family violence.*
- *If you suspect that a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, emotional or psychological harm, you must follow the  [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse](#) |  [Word version](#)*

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

What is emotional abuse?

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

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. Emotional abuse may occur with or without other forms of abuse.

What are the physical 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

What are the behavioural indicators of emotional child abuse?

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 with other children

CRITICAL INFORMATION

- **Serious neglect significantly impairs the health or physical development of the child, or places this development at serious risk.**
- If you suspect that a child is experiencing neglect, you must report it by following the [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse](#).
- If you have low to moderate concerns for the wellbeing of a child, such as concerns due to conflict within a family, parenting difficulties, isolation of a family or a lack of apparent support, the [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse](#) can support you in determining whether to make a report and what other action to take to support the child.

NEGLECT

What is neglect?

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.

In some circumstances the neglect of a child:

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

Both these forms of neglect must be responded to via the [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse](#).

What are the physical 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



What are the behavioural indicators of neglect?

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

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 for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse](#) |  [Word version](#)

FAMILY VIOLENCE

What is family violence?

Family violence is behaviour towards a family member that may include:

- physical violence or threats of violence
- verbal abuse, including threats
- emotional or psychological abuse
- sexual abuse
- financial and social abuse.

A child's exposure to family violence constitutes child abuse. This exposure can be very harmful and may result in long-term physical, psychological and emotional trauma. Action must be taken to protect the child, and to mitigate or limit their trauma.

The longer a child experiences or is exposed to family violence, the more harmful it is. This is why, if you suspect that a child is exposed to, or at risk of being exposed to family violence, it is critical to follow the

 [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse](#) |  [Word version](#)

What are the physical indicators of family violence?

PHYSICAL indicators of family violence 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)
- 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 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 and/or poor academic outcomes
- parent-child conflict

For older children and young people indicators can also include:

- moving away/running away from home
- entering into a relationship early to escape the family home
- experiencing violence in their own dating relationships
- involvement in criminal activity
- alcohol and substance abuse

For more information about family violence, see: [Department of Human Services - What is family violence?](#)

What to do when an allegation of child abuse is made

This resource is designed to provide guidance on what to do if a child discloses an incident of abuse, or if a parent/carer raises a concern or allegation of abuse which may have taken place in your organisation.

Forming a reasonable belief

Most of the reporting provisions in the *CYFA* and *Crimes Act* prompt persons to report where they have formed a 'reasonable belief' or 'a belief on reasonable grounds':

- Under the 'Failure to Disclose' offence, any adult that forms a **reasonable belief** that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under 16 years must report to Victoria Police.
- A mandatory reporter must report to DHHS Child Protection where they form a **belief on reasonable grounds** that a child is in need of protection from sexual or physical abuse.
- Any person who **believes on reasonable grounds** that a child is in need of protection from any form of abuse should report to DHHS Child Protection.
- Any person who **believes on reasonable grounds** that a child over 10 but under 15 years may be in need of therapeutic treatment because they are exhibiting sexually abusive behaviours, should report this belief to DHHS Child Protection.

A belief is considered to be more than a suspicion. It results in a person being more inclined to accept, rather than reject, the particular idea they are contemplating. It is important to understand that proof is not required to support your claim.

It is not the responsibility of school staff to determine or investigate whether child abuse, neglect or a criminal offence has actually occurred.

Reasonable grounds

Examples of reasonable grounds for forming a belief may include:

- a child states they have been abused
- a child states they know someone who has been, or is being, abused

- someone who knows the child states that the child has been abused, is being abused, or is at risk of abuse
- you observe a child's behaviour, actions or injuries that may place them at risk of harm, or may lead you to suspect that abuse is occurring
- you are aware of persistent family violence, parental substance misuse, psychiatric illness or disability that is impacting on the child's safety, stability or development
- you observe signs or indicators of abuse, including non-accidental, unexplained injury, persistent neglect, poor care or lack of appropriate supervision
- you become aware of possible harm via your involvement in the community, external to your professional role.

School staff should make sufficient enquiries to form a belief. However, once a belief has been formed, **it is not the role of school staff to conduct an investigation** into child protection concerns or criminal offences. It is for DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police to determine whether the report should be investigated.

If a child discloses abuse to you, you should only ask **appropriate questions** (see below) to obtain any further necessary information in order to form a belief on reasonable grounds (see Examples). It is important not to use leading questions which may influence the child's answers. You should **maintain written records** (see below) including all observations, disclosures and other details that led you to suspect the abuse

Appropriate Questions and Support

Tips for responding to a child who has disclosed abuse include the following:

- Try and separate them from the other children discreetly and listen to them carefully
- Reassure the child that you take what they are saying seriously, and it is not their fault and that they are doing the right thing
- Explain to them that this information may need to be shared others, such as with their parent/carer, specific people in your organisation, or the police
- Do not make promises to the child such as promising not to tell anyone about the incident, except that you will do your best to keep them safe
- allow the child to have their say in their own words
- use a neutral tone with no urgency
- avoid repeated accusations
- be patient and non-judgmental throughout
- stay calm and listen
- do not ask leading questions, but instead ask, "What happened next?" (rather than, "Why")
- use verbal facilitators such as, "Okay, I see", restate the child's previous statement, and use non-suggestive forms of encouragement, which are designed to the child talking in a n open-ended way

Maintain Written Records

Use the template in this document (Responding to Suspected Child Abuse template) if feasible. If not feasible, complete it after the discussion with the child.

Keep clear and comprehensive notes on all observations, disclosures and other details that led you to suspect the abuse.

The notes should include dates, times and places.

Record facts, actual words spoken and not make judgments or state opinions, when recording the detail These records will be helpful in assisting you to make a report of the abuse to the relevant authorities.

Also, keep records of all actions taken in responding to the belief that abuse has occurred / is occurring, including:

- reports to external agencies
- consultations with other school staff
- consultations with external agencies
- any discussions with the child's family (where relevant and approved by the Principal)
- supports provided to the student

This information may be later sought if the matter is subject to court proceedings. Your notes may also later assist staff if they are required to provide evidence to support their decisions.

What if another person has already made a report?

Once a school staff member forms a belief on reasonable grounds that they should make a report to protect a child, their obligation to report is separate from the reporting obligations or actions of other people.

This means that you should make a report to protect a child even if:

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

Regardless of whether the report is mandated by the *CYFA* or *Crimes Act*, all school staff owe a duty of care to their students. Making a report is consistent with this duty.

You should also bear in mind that other people may not have access to the specific information held by school staff. The information you provide through your report may assist the relevant authority to take further action to protect the child.

Reporting further reasonable grounds for belief

School staff should make a new report after each occasion on which they become aware of any further reasonable grounds for the belief.

This means that although a report has already been made to the relevant authorities, if new information comes to light that constitutes new grounds for reporting a reasonable belief that warrants a report being made to protect a child, then a new report should be made.

EXAMPLE

A classroom teacher receives a disclosure from a student that he is being physically abused by his father, and forms a reasonable belief that the child is in need of protection. The teacher makes a mandatory report to DHHS Child Protection.

The next week the same teacher observes new bruising to the student's face. The teacher decides that this observation forms further reasonable grounds for their belief that the child is in need of protection. The teacher therefore must make a new report to DHHS Child Protection.

Obtaining advice or support

If you have a concern but are unsure if you should make a report to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police or a referral to Child FIRST, you should discuss this with your school principal / Child Safe Leader, the school leadership team, or welfare staff.

However, if you form and continue to hold a belief on reasonable grounds, even if other staff members do not agree with you, you should still make a report to the relevant authorities.

In the event that you are not sure whether to make a report, it is better to err on the side of caution and make a report.

You can also seek advice and support from any of the following:

- the local [Victoria Police](#), either by calling '000' or by contacting the nearest police station
- the local [Department of Human Services, Child Protection](#)
- local DHHS [Child FIRST](#) provider.

MAKING A REPORT

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

Schools must take immediate action in relation to concerns about potential child abuse. Staff should take steps to ensure the immediate safety of the student involved and ensure an appropriate level of care and supervision is provided for the student.

In the case of an emergency, staff should contact Emergency Services on 000.

Depending on what kind of abuse is alleged, staff must report the abuse to DHHS Child Protection and / or Victoria Police.

For Victorian government schools, the allegations must also be reported to the:

- school leadership team
- DET Security Services Unit on (03) 9589 6266
- relevant [DET Regional Office](#)
- DET Student Critical Incident and Advisory Unit on (03) 9637 2934 or (03) 9637 2487.

SUPPORTING STAFF TO MAKE A REPORT

The school leadership team should support and empower staff to make a report to DHHS Child Protection, Victoria Police or a referral to Child FIRST by having clear policies and procedures about:

- from whom staff can seek advice if they have concerns when considering whether to make a report about a child in need of protection
- what arrangements are in place to relieve staff while you are making or deciding to make a report as soon as practicable
- what strategies are in place to support staff through the process of making a report
- maintaining written records about the disclosure, the internal consultation process and the report.

For government school staff, the following sections of the DET School Policy and Advisory Guide (SPAG) provide guidance on policies for responding to child abuse:

- [Child Protection – Reporting Obligations](#)
- [Responding to Student Sexual Assault](#).

It can be stressful for staff involved in responding to situations and supporting students affected by abuse. Victorian government school staff requiring wellbeing support can contact the DET Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

STEP BY STEP

Step 1 - Responding to concerns:

Go to **Step 4** if your concerns relate to:

- a child in need of immediate protection, or

- a child that has had a sexual offence committed against them by an adult, or
- a reasonable belief that a child is at significant risk of harm, or
- a reasonable belief that a child is in need of therapeutic treatment because they are exhibiting sexually abusive behaviours.

Go to Step 3 If you have significant concerns that a child and their family need a referral to Child FIRST for family services.

Go to Step 2 In all other situations.

Step 2 - Forming a belief on reasonable grounds:

1. Consider the level of immediate danger to the child. Ask yourself:

- a. Have I formed a reasonable belief that the child has suffered, is suffering, or is at risk of suffering significant harm, or has had a sexual offence committed against them by an adult?
- b. Am I in doubt about the child's safety and the parent's ability to protect the child?

If you answered yes to a) or b) **Go to Step 4.**

If you have significant concerns that a child and their family need a referral to Child FIRST for family services **Go to Step 3.**

Step 3 - Making a referral to Child FIRST:

1. Contact your local Child FIRST provider.
2. Have notes ready with your observations, together with child and family details

Step 4 - Making a report to DHHS Child Protection and / or Victoria Police:

You must:

- immediately contact your local DHHS Child Protection intake provider to report concerns that a child has suffered, is suffering, or is at risk of suffering significant harm
- immediately contact Victoria Police where you are concerned that a sexual offence or other criminal offence (e.g. assault) has been committed by an adult against a child
- have notes ready with your observations, together with child and family details.

Under the 'Failure to Disclose' offence, if you know or reasonably believe that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under 16 years of age you must make a report to Victoria Police. By law, if you have already made a report to DHHS Child Protection, you are not required to make the same report to Victoria Police.

Note that for Victorian government school staff it is a DET policy requirement that you report concerns to both DHHS Child Protection and Victoria Police.

What information should be provided in a report:

Child	Family	Alleged Abuse	Notifier (person making the report)
Name / gender / age Any disabilities, mental or physical health issues Current location and safety status (e.g. is the child safe now or in immediate danger?) Social and economic background Previous history or indicators of abuse Cultural status Language(s) spoken Religion Any other significant factors Positive relationships with family member or carer	Composition (e.g. parenting or care arrangements) Parent / carer information Presence of extended family Siblings - names / ages Disability or illness in family Language(s) spoken at home Other people living with the child History of school involvement with family Other agencies involved Likely reaction to DHHS Child Protection Family awareness of report	Times / dates of incident Nature of incident Any patterns of behaviour or prior concerns leading up to the alleged abuse History of violence Previous incidents Previous agency involvement	Name Occupation Location Contact details Relationship to child Grounds for belief Present / prior concerns

If a parent/carer says their child has been abused in your organisation or raises a concern

- Explain that your organisation has processes to ensure all abuse allegations are taken very seriously.
- Ask about the wellbeing of the child.
- Allow the parent/carer to talk through the incident in their own words.
- Advise the parent/carer that you will take notes during the discussion to capture all details.
- Explain to them the information may need to be repeated to authorities or others, such as the organisation's management or Child Safety Officer, the police or child protection.
- Do not make promises at this early stage, except that you will do your best to keep the child safe.
- Provide them with an incident report form to complete, or complete it together.
- Ask them what action they would like to take and advise them of what the immediate next steps will be.
- Ensure the report is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely.

You need to be aware that some people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds may face barriers in reporting allegations of abuse. For example, people from some cultures may experience anxiety when talking with police, and communicating in English may be a barrier for some. You need to be sensitive to these issues and meet people's needs where possible, such as having an interpreter present (who could be a friend or family member).

If an allegation of abuse involves an Aboriginal child, you will need to ensure a culturally appropriate response. A way to help ensure this could include engaging with parents of Aboriginal children, local Aboriginal communities or an Aboriginal community controlled organisations to review policies and procedures.

Some children with a disability may experience barriers disclosing an incident. For example, children with hearing or cognitive impairments may need support to help them explain the incident, including through sign language interpreters. Advice on [communicating with people with a disability](#) can be found on the Department of Health and Human Services website <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-business-and-community/community-involvement/people-with-a-disability-in-the-community/communicate-and-consult-with-people-with-a-disability/communication-with-people-with-disabilities>.

If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse phone 000.

Legal responsibilities

While the child safe standards focus on organisations, every adult who reasonably believes that a child has been abused, whether in their organisation or not, has an obligation to report that belief to authorities.

The **failure to disclose** criminal offence requires all adults (aged 18 and over) who hold a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria by an adult against a child under 16 to disclose that information to police (unless they have a reasonable excuse not to, for example because they fear for their safety or the safety of another).

More information about [failure to disclose](#) is available on the Department of Justice and Regulation website

<www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence>

While failure to disclose only covers child sexual abuse, all adults should report other forms of child abuse to authorities. Failure to disclose does not change mandatory reporting responsibilities.

More information about [mandatory reporting](#) is available in the *Child protection manual* <www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/intake/mandatory-reporting>.

Mandatory reporters (doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers (including early childhood teachers), principals and police) must report to child protection if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse.

See the Department of Health and Human Services website for information about [how to make a report to child protection](#) <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/guide-to-making-a-report-to-child-protection-or-child-first>.

The **failure to protect** criminal offence (commenced on 1 July 2015) applies where there is a substantial risk that a child under the age of 16 under the care, supervision or authority of a relevant organisation will become a victim of a sexual offence committed by an adult associated with that 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.

Further information about [failure to protect](#) can be found on the Department of Justice and Regulation website

<www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence, and the Department of Health and Human Services website>

Further information

Further information on [child safe standards](#) can be found on the Department of Health and Human Services' website www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/plans,-programs-and-projects/projects-and-initiatives/children,-youth-and-family-services/creating-child-safe-organisations

Additional resources for organisations in the child safe standards toolkit can be found on the [Department of Health and Human Services website](#): <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies,-guidelines-and-legislation/child-safe-standards>. In particular, [An Overview to the Victorian child safe standards](#), has information to help organisations understand the requirements of each of the child safe standards, including examples of measures organisations can put in place, a self-audit tool and a glossary of key terms: www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/word_doc/0005/955598/Child-safe-standards-overview.doc

Note for registered schools: a forthcoming Ministerial Order under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* will contain the minimum actions that schools must take to meet each of the child safe standards. There will be a lead in time before regulation will commence to allow schools time to prepare. The Department of Education and Training and the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority will provide information and materials specifically for schools to assist with capacity building and compliance.

Registered schools can contact the Department of Education and Training: child.safe.schools@edumail.vic.gov.au

Early childhood services operating under the *National Quality Framework* or *Children's Services Act 1996* should contact: licensed.childrens.services@edumail.vic.gov.au

Licensed children's services enquiry line: 1300 307 415

RESPONDING TO SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE: TEMPLATE FOR VICTORIAN SCHOOLS

When to use this template?

School staff should use this template to document any incident, disclosure or suspicion that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused. This template should be used in conjunction with the following: Four Critical Actions For Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse.

Completing this template should not impact on reporting times. If a child is in immediate danger, school staff should report immediately to Victoria Police.

Whilst you may need to gather the information to make a report, remember it is not the role of school staff to investigate abuse, leave this to Victoria Police and/or DHHS Child Protection.

Why record this information?

When completing this template your aim should be to provide as much information as possible. This information will be critical to any reports and may be sought at a later date if the matter is the subject of Court proceedings. These notes may also later assist you if you are required to provide evidence to support any decisions.

It is a requirement under **Ministerial Order No. 870- Child Safe Standards- Managing the risk of child abuse in schools** for schools to keep clear and comprehensive notes on all observations, disclosures and other details that led them to suspect the abuse.

RESPONDING TO AN INCIDENT, DISCLOSURE OR SUSPICION OF CHILD ABUSE

PLEASE NOTE: IF YOU ARE MAKING A REPORT TO DHHS CHILD PROTECTION OR VICTORIA POLICE YOU MUST SEEK ADVICE BEFORE CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS SO AS NOT TO COMPROMISE ANY INVESTIGATION OR PLACE A CHILD AT FURTHER RISK

STAFF MEMBER LEADING THE RESPONSE
NAME:
OCCUPATION:
LOCATION (SCHOOL ADDRESS):
RELATIONSHIP TO CHILD:

Critical action 1: immediate response to an incident

If anyone is in immediate danger school staff should report immediately to Victoria Police on 000.

See action 1 of [Four Critical Actions For Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse](#).

RESPONDING TO AN EMERGENCY
DID THE CHILD REQUIRE FIRST AID? PROVIDE DETAILS IF 'YES'.
WHO ADMINISTERED THIS? (NAME AND TITLE)
DID THE CHILD REQUIRE FURTHER IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE?
CURRENT LOCATION AND SAFETY STATUS: <i>E.G. ARE ALL IMPACTED STUDENTS SAFE AND NOT IN ANY IMMEDIATE DANGER? IF A CHILD IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER SCHOOL STAFF SHOULD REPORT IMMEDIATELY TO VICTORIA POLICE ON 000</i>

Child's information

PERSONAL DETAILS	
NAME:	GENDER:
YEAR LEVEL/CLASS:	DATE OF BIRTH:
RESIDENTIAL ADDRESS:	
PARENT/CARER NAME/S:	
PARENT/CARER CONTACT:	
LANGUAGE(S) SPOKEN BY CHILD:	

MOUNT VIEW PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILD SAFETY & MANDATORY REPORTING

DISABILITIES, MENTAL OR PHYSICAL HEALTH ISSUES:

CHILD'S BACKGROUND

CULTURAL STATUS AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

IF THE CHILD IS OF ABORIGINAL OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER BACKGROUND, GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS MUST CONTACT THEIR KOORIE ENGAGEMENT SUPPORT OFFICER, AND CATHOLIC SCHOOLS MUST CONTACT THE DIOCESAN EDUCATION OFFICE TO ARRANGE CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE SUPPORT. IF THE CHILD IS AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT YOU MUST NOTIFY THE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION DIVISION ON (03) 9637 2990

ANY KNOWN PREVIOUS HISTORY OF SUSPECTED ABUSE
(PRIOR TO THIS INCIDENT, DISCLOSURE OR SUSPICION OR INVOLVEMENT WITH AGENCIES):

DISABILITY, MENTAL OR PHYSICAL HEALTH ISSUES IN FAMILY (IF KNOWN):

FAMILY BACKGROUND

LIKELY REACTION TO A REPORT BEING MADE (IF KNOWN):

FAMILY COMPOSITION (IF KNOWN):

LIST PARENTING OR CARE ARRANGEMENTS AND SIBLING NAMES AND AGES

ANY OTHER PEOPLE LIVING WITH THE CHILD (IF KNOWN):

Details of the incident, disclosure or suspicion

GROUNDINGS FOR YOUR BELIEF THAT A CHILD HAS BEEN, OR IS AT RISK OF ABUSE

INDICATORS OR INSTANCES WHICH LED YOU TO BELIEVE THAT A CHILD/CHILDREN ARE SUBJECT TO CHILD ABUSE, OR AT RISK OF ABUSE:

DETAIL ANY DISCLOSURES OR INCIDENTS OR SUSPICIONS (INCLUDING NAMES, TIMES AND DATES DOCUMENTING A CHILD'S EXACT WORDS AS FAR AS POSSIBLE). INCLUDE SPECIFIC DETAIL HERE ON WHAT LED YOU TO FORM A REASONABLE BELIEF THAT A CHILD HAS BEEN, OR IS AT RISK OF BEING ABUSED.

ANY PHYSICAL INDICATORS OF ABUSE:

ANY BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS OF ABUSE:

ANY PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOUR OR PRIOR CONCERNS LEADING UP TO AN INCIDENT, DISCLOSURE OR SUSPICION:

DETAILS OF PERSONS ALLEGED TO HAVE COMMITTED THE ABUSE (IF KNOWN)

NAME:

GENDER

DATE OF BIRTH:

RELATIONSHIP TO CHILD:

NOTHING IF THEY ARE WITHIN THE SCHOOL OR WITHIN THE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY (THIS WILL IMPACT ON WHO YOU REPORT TO)

MOUNT VIEW PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILD SAFETY & MANDATORY REPORTING

ADDRESS:

CONTACT DETAILS:

Critical action 2: reporting

See action 2 of four critical actions for schools: responding to incidents, disclosures and suspicions of child abuse

REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES

TICK THE AUTHORITIES YOU HAVE REPORTED TO:

- VICTORIA POLICE
- DHHS CHILD PROTECTION
- CHILD FIRST
- DECISION NOT TO REPORT

IF YOU'VE DECIDED NOT TO REPORT, LIST YOUR REASONS HERE. ALSO INCLUDE ANY FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN BY YOU BELOW:

PROVIDE DETAILS OF YOUR INTERNAL DISCUSSIONS TO EITHER OF THE FOLLOWING:

GOVERNMENT SCHOOL STAFF MUST REPORT TO SECURITY SERVICES UNIT AND ALSO TO THE EMPLOYEE CONDUCT BRANCH IF THE INCIDENT, DISCLOSURE OR SUSPICION INVOLVES A STAFF MEMBER, CONTRACTOR OR VOLUNTEER.

DATE:

TIME:

AUTHORITY:

OUTCOMES FROM THE REPORT:

REPORTING INTERNALLY

PROVIDE DETAILS OF YOUR DISCUSSION WITH SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

TIME:

DATE:

NAMES:

DISCUSSION OUTCOMES:

PROVIDE DETAILS OF YOUR INTERNAL DISCUSSIONS TO EITHER OF THE FOLLOWING:

YOU MUST REPORT TO SECURITY SERVICES UNIT AND ALSO TO THE EMPLOYEE CONDUCT BRANCH IF THE INCIDENT, DISCLOSURE OR SUSPICION INVOLVES A STAFF MEMBER, CONTRACTOR OR VOLUNTEER

TIME:

DATE:

NAMES:

DISCUSSION OUTCOMES:

Critical action 3: contacting parents/carers

See Action 3 of [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse](#)

ACTIONS TAKEN

PROVIDE DETAILS OF YOUR DISCUSSION WITH PARENTS/CARERS (IF APPROPRIATE):

SCHOOL STAFF MUST CONSULT WITH VICTORIA POLICE AND/OR DHHS CHILD PROTECTION TO DETERMINE IF IT IS APPROPRIATE TO CONTACT PARENTS, IF IT IS, PARENTS MUST BE CONTACTED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE (PREFERABLY ON THE SAME DAY OF THE INCIDENT, DISCLOSURE OR SUSPICION).

HAVE YOU SOUGHT ADVICE FROM DHHS CHILD PROTECTION OR VICTORIA POLICE?

- NO
- YES

IS IT APPROPRIATE TO CONTACT PARENT/CARER

- NO
- YES

LIST REASONS IF IT IS NOT APPROPRIATE TO CONTACT PARENT/CARER:

IF CONTACTING PARENT/CARER, PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING DETAILS:

NAME OF STAFF MEMBER MAKING THE CALL:

NAME OF PARENT/CARER RECEIVING THE CALL:

DISCUSSION OUTCOMES:

Critical action 4: providing ongoing support

See Action 4 of [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse](#)

PLANNED ACTIONS

MOUNT VIEW PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILD SAFETY & MANDATORY REPORTING

INCLUDE DETAIL ON WHAT FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS HAVE OCCURRED TO SUPPORT THE STUDENT (FOR EXAMPLE, REFERRAL TO WELLBEING PROFESSIONALS AND OTHER SPECIALISED SERVICES, THE CONVENING OF A STUDENT SUPPORT GROUP AND DEVELOPMENT OF SUPPORT PLANS):

FOLLOW UP ACTIONS

SUPPORT:

REFERRALS(S):

PROCESS OF REVIEW

Complete this section between 4-6 weeks after an incident, suspicion or disclosure of abuse in conjunction with the school leadership team.

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

SAFETY AND WELLBEING

CURRENT SAFETY AND WELLBEING OF THE CHILD

IS THE CHILD SAFE FROM ABUSE AND HARM?

- NO
 YES

IF NOT CONSIDER THE NEED TO MAKE A FURTHER REPORT

DOES THE CHILD HAVE ANY WELLBEING ISSUES THAT ARE NOT CURRENTLY BEING ADDRESSED?

- NO
 YES

IF SO, CONSIDER HOW THESE CAN BE ADDRESSED AND CAPTURED WITHIN A STUDENT SUPPORT PLAN

CURRENT WELLBEING OF OTHER CHILDREN WHO MAY BE IMPACTED BY THE ABUSE

ARE THERE ANY OTHER CHILDREN WHO MAY BE IMPACTED BY THE ABUSE?

- NO
 YES

IF SO HAVE THEIR WELLBEING NEEDS BEEN MET

- NO
 YES

IF SO, CONSIDER HOW THESE CAN BE ADDRESSED AND CAPTURED WITHIN A STUDENT SUPPORT PLAN

CURRENT WELLBEING OF impacted staff members

DOES THE STAFF MEMBER WHO MADE THE REPORT/ WITNESSED THE INCIDENT, FORMED A SUSPICION OR RECEIVED A DISCLOSURE REQUIRE ANY SUPPORT?

- NO
 YES

IF SO HAS THIS BEEN RECEIVED?

- NO
 YES

ACTIONS

REVIEW OF ACTIONS TAKEN

HAVE SCHOOL STAFF FOLLOWED THE FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOLS: RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS, DISCLOSURES OR SUSPICIONS OF CHILD ABUSE?

WAS AN APPROPRIATE DECISION MADE IN RELATION TO WHEN TO ACT?

- NO
 YES

COULD THE SUSPECTED ABUSE HAVE BEEN DETECTED EARLIER?

- NO
 YES

ACTION 1

DID THE SCHOOL TAKE APPROPRIATE ACTION IN AN EMERGENCY?

- NO
 YES

ACTION 2

WAS A REPORT MADE TO THE APPROPRIATE AUTHORITIES AND INTERNALLY?

- NO
 YES

HAVE THE PARENTS CONTINUED TO BE ENGAGED IF APPROPRIATE?

- NO
 YES

ACTION 4

HAS THE SCHOOL PROVIDED ADEQUATE SUPPORT FOR THE STUDENT?

- NO
 YES

HAS A STUDENT SUPPORT PLAN BEEN ESTABLISHED, IMPLEMENTED AND REVIEWED?

- NO
 YES

HAS A STUDENT SUPPORT GROUP BEEN ESTABLISHED?

- NO
 YES

WAS THE STUDENT APPROPRIATELY SUPPORTED IN ANY INTERVIEWS?

- NO
 YES

MOUNT VIEW PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILD SAFETY & MANDATORY REPORTING

WERE SUBSEQUENT REPORTS MADE IF NECESSARY?

- NO
- YES

ACTION 3

DID THE SCHOOL CONTACT THE PARENTS/CARERS ASAP?

- NO
- YES

HAVE ANY COMPLAINTS BEEN RECEIVED?

- NO
- YES

HAVE THE COMPLAINTS BEEN RESOLVED?

- NO
- YES

Responding to other concerns about the wellbeing of a child

Critical Information

Regardless of the suspected cause, all concerns about the wellbeing of a child (or their unborn child) should be taken seriously and acted upon. This includes concerns about the wellbeing of a child, which do not appear to be the result of abuse.

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.*

You 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.*

You should contact DHHS Child Protection if:

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

If you are unsure whether to take action, or what action to take, you should discuss this with your leadership team and make contact with authorities for further advice.

Regardless of the suspected cause, all concerns about the wellbeing of a child (or their unborn child) should be taken seriously and acted upon. This includes concerns about the wellbeing of a child, which do not appear to be the result of abuse.

This section will support you to determine how to respond to concerns about the wellbeing of a child which do not appear to be the result of child abuse, with information on:

- When to Report Wellbeing Concerns to Child FIRST
- When to Report Wellbeing Concerns to Victoria Police
- When to Report Wellbeing Concerns to DHHS Child Protection.

In addition to reporting and referring wellbeing concerns to relevant authorities, you also have a Duty of Care to ensure that students feel safe and supported at school.

See [Action Four - Providing Support](#) for advice on how to engage relevant allied health professionals and plan and document support strategies via a Student Support Planning process.

If you are unsure whether to take action, or what action to take, you should discuss this with your leadership team and make contact with

WHEN TO REPORT WELLBEING CONCERNS TO CHILD FIRST

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

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 reported 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 REPORT WELLBEING CONCERNS TO 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 REPORT WELLBEING CONCERNS TO DHHS CHILD PROTECTION

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 and
- 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.

Common grounds for protection include:

- **Abandonment**

The child's parents have abandoned the child and after reasonable inquiries, the parents cannot be found, and no other suitable person can be found who is willing and able to care for the child.

- **Death or incapacity of parent/carer**

The child's parents are dead or incapacitated and there is no other suitable person willing and able to care for the child.

- **Extreme risk-taking behaviour**

The child is displaying extreme risk taking behaviour, which has potentially severe or life threatening consequences. Examples include severe alcohol or drug use, unsafe sexual activity including prostitution, solvent abuse and chroming, and violent or dangerous peer group activity.

In addition to contacting DHHS Child Protection it may also be necessary to contact Victoria Police where the risk taking activity is illegal and extreme in nature or poses a high risk to the child.

- **Harm to an unborn child**

There is a threat of harm to an unborn child, including circumstances where a parent has previously demonstrated an inability to safely parent. The *Children Youth and Families Act 2005* allows DHHS Child Protection to receive and respond to reports about an unborn child, which provides an important opportunity for earlier intervention and prevention. Prenatal reports may be particularly helpful to the unborn child in family violence situations, or where there are mental health concerns or drug or alcohol misuse during pregnancy.

SUPPORT MATERIALS FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS

FEELING SAFE- PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Get the facts

This fact sheet is about making sure you know how to keep safe. It gives you the facts about what to do if someone is hurting you or your friends or making you feel unsafe.

WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS?

- Everyone has the right to feel safe and be protected.
- No one is allowed to threaten you, hurt you or touch you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable.
- No one should behave in a way that makes you feel unsafe or afraid, including anyone in your family, anyone at school or anywhere else in the community.

HOW DO I KNOW IF SOMETHING IS WRONG?

- Every relationship should be respectful.
- It is wrong for anyone to hurt you or make you feel unsafe, uncomfortable or afraid.
- Remember a person doesn't have to physically hurt or touch you to be doing the wrong thing.
- Even if you are not sure, if something doesn't feel right you should tell an adult who can help you.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I FEEL UNSAFE?

- Tell an adult – telling someone won't get you in trouble.
- If you feel threatened, unsafe, or if you feel uncomfortable about how someone is touching, talking to you, or treating you, you should tell a trusted adult.
- You can tell a teacher or any adult at your school. They will be able to help you.
- You can also tell your parent, carer, or any family member or adult you trust.
- Even if the person who is making you feel like this has asked you not to tell anyone, you should still talk to an adult. It is more important that you are safe and protected.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I AM WORRIED THAT SOMEONE I KNOW IS UNSAFE?

- Tell an adult you trust.
- You can tell a teacher or any adult at your school.
- They will be able to help your friend or the person you are worried about.
- You can also tell your parent, carer, or any family member or adult that you trust.
- Even if the person who you are worried about has asked you not to tell anyone, you should still talk to an adult. It is more important to make sure that your friend is safe and protected.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I TELL AN ADULT AT THE SCHOOL THAT I FEEL UNSAFE, OR THAT I THINK MY FRIEND IS UNSAFE?

- Adults at your school must listen to your concerns and help.
- In some cases the adult at school may need to tell another adult about your concerns so that you, or the person you know can be protected.
- Adults at your school can provide you with support and make sure that you don't have to deal with this alone.

WHAT IF I DON'T FEEL LIKE I CAN TALK TO ANYONE AT MY SCHOOL?

- If you don't feel like you can talk to an adult at your school, you can talk to your parent or carer.
- If you don't feel like you can talk to your parent or carer, you can talk to another adult within your family. This may be an aunt, uncle, a step-parent, or a grandparent.

- If you don't feel like you can talk to any of these adults, you should still try and find an adult that you can trust, and that you can talk to.
- You don't need to deal with things on your own.

THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP YOU. HERE ARE SOME OTHER SUGGESTIONS:

- visit eHeadspace (which provides an online and a 9am-1am telephone support service) www.eheadspace.org.au or 1800 650 850
- call KidsHelp Line on 1800 55 1800 or visit for 24 hour support
- call or visit your local police station or call 000.

PROTECT



PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM ABUSE: FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

GET THE FACTS

As adults we all play a critical role to protect children from harm.

As a parent or carer you have the primary responsibility for protecting and caring for your own children and supporting them to build relationships that are safe and respectful.

You also play a critical role in identifying and responding to suspected abuse within the community. In fact it may amount to a criminal offence if you fail to report suspected sexual child abuse.

REPORTING ABUSE

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SUSPECT THAT MY CHILD HAS BEEN ABUSED?

If you believe that your child has been abused, or is at risk of being abused contact Victoria Police immediately via the local police station or on 000 if it's an emergency.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SUSPECT THAT ANOTHER CHILD HAS BEEN ABUSED?

If you suspect that a child has been abused, or is at risk of abuse (such as physical abuse, family violence or neglect) you should report immediately to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Child Protection (see contact detail at the end of this fact sheet)

- If you suspect that a child has been sexually abused, you must also report your concerns to the Victoria Police. You may be committing a criminal offence if you fail to do so.
- You should report even if you're not sure. It is the role of authorities to investigate your concerns and determine if any further action needs to be taken.
- Parent and carers are also often in a position to protect the friends of their children. This is because children are most likely to disclose their experiences of abuse to their peers, who in turn may share this with their own parents and carers.
- If your child talks to you about their friend, and you suspect that the child is being abused or is at risk of being abused, you should act. You may be the only adult in a position to act and your response may be critical in protecting that child's safety.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SUSPECT THAT A CHILD IS BEING ABUSED AND AUTHORITIES HAVE PREVIOUSLY INVESTIGATED AND DISMISSED MY REPORT?

If you have new grounds for believing that a child is being abused, you should make another report to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police. Every report is critical to protecting a child as it builds evidence and helps authorities to gain a clearer understanding of risks to the child.

WHAT HAPPENS TO MY CHILD IF SOMEONE AT THE SCHOOL SUSPECTS THAT MY CHILD HAS BEEN ABUSED?

All staff members at your child's school are required to report suspected child abuse to DHHS Child Protection and, in some circumstances, to Victoria Police.

Your child's school will contact you as soon as possible, unless they have been advised not to do so by DHHS Child Protection and/or Victoria Police.

Where appropriate the school will work with you to ensure that your child is provided with support, which may include referring them to wellbeing professionals.

WHEN IS IT A CRIMINAL OFFENCE TO NOT REPORT SUSPECT ABUSE?

Any adult may face criminal charges if they believe that another adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 years of age and does not report this information to the police.

FACTS ON CHILD ABUSE

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

Child abuse:

- can include physical abuse, sexual abuse, grooming, emotional or physiological harm, neglect or family violence
- does not have to involve physical contact or force (eg, child sexual abuse can include talking to a child in a sexually explicit way)
- can be committed by any member of the community, including someone within a child's family or someone within the school setting.

The trauma associated with child abuse can significantly impact upon the wellbeing and development of a child. This is why it is critical that we all respond immediately to any form of suspected abuse.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS THAT A CHILD HAS BEEN ABUSED?

There are a range of physical and behavioural indicators of child abuse.

Most importantly you should act if you notice anything that causes you to form a reasonable belief that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused, including (but not limited to):

- a change in a child's behaviour (e.g. withdrawal, regressive behaviour, or non-age appropriate sexual behaviours)
- physical indicators of abuse (e.g. unexplained bruises, welts, signs of malnutrition)
- an inappropriate relationship between an adult and a child (e.g. inappropriate physical contact, unexplained gifts or phone/email contact).

THE SCHOOL'S ROLE

HOW MUST SCHOOLS RESPOND TO SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE?

All staff in Victorian schools are obligated to respond to any incident or suspicion of child abuse as outlined below:

1. Respond to the emergency

Address any immediate health and safety needs (eg. administer first aid or contact emergency services).

2. Inform authorities

Report any reasonable belief that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused to the DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police.

3. Contact parents/carers when appropriate

Contact parents/carers once authorities advise that it is safe and appropriate to do so.

Ideally parents/carers will play a central role in providing support for their children, however schools will be instructed not to contact parents/carers in circumstances where this may impede an investigation or place the child at greater risk.

4. Provide ongoing support for all children impacted by the abuse

Provide appropriate support for all children impacted by abuse. This will likely include ongoing counselling from professionals. The child's ongoing support will be documented in a Student Support Plan.

These actions are outlined in further detail in Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools.

ARE THE STAFF AT MY CHILD'S SCHOOL REQUIRED TO REPORT CHILD ABUSE?

Yes – all staff at your child's school are required by law to report any reasonable belief that a child has been abused, or is at risk of abuse.

In some circumstances, it may be a criminal offence for school staff to fail to report child abuse to the authorities.

PROTECTING MY CHILD

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP EDUCATE AND PROTECT MY CHILD FROM ABUSE?

Have a chat to your child and make sure that he or she knows that no one is allowed to threaten, hurt or touch them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable.

Every relationship should be respectful and no one should behave in a way that makes them feel unsafe or afraid.

Your child's school will also be supporting your child in learning about their rights to be safe and respected. Victorian government schools are teaching the *Respectful Relationships* program which promotes positive attitudes and behaviours and is aimed at preventing family violence.

WHAT SHOULD I TALK ABOUT WHEN I EXPLAIN SAFETY TO MY CHILD?

There are some things you can do at home to build your child's understanding of safe and respectful relationships including:

- talking openly with your child about their feelings and relationships
- being sure that they understand you will listen and act if they are concerns about how anyone is treating them
- using the correct names for body parts and having age-appropriate conversations about touching and sexual activity
- letting your child know that adults should never harm or act in a sexual way with any child.

KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE OUTSIDE OF THE HOME OR SCHOOL

You play a critical role in ensuring that your children are spending time in safe places.

In Victoria all people who are working with your children such as coaches and music teachers need to have a current *Working With Children Check*.

You may like to check that any staff and volunteers spending time with your child after school hours and on weekend have a valid *Working With Children Check*.

If you think that you may need some help to keep your children safe from harm and support their healthy development, it is important you find some help. Visit the Victorian Government's Better Health Channel for information on seeking support: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/parenting-support-to-help-prevent-abuse>

FURTHER INFORMATION

WHERE CAN I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT?

You can contact DHHS Child Protection and Victoria Police directly to discuss any concerns you may have for the wellbeing of a child (see contact details on the page 53)

If you have any concerns about your child or another child at your child's school talk to the principal or another staff member at the school about your concerns. You can also raise this matter with DHHS Child Protection and the Victoria Police.

For further information on where to go for support to keep your children safe from harm visit the Victorian Government's Better Health Channel: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/parenting-support-to-help-prevent-abuse>

For more information on:

- your child's school's role in preventing and managing child abuse: www.education.vic.gov.au/protect
- indicators of abuse, visit www.education.vic.gov.au/protect

If you are concerned or unsure about your school's response and/or would like to talk to someone outside of the school please contact:

- Victorian Government schools Regional Office
(www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/regions.aspx)
- Catholic Schools local Diocesan education office
(www.cecv.catholic.edu.au/About-Us/Dioceses)
- Independent Schools Victoria (www.is.vic.edu.au/who-we-are/contact-us/)

CONTACT NUMBERS

Contact Numbers

24 Hour Services

Victoria Police	000
Department of Health and Human Services Child Protection	131 278
Department of Education and Training Security Services Unit	(03) 9589 6266

Department of Education and Training

Security Services Unit	(03) 9589 6266
Student Incident and Recovery Unit	(03) 9637 2934
	or (03) 9637 2487
Legal Division	(03) 9637 3146
Employee Assistance Program	1300 361 008
Employee Health	(03) 9637 2395
Employee Conduct Branch	(03) 9637 2595
Privacy Unit	(03) 9637 3601
International Division	(03) 9651 3976
Communications Division	(03) 9637 2871

Regional

<i>North Eastern Victoria</i>	
Glen Waverley office	(03) 8392 9300

Department of Health and Human Services Child Protection

<u>Box Hill</u> 883 Whitehorse Road, Box Hill 3128	1300 360 452
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Child FIRST

1300 721 383

Other Services

Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASA) – Emergency Counselling & Support Line	1800 806 292
Australian Childhood Foundation	1800 176 453
Children's Protection Society	(03) 9450 0900
Child Wise	(03) 9695 8900
Vic Aboriginal Education Association	(03) 9481 0800
Child Safety Commission	1300 782 978
Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner	1800 880 176
Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)	(03) 9287 8800
Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)	(03) 9411 9411

Sexually Abusive Behaviour Treatment Services Providers:

Australian Childhood Foundation	(03) 9874 3922
Children's Protection Society	(03) 9450 0900
Berry Street	(03) 5822 8100

RISK ASSESSMENT

Risk Assessment

Risk Environment	Event or	Existing management strategies or existing controls	risk Likelihood	Consequence	Current risk rating	New risk management strategies or treatments	Who is responsible?	Target risk rating
No organisational culture of child safety – lack of leadership, public commitment and frequent messaging		Child safety code of conduct Strategies developed to embed culture of child safety	Possible	Severe	Extreme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies to embed organisational culture of child safety are reviewed Statement of commitment to child safety is publicly available 	Principal	Low
Inappropriate behaviour is not reported and addressed		Child safety code of conduct Clear child safety reporting procedures Performance management procedures	Unlikely	Severe	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies to embed organisational culture of child safety are reviewed Refresher training for staff – see eLearning mandatory reporting module 	Principal Child Safety Officer	Low
Unquestioning trust of long term employees and contractors or norms		Strategies developed to embed culture of child safety Clear child safety reporting procedures =	Possible	Major	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refresher training for staff – see eLearning mandatory reporting module 	Principal Business manager Staff	Low
Recruitment of an inappropriate person		WWCC or Victorian Institute of Teaching registration	Unlikely	Major	Medium	Processes updated to require: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Criminal history search Pre-employment reference check includes asking about child safety 	Principal	Low

MOUNT VIEW PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILD SAFETY & MANDATORY REPORTING

Risk Environment	Event or	Existing management strategies or controls	risk	Likelihood	Consequence	Current risk rating	New risk management strategies or treatments	Who is responsible?	Target rating	risk
Engagement children online	with	Child safety code of conduct Strategies developed to embed culture of child safety		Possible	Moderate	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train students and staff to detect inappropriate behaviour • Ensure appropriate settings on all student technologies 	Principal Teachers	Low	
Unknown people and environments at excursions and camps	at	Child safety code of conduct Strategies developed to embed culture of child safety Clear child safety reporting procedures		Unlikely	Moderate	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of new or changed environments for child safety risks • Ensure Code and strategies apply in all school contexts 	Principal Camp coordinator and leaders Teachers in charge of excursions	Low	
Ad-hoc contractors on the premises (eg maintenance)	(eg)	Child safe environments Information and awareness for visitors, staff, volunteers and contractors Adequate monitoring	safe	Unlikely	Moderate	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refresher training for frequent contractors 	Principal Business manager	Low	
Mount View Primary school acknowledges hearing impaired students rely on trusted adults to aid communication.	Primary	Teachers of the deaf, Education Support Staff allocated to work in concert with classroom teachers.		Unlikely	Moderate	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mount View Facility Supporting Students with a Hearing Impairment document outlines programs to support 	Principal Leading Teacher – Facility. Teachers	Low	

MOUNT VIEW PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILD SAFETY & MANDATORY REPORTING

Risk Environment	or	Existing management strategies or existing controls	risk	Likelihood	Consequence	Current rating	New risk strategies or treatments	management	Who is responsible?	is	Target rating	risk
							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> and assist hearing impaired student. • All adults must abide by the schools Code of conduct • Mandatory Reporting Policies and Procedures publically • Child Friendly reporting procedures • Student Wellbeing programs i.e. respectful relationships etc. 					