



CHILD SAFE PROCEDURES

OVERVIEW

What are Child Safe Standards?

Compulsory minimum standards for all schools and organisations that provide services to children. They apply to all employees at a school under Ministerial Order No. 870.

The Standards are developed to:

- Establish a minimum and compulsory benchmark to create and maintain safe environments for all organisations that provide services to children
- Promote the safety of children and prevent, detect, report and respond appropriately to child abuse
- Drive cultural change to ensure all children are safe

OBLIGATIONS OF STAFF

- All school staff members have a moral and legal obligation as well as a duty of care to protect children from reasonably foreseeable harm (not just staff who are classified as mandatory reporters).
- As a school staff member, you **must** respond to any reasonable suspicion that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused.
- In Victoria, failure to report child abuse can constitute a criminal offence.
- You may be the best-placed, or only adult in a position to identify and respond to suspected abuse.

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

- The trauma associated with child abuse can significantly impact the wellbeing, safety, stability and development of a child/young person; and
- 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.

What constitutes child abuse?

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse/grooming
- Emotional abuse
- Neglect
- Family violence

Other matters that should be reported:

- Forced marriage
- Age inappropriate sexualised behaviour

DEFINITIONS

Physical 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.

Child sexual abuse:

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



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Child sexual abuse may not always include physical sexual contact and can also include non-contact offences, for example:

- talking to a child in a sexually explicit way
- sending sexual messages or emails to a child
- exposing a sexual body part to a child
- forcing a child to watch a sexual act (including showing pornography to a child)
- having a child pose or perform in a sexual manner (including child sexual exploitation).

Child sexual abuse does not always involve force. In some circumstances a child may be manipulated into believing that they have brought the abuse on themselves, or that the abuse is an expression of love, through a process of grooming.

Grooming includes online grooming. It 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.

Emotional child abuse occurs when a child is repeatedly rejected, isolated or frightened by threats. It also includes hostility, derogatory name-calling and put-downs, and persistent coldness from a person, to the extent that the child suffers, or is likely to suffer, emotional or psychological harm to their physical or developmental health.

Neglect includes a failure to provide the child with an adequate standard of nutrition, medical care, clothing, shelter or supervision.

In some circumstances the neglect of a child:

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

'Serious' neglect is the highest level of neglect. It involves the continued failure to provide a child with the basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, shelter, hygiene, medical attention or adequate supervision, to the extent that the child's health, safety and/or development is, or is likely to be, jeopardised. Serious neglect can also occur if an adult fails to adequately ensure the safety of a child where the child is exposed to extremely dangerous or life threatening situations.

Under the **Reportable Conduct Scheme**, a Principal must notify the Employee Conduct Branch if school staff, contractors or volunteers engage in neglectful conduct that is 'significant'. This covers significant neglect that occurs within the school environment, as well as significant neglect by staff, contractors or volunteers that happens outside the school. That means that neglect by school members that is either significant or serious must be reported to the Employee Conduct Branch under the scheme.

The Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic) defines **family violence** as behaviour by a person towards a family member where the behaviour:

- is physically or sexually abusive, is emotionally or psychologically abusive
- is economically abusive
- is threatening or coercive OR
- in any other way controls or dominates the family member, and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member, or another person.

YOU MUST ACT
CRITICAL INFORMATION

- As a school staff member, you must act as soon as practicable after you witness an incident or form a reasonable belief that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused, including exposure to family violence.
- You must act if you form a suspicion/reasonable belief that abuse has occurred or is at risk of occurring, 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).
- This includes abuse that has, or is suspected to have, taken place within or outside of school grounds and hours.



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FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS

These should be followed in all cases of Child Abuse or Student Sexual Offending

YOU MUST TAKE ACTION

As a school staff member, you play a critical role in protecting children in your care.

- **In responding to incidents, disclosures and suspicions of Child Abuse**, 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.
- A reasonable belief is a deliberately low threshold. This enables authorities to investigate and take action.
- 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).
- It is strongly recommended that you use the Responding to Suspected Child Abuse template to keep clear and comprehensive notes, even if you make a decision not to report.
- **In responding to Student Sexual Offending**, you must act by following the 4 critical actions, as soon as you witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a suspicion that a student is a victim of student sexual offending and/or a student has engaged in sexual offending.
- You must act even if you are unsure and have not directly observed student sexual offending (e.g. if the victim, or another person tells you about the offence).
- You must use the Responding to Student Sexual Offending Template to keep clear and comprehensive notes.

ACTION 1: IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO AN INCIDENT

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.

ACTION 2: REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES

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

VICTORIA POLICE

All instances on 000

DHHS CHILD PROTECTION

If you believe that:

- the victim's parent/carers are unable or unwilling to protect the child
- The student who is alleged to have engaged in the student sexual offending is:
- Aged over 10 and under 15 years and may be in need of therapeutic treatment to address these behaviours
- May be displaying physical and behavioural indicators of being the victim of child abuse.

INTERNALLY

Also report internally to:

- A Principal Class member, Child Safety Officer and a member of School Wellbeing Team
- Emergency Management/DET Security Services Unit



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ACTION 3: CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

It is not your role to contact parents.

Your Principal must consult with Victoria Police or DHHS Child Protection to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers. They may advise:

- not to contact the parents/carers (e.g. in circumstances where contacting the parents/carers is likely to adversely affect a Victoria Police investigation or where the student is a mature minor and has requested that their parent/carer not be notified).
- to contact the parents/carers and provide agreed information (this must be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion).

ACTION 4: PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

Your school must provide support for students who are victim to a student sexual offence AND students who have engaged in a sexual offence. This is an essential part of your duty of care requirements.

- This support should include the development of a Student Support Plan in consultation with wellbeing professionals outlining support strategies.
- Strategies may include the development of a safety plan, direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals.
- Do not assume that someone else is doing it. Stay in communication with the person to whom you reported.

A poster is in each staffroom area.

As a school staff member, you must keep clear and comprehensive notes relating to incidents, disclosures and allegations of child abuse. Use the School's Incident Report Form.

REPORTING

In summary:

Report a Disclosure of abuse to a PCO and the Wellbeing Team
Collect an Incident Report form from GL
Call and Report to DHHS and SOCIT (for sexual matters)
Call Emergency Management (Department of Education)
Send Emergency Management Email to all PCOs and Wellbeing Team
Complete Incident Report Form and give to GL

Additional Critical Information

Forming a suspicion/reasonable belief

All suspicions that a child has been, or may be in danger of being abused must be taken seriously. This includes abuse that is suspected to have occurred outside of school grounds and hours.

If you form a reasonable belief that a child has been, or may be at risk of being abused, you **must** act, even if you have not directly witnessed the child abuse.

Forming a belief on reasonable grounds may include:

- a child stating that they have been abused
- any person telling you they believe someone has been abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves)
- physical indicators of abuse such as non-accidental or unexplained injuries; persistent neglect, or inadequate care and supervision lead you to believe that the child has been abused (see Identifying Signs of Abuse)
- behavioural indicators of abuse lead you to believe that the child has been abused (see Identifying Signs of Abuse) Receiving a disclosure (current student)



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

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

Receiving a disclosure (former student)

If you receive a disclosure from a former student of your school about historical abuse you must act.

If the former student is currently of school age and attending a Victorian school you must follow the [Four Critical Actions](#). If the former student is no longer of school age or attending a Victorian school you must also still act.

Failure to disclose

Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. Accordingly, a new criminal offence has been created in Victoria that imposes clear legal duty upon all adults to report information about child sexual abuse to police.

Any adult who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under 16 has an obligation to report that information to police. Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence unless you have a “reasonable excuse” or have an “exemption” from doing so.

A reasonable excuse includes:

- fear of safety
- where the information has already been disclosed.

There are a number of exemptions, which include:

- the victim requests confidentiality
- the person is a child when they formed a reasonable belief
- the information would be privileged
- the information is confidential communication
- the information is in the public domain
- where police officers are acting in the course of their duty.

Failure to protect

In response to the Betrayal of Trust Report, the Victorian Government has strengthened laws to protect our children from sexual abuse and exposure to sexual offenders. This is in recognition of the shared community responsibility to protect children from abuse and to provide a safe environment for children to develop, learn and play.

A new criminal offence for failing to protect a child under the age of 16 from a risk of sexual abuse commenced on 1 July 2015.

The offence 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 fail to do so.

This offence encourages organisations to actively manage the risks of sexual offences being committed against children in their care to protect them from harm.

Any staff member in a position of authority, who becomes aware that an adult associated with their organisation (such as an employee, contractor, volunteer or visitor) poses a risk of sexual abuse to a child under the care, authority or supervision of the organisation, must take all reasonable steps to remove or reduce that risk. This may include, for example, removing the adult from child-related work pending investigation. If a staff member in a position of authority fails to take reasonable steps in these circumstances, this may amount to a criminal offence.



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Training obligations

The school will provide staff training throughout each year, including at least the following:

- Completion of the eLearning Module. (Mandatory Reporting and Other Obligations). This is compulsory for all staff members each calendar year.
- A compulsory presentation to all staff members twice a year
- Regular emails to all staff with refresher information on Child Safe requirements and procedures.
- The issuing of this school procedures document.

All new staff must complete the eLearning Module prior to commencement on staff.

Visitors to the school

To improve the educational experience of students or as part of the daily business of the school, a range of visitors are likely to enter the school. Under Ministerial Order No. 870 all people who come into the school property and others who may come into contact with students must comply with the Child Safe provisions. It is noted that schools are not public places and the safety of students and staff is paramount. Visitors must have a valid reason for being on school property.

The **school requires all visitors arriving and departing** during school hours to use a visitors' book to record their name, signature, the date and time, and the purpose of the visit. The general procedures that apply to all visitors are as follows:

- The arrival of visitors should be planned in advance where possible (It is acknowledged that some visitors such as police officers, Departmental staff or public officials may arrive without prior approval)
- Signing in to the visitors book in the General Office with photo identification, where possible.
- The staff member who authorises or invites any visitor (including guest speakers) must meet them at the Office, remain with them while in the school grounds and return with them to the General Office prior to their leaving.

Additional procedures for Specific classes of visitors:

- **Student or Trainee Teachers** have prior approval organised by the University, passed on to the Student Teacher Liaison teacher and recorded, in advance, in the General Office along with the Working with Children Check.
- **Tradespeople** are approved by Building and Grounds Manager and recorded in the General Office
- Camps and Excursions are checked by the teacher in charge of the activity through the completion of the Risk Assessment. The Camps and Excursions approval process is overseen by the Assistant Principal responsible.
- **Casual Relief Teachers** will not be employed at the school without prior recording of VIT Registration through the Daily Organiser.
- **School Volunteers** must receive prior approval through School Council following detailed background checks including a Working with Children Check.

Addendum:

Royal Commission into Child Abuse Recommendations:

Recommendation 6.6

Institutions should be guided by the following core components when implementing the Child Safe Standards:

Standard 1: Child safety is embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture

- a. The institution publicly commits to child safety and leaders champion a child safe culture.
- b. Child safety is a shared responsibility at all levels of the institution.
- c. Risk management strategies focus on preventing, identifying and mitigating risks to children.
- d. Staff and volunteers comply with a code of conduct that sets clear behavioural standards towards children.
- e. Staff and volunteers understand their obligations on information sharing and recordkeeping.



Standard 2: Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously

- a. Children are able to express their views and are provided opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their lives.
- b. The importance of friendships is recognised and support from peers is encouraged, helping children feel safe and be less isolated.
- c. Children can access sexual abuse prevention programs and information.
- d. Staff and volunteers are attuned to signs of harm and facilitate child-friendly ways for children to communicate and raise their concerns.

Standard 3: Families and communities are informed and involved

- a. Families have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of their child and participate in decisions affecting their child.
- b. The institution engages in open, two-way communication with families and communities about its child safety approach and relevant information is accessible.
- c. Families and communities have a say in the institution's policies and practices.
- d. Families and communities are informed about the institution's operations and governance.

Standard 4: Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account

- a. The institution actively anticipates children's diverse circumstances and responds effectively to those with additional vulnerabilities.
- b. All children have access to information, support and complaints processes.
- c. The institution pays particular attention to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disability, and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Standard 5: People working with children are suitable and supported

- a. Recruitment, including advertising and screening, emphasises child safety.
- b. Relevant staff and volunteers have Working With Children Checks.
- c. All staff and volunteers receive an appropriate induction and are aware of their child safety responsibilities, including reporting obligations.
- d. Supervision and people management have a child safety focus.

Standard 6: Processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse are child focused

- a. The institution has a child-focused complaint handling system that is understood by children, staff, volunteers and families.
- b. The institution has an effective complaint handling policy and procedure which clearly outline roles and responsibilities, approaches to dealing with different types of complaints and obligations to act and report.
- c. Complaints are taken seriously, responded to promptly and thoroughly, and reporting, privacy and employment law obligations are met.

Standard 7: Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training

- a. Relevant staff and volunteers receive training on the nature and indicators of child maltreatment, particularly institutional child sexual abuse.
- b. Staff and volunteers receive training on the institution's child safe practices and child protection.
- c. Relevant staff and volunteers are supported to develop practical skills in protecting
- d. children and responding to disclosures.

Standard 8: Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur

- a. Risks in the online and physical environments are identified and mitigated without compromising a child's right to privacy and healthy development.
- b. The online environment is used in accordance with the institution's code of conduct and relevant policies.

Standard 9: Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved

- a. The institution regularly reviews and improves child safe practices.
- b. The institution analyses complaints to identify causes and systemic failures to inform continuous improvement.



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Standard 10: Policies and procedures document how the institution is child safe

- a. Policies and procedures address all Child Safe Standards.
- b. Policies and procedures are accessible and easy to understand.
- c. Best practice models and stakeholder consultation inform the development of policies and procedures.
- d. Leaders champion and model compliance with policies and procedures.
- e. Staff understand and implement the policies and procedures.

These procedures are reviewed regularly within the life of each Strategic Plan.