PROTECT

IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO ALL FORMS OF ABUSE IN VICTORIAN SCHOOLS

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INTRODUCTION

Audience

This policy is for:

- all employees of government, Catholic and independent schools (including principals, teachers, education support staff, allied health professionals and administrative staff)
- all contractors, volunteers and service providers within government, Catholic and independent schools.

Purpose

This policy has been designed to support you to take action if you suspect, receive a disclosure, or are witness to any form of child abuse.

As a professional who works with children, you play a vital and legislated role in protecting children from abuse by responding to and reporting any incidents, disclosures or suspicions. You are often best placed to identify signs and behaviours that may indicate that a child* has been subject to abuse, or that a school community member or a school staff member may be a perpetrator of abuse.

About

This policy centres on Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse (Four Critical Actions), and also includes specific advice on:

- Understanding your obligations
- Identifying signs of child abuse including:
    - Physical child abuse
    - Child sexual abuse
    - Family violence
    - Grooming
    - Emotional abuse
    - Neglect.
- Responding to other concerns about the wellbeing of a child (i.e. concerns about harm to a child that does not meet the definition of child abuse).

Following the Four Critical Actions will support you to meet your legislative obligations to protect children in your care (these obligations are detailed for your reference in Understanding your obligations).

* *This resource uses the term 'child' to refer to any person under the age of 18.*

This is Edition 2 of the resource and updates the 2016 document Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR OBLIGATIONS

CRITICAL INFORMATION

All staff working with students or in schools have a moral and legal obligation and a duty of care to protect any child under their care 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 or belief that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused, following the Four Critical Actions.

Failure to report some forms of child abuse can constitute a criminal offence in Victoria, including where:

- an adult forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by another adult against a child under the age of 16 years.

it is known that a person associated with their organisation poses a substantial risk of sexually abusing children.

As members of a community, we all have a moral obligation to protect any child under our care and supervision from reasonably foreseeable harm.

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

The easiest way to comply with your legal and moral obligations is to remember that you must respond to and report any reasonable suspicion or belief that a child has been abused, or is at risk of being abused by following the Four Critical Actions.

This includes abuse that has, or is suspected to have, taken place within or outside of school grounds and hours.

This section sets out your legal obligations in further detail, including:

- Duty of care obligations
- Mandatory reporting obligations
- Criminal offences
- Ministerial Order No. 870 - Child Safe Standards - Managing the risk of child abuse in schools
- Requirements to report the allegation under the Reportable Conduct Scheme
- Obligations under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

Please note that for school councils operating a licensed or approved early childhood education or care service (including an Outside Hours School Care service), if an incident, disclosure or suspicion of child abuse is formed within this service setting, schools must also comply with the *National Quality Framework* and its corresponding legislation.

Please see *Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Early Childhood Services* for advice on meeting these requirements, including advice on when to contact the regulator (Quality Assessment and Regulation Division).

Child safety obligations and Minimum Standards for school registration

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

All of the following child safety obligations are conditions of school registration through Schedule 4, Clause 12 of the Regulations, which state that a registered school must ensure that:

a. the care, safety and welfare of all students attending the school is in accordance with any applicable State and Commonwealth laws; and

b. all staff employed at the school are advised of their obligations under those laws.

For further information on the Minimum Standards see the Victorian Registration and Qualification Authority website.

You can also contact Regional Services Group in the Department of Education and Training: school.reorganisation@edumail.vic.gov.au

DUTY OF CARE OBLIGATIONS

As a school staff member you have a duty to take reasonable steps to protect children under your care and supervision from harm that is reasonably foreseeable (this applies to ALL school staff).

The question of what constitutes "reasonable steps" will depend on the individual circumstances of each case. You may breach your duty of care towards a student if you fail to act in the way a reasonable or diligent professional would have acted in the same situation.

In relation to suspected child abuse, reasonable steps may include (but are not limited to):

- acting on concerns and suspicions of abuse as soon as practicable
- seeking appropriate advice or consulting with other professionals or agencies when the school staff member is unsure of what steps to take
- reporting the suspected child abuse to appropriate authorities such as Victoria Police and DHHS Child Protection
- arranging counselling and/or other appropriate welfare support for the child
- providing ongoing support to the child (this may include attending DHHS Child Protection Case Planning meetings, and convening regular Student Support Group meetings)
- sharing information with other school based staff who will also be responsible for monitoring and providing ongoing support to the child.

The Four Critical Actions outlines steps to take and services to refer to depending on your assessment of the child's situation. You must follow the Four Critical Actions, including reporting to Victoria Police or DHHS Child Protection, or referring to other services like Child FIRST, to ensure that you fulfil your duty of care obligations.

Your duty of care also extends to students who are:

- **aged 17 years and over**

  In circumstances where you suspect that they are subject to abuse you should still follow the Four Critical Actions. Although DHHS Child Protection generally work with children under 17, they can still be contacted with concerns relating to students 17 and over for referral and advice.

- **involved in student sexual behaviour**

  You have a duty of care towards all students involved in student sexual behaviour, including students exhibiting concerning/harmful behaviours, students impacted by such behaviours and any other students in the school who may have witnessed and/or been affected by the sexual behaviour. See Identifying and Responding to Student Sexual Offending.

MANDATORY REPORTING

There are certain classes of professionals who are classified as "mandatory reporters". Within a school mandatory reporters include all:

- Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registered teachers, including principals
- staff who have been granted permission to teach by the VIT
- registered doctors and nurses.

All mandatory reporters must make a report to Victoria Police and/or DHHS Child Protection as soon as practicable if, during the course of carrying out their professional roles and responsibilities, they form a belief on reasonable grounds that:

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

It is a criminal offence not to report in these circumstances.

Mandatory reporters must also follow the Four Critical Actions to ensure they fulfil all their legal obligations.

CRIMINAL OFFENCES

In response to the *Betrayal of Trust Report*, the Victorian Government has introduced criminal offences to protect children from sexual abuse. Under these reforms a failure to report, or take action in relation to suspected child sexual abuse can now constitute a criminal offence.

Failure to disclose

This offence applies to all adults (not just professionals who work with children) who:

- form a reasonable belief that another adult may have committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 years of age; AND
- fail to report this information to Victoria Police.

A person will not be guilty of the offence if they have a reasonable excuse for not disclosing the information. A reasonable excuse includes:

- a reasonable fear for their own or another person's safety

  Failing to disclose a sexual offence based on concerns for the interests of the perpetrator or organisation (e.g. concerns about reputation, legal liability or financial status) will not be regarded as a reasonable excuse.

- a reasonable belief that the information has already been disclosed to Victoria Police or DHHS Child Protection and the person has no new information to add to the disclosure.

Additional exemptions apply where:

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

Failure to protect

This offence applies to a person in a position of authority within an organisation who:

- knows of a substantial risk that a child under the age of 16, under the care, supervision or authority of the organisation will become a victim of a sexual offence committed by an adult associated with the organisation (e.g. employee, contractor, volunteer, visitor); AND
- has the power or responsibility to remove that risk; AND
- negligently fails to remove or reduce the risk of harm.

Within a school setting, a position of authority includes principals and assistant principals and staff in institutional management positions (for example in government schools this includes Regional Directors and other senior managers).

For further information on these offences, please refer to:

- *Failure to protect offence*
- *Failure to disclose offence*
- Government's responses to the recommendations of the *Betrayal of Trust Report*

For information sharing requirements for Doctors in Secondary Schools please see here.

MINISTERIAL ORDER NO. 870 - CHILD SAFE STANDARDS

All Victorian schools must comply with *Ministerial Order No. 870 - Child Safe Standards - Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools* in order to be registered, and remain registered with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA).

The Order came into effect on 1 August 2016 and specifies how every Victorian school must:

- embed a culture of 'no tolerance' for child abuse
- comply with the prescribed seven minimum Child Safe Standards.

In meeting the requirements of the Order, schools must be inclusive of the needs of all children, particularly students who are vulnerable due to age, family circumstances, abilities, or indigenous, cultural or linguistic background.

This resource will support schools to meet their obligations under the Order (Standard 5 - Section 11), by assisting them to develop clear procedures for responding to allegations of suspected abuse.

School governing authorities (which includes government school councils, principals and nominated school leaders) will have responsibility for ensuring that schools meet all of the obligations set out within the Order.

REPORTABLE CONDUCT SCHEME

What is reportable conduct?

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

There is an allegation of 'reportable conduct' where a person has a 'reasonable belief' that there has been:

- a sexual offence, sexual misconduct or physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of a child; OR
- behaviour causing significant emotional or psychological harm to a child; OR
- significant neglect of a child; OR
- misconduct involving any of the above.

The scope of 'reportable conduct' is wide, and includes:

- information about something that is alleged to have occurred outside the course of the person's employment or engagement with the school
- sexual offences, sexual misconduct or physical violence committed in the presence of a child (which may include family violence committed by a school staff member in front of their own child).

However, student-to-student abuse is not covered by the Scheme.

How do I respond to a reportable conduct allegation?

To ensure you fulfil all of your legal obligations, principals or other school staff should follow the Four Critical Actions. These actions will support you to follow the notification steps required by the Reportable Conduct Scheme (detailed below).

To respond to an allegation of reportable conduct in a government school, principals or other school personnel do not need to make a report directly to the Commission for Children and Young People. Government school staff members should notify the principal of the allegation, and government school principals must then notify the Employee Conduct Branch on (03) 9637 2594 as soon as possible. The Employee Conduct Branch will then report the allegation to the Commission for Children and Young People, on behalf of the Department.

To respond to an allegation of reportable conduct in:

- a Catholic school, Catholic school principals should contact:
  - Archdiocese of Melbourne: Industrial Relations Unit on (03) 9267 0431 or by email on ceoir@cem.edu.au
  - Diocese of Sale: Executive Manager Industrial Relations/Human Resources on (03) 5622 6600
  - Diocese of Ballarat:
    - Education Consultants or Co-ordinator for Professional Standards on (03) 5337 7124
    - If the reportable conduct is in relation to a principal, contact the Director of Catholic Education on (03) 5337 7135 or by email on director@ceoballarat.catholic.edu.au
  - Diocese of Sandhurst: Assistant to the Director: Legal, Industrial & Human Resources or Consultant: Pastoral Wellbeing on (03) 5443 2377.
- an independent school, independent school principals should directly contact the Commission for Children and Young People.

Interaction with mandatory reporting and other reporting obligations

The Reportable Conduct Scheme does not change a person's mandatory reporting or other reporting obligations. For example, school staff must still contact Victoria Police if they suspect a criminal offence involving a child has occurred, in addition to following the notification steps required by the Reportable Conduct Scheme.

Resources

Further information regarding the Scheme is available at:

- School Policy Advisory Guide: Reportable Conduct Scheme
- HR Web: Reportable Conduct Scheme – Information for Schools
- Catholic schools: Reportable Conduct Scheme
- The Commission for Children and Young People: Reportable Conduct Scheme.

ORGANISATIONAL DUTY OF CARE

The organisational duty of care requires all organisations that exercise care, supervision or authority over children in Victoria, including the Department and schools, to take reasonable precautions to prevent the abuse of a child (sexual or physical abuse) by an individual associated with the organisation while the child is under their supervision or authority. This duty of care ensures that organisations that work with children have a well-defined and clear legal duty to prevent child abuse.

The duty should represent no significant change in day-to-day practice for schools in managing their duty of care obligations, so long as the school is compliant with the Child Safe Standards and is taking reasonable steps to minimise the risk of child abuse.

The duty does not change existing duties that schools and teachers already have, but instead reinforces the importance of ensuring that schools take reasonable precautions to minimise the risk of child abuse.

What is a reasonable precaution?

What is meant by 'reasonable precautions' will depend on the circumstances and is not defined in legislation.

The courts have previously considered the following examples to be reasonable precautions taken by organisations in the context of organisational child abuse. This list includes examples of how the Child Safe Standards would assist in taking these precautions:

- Employment screening and reference checking (Child Safe Standard 4)
- Supervision and training (Child Safe Standard 3, 4 and 5)
- Implementing systems to provide early warning of possible offences (Child Safe Standard 1)

- Random and unannounced inspections to deter misconduct (Supervisory requirements/ risk mitigation are part of Child Safe Standard 6)
- Prohibiting adults from being alone with a child (Supervisory requirements/ risk mitigation are part of Child Safe Standard 6), and
- Encouraging children and adults to notify authorities or parents about any signs of unusual or aberrant behaviour (Child Safe Standard 5 and 7).

Whose conduct does the duty apply to?

Organisational duty of care relates to conduct by an individual, such as a teacher, associated with the organisation while the child is under the care, supervision or authority of the organisation. This can include, but is not limited to, employees, volunteers, contractors, office holders, and foster or kinship carers.

Organisations cannot avoid their duty by delegating their care, supervision or authority of children to other organisations. For example, if a school sends students to a privately run camp and a member of the camp's staff abuses a student, the school is required to prove that it took reasonable precautions to prevent that abuse.

OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE CHARTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) requires Victorian government school staff to give proper consideration to human rights in making decisions and to act compatibly with human rights.

In responding to suspected child abuse, your decisions and actions should give consideration to Charter rights, including:

- That every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in his or her best interests and is needed by him or her by reason of being a child
- That a person has a right, under the Charter, to not have his or her privacy unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. In responding to suspected child abuse, it is important to properly consider a child's right to privacy, however this should not prevent you from discharging your protective obligations.
- The Charter provides for protection from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. As well as the prohibition on such conduct, there may be an obligation to take steps to prevent deliberate acts of torture or other conduct prohibited by the Charter.

Charter rights are not absolute and under the Charter, rights may be subject under law to reasonable limitations that can be demonstrably justified. In a situation where there is suspected child abuse, a limitation on a child's right to protection in their best interests is unlikely to be justified. You can contact the Department's Legal Division for further advice and guidance.

These guidelines support schools in meeting these requirements. For more information see: Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

IDENTIFYING SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE

CRITICAL INFORMATION

As a school staff member:

- it is critical to be able to recognise the physical or behavioural signs of child abuse (in many circumstances they may be the only indication that a child is subject to abuse)
- you may be the best-placed or only adult in a position to identify and respond to suspected abuse.

If indicators lead you to form a reasonable belief that a child is being abused, you must follow the Four Critical Actions. These actions will support you to immediately report your suspicion to DHHS Child Protection, and/ or to Victoria Police.

Trigger warning

This section includes explicit descriptions of abuse and may be distressing to engage with for some staff members.

If you need to talk to someone it is recommended that you speak to your school leadership team about arranging appropriate support. You can also talk to your GP or another allied health professional.

Government school staff can also contact the Employee Assistance Program on 1300 361 008.

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 child abuse
- child sexual abuse
- grooming
- family violence
- emotional child abuse
- neglect.

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

- some instances of child abuse will fall across multiple categories (i.e. family violence may involve physical, sexual and/or emotional child abuse)
- 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 possible.

If physical and/or behavioural indicators lead you to suspect that a child has or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse, regardless of the type of abuse, you must respond as soon as practicable by following the Four Critical Actions.

PHYSICAL CHILD ABUSE

CRITICAL INFORMATION

Physical child abuse is any non-accidental infliction of physical violence on a child by any person.

If you suspect that a child has been or is being physically abused, or is at risk of physical abuse, you must respond by following the Four Critical Actions.

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.

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, suicidal thoughts or self-harm.

Student fights

Please note that physical harm may also be caused by student fights and/or bullying. For further information on this see online advice below.

For online advice

- on bullying please visit *Bully Stoppers*: http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/bullystoppers/Pages/default.aspx
- on student fights visit:
    - *Intervention in School Fights* (government schools)
    - Catholic Schools - Archdiocese of Melbourne search for Student Behaviour Guidelines - Policy 2.26 Pastoral Care of Students at www.cem.edu.au.

Government schools can contact the DET Security Services Unit on (03) 9589 6266 to report a student fight and for advice on an appropriate response.

Catholic schools can also contact their Diocesan education office, specifically:

- Archdiocese of Melbourne: Student Wellbeing Information Line on (03) 9267 0228.
- Diocese of Sale: Executive Manager Industrial Relations/Human Resources on (03) 5622 6600
- Diocese of Ballarat: Student Wellbeing on (03) 5337 7135
- Diocese of Sandhurst: Consultant: Pastoral Wellbeing on (03) 5443 2377.

Independent Schools can contact Independent Schools Victoria on (03) 9825 7200.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

CRITICAL INFORMATION

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 and can include exposing a child to pornography
- does not always involve physical contact or force.

You must follow the Four Critical Actions if you suspect that a:

- child has been or is being sexually abused, or is at risk of sexual abuse
- school staff member, contractor or volunteer may be engaging, or are at risk of engaging in sexual behaviour with a child/children.

Unwanted sexual behaviour toward a student by a child 10 years or over can constitute a sexual offence and is referred to as student-to-student sexual offending. All incidents, suspicions and disclosures of student sexual offending must be responded to by following the Four Critical Actions.

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 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.

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.

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 victims, 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 more in age*
- a family friend or stranger 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 capable of committing an offence. Any suspected sexual behaviours by children under 10 is referred to as problem sexual behaviour.

What are the physical and behavioural 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.

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, or attempted suicide
- sudden decline in academic performance, poor memory and concentration
- engaging in sex work and/or sexual risk-taking behaviour
- 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 if you:

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

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 a child, 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 they are in an intimate relationship
- 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 etc.
- 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).

GROOMING

CRITICAL INFORMATION

- Grooming is when a person engages in predatory conduct to prepare a child for sexual abuse at a later time. Grooming can include communicating and/or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent/carer.
- If you suspect that a child is being groomed, you must follow the Four Critical Actions.

What is grooming?

Grooming is a criminal offence and occurs when an adult engages in predatory conduct to prepare a child for sexual abuse at a later time. Grooming can include communicating and/or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent/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, manipulation, force or use of authority (this can make a child fearful to report unwanted behaviour)
- making close physical contact, 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?

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. This can include online chats, sexting, and other interactions. Any incidents of suspected grooming must be reported by following the follow the Four Critical Actions.

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

For more information about:

- online grooming please visit here
- sexting and the transmission of sexual images between students please visit here.

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'
- 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'.

See Behavioural indicators for perpetrators of child sexual abuse for information on the indicators to look for in suspected perpetrators.

FAMILY VIOLENCE

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.

What is family violence?

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.

A child can be the victim to any of these behaviours. Family violence also includes behaviour that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, any of these behaviours.

A child or young person might be a victim of family violence in the following ways:

- being hit, yelled at, or otherwise directly abused
- being injured
- being sexually abused
- experiencing fear for self
- experiencing fear for another person, a pet or belongings
- seeing, hearing or otherwise sensing violence directed against another person
- seeing, hearing or otherwise sensing the aftermath of violence (such as broken furniture, smashed crockery, an atmosphere of tension)
- knowing or sensing that a family member is in fear
- being told to do something (such as to be quiet or to 'behave') to prevent violence
- being blamed for not preventing violence
- attempting to prevent or minimise violence
- attempting to mediate between the perpetrator and another family member
- being threatened or co-opted by the perpetrator into using violent behaviour against another family member
- being co-opted into supporting the perpetrator or taking their side
- being isolated or socially marginalised in ways that are directly attributable to the perpetrator's controlling behaviours.

Family violence is predominantly (although not always) perpetrated by men against women and children.

Children most commonly experience family violence through a partner or ex-partner of the mother. A child (or children) may also be the target of the behaviour (including a direct or indirect attack on the mother–child relationship), or may witness the behaviours, or the effects of the behaviours.

Family violence can have devastating impacts on children

Experiences of family violence create significant risks to a child's social, emotional, psychological and physical health and wellbeing. The longer a child experiences family violence, the greater the impact can be.

Action must be taken to protect the child, and to limit their trauma and support their recovery. As a school staff member you may be in the best position to identify that a child may be experiencing family violence and to take steps to protect the child by following the Four Critical Actions.

Family violence in our communities

Unfortunately the incidence of family violence is high. Family violence is one of the most significant and serious issues facing our communities, with a devastating impact on the health and wellbeing of many Victorians.

It occurs within all social, cultural and economic groups, although some groups experience greater barriers to accessing help and support. Women are particularly vulnerable to family violence during pregnancy. Family violence does not necessarily end if the relationship ends. In fact the family violence may not only continue, but may increase in frequency and severity (especially during the period where action is taken to leave or end the relationship).

Victoria's Plan for Change

The Victorian Government is implementing ALL of the 227 recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence (see *Ending Family Violence: Victoria's Plan for Change*), including the implementation of the Respectful Relationships initiative in Victorian Schools.

How can family violence be identified?

Family violence can be difficult to identify. Victims of family violence, including children often become very adept at hiding their distress, often as a coping and safety strategy.

The following sections outline some of the key physical and behavioural indicators of family violence in children.

These indicators are drawn from the Department of Health and Human Services' Common Risk Assessment Framework for family violence. Please note that the Framework is currently being updated in response to recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence – an updated Framework is expected to be released by mid-2018.

What are the physical indicators of family violence?

PHYSICAL indicators of family violence in children 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)
- fractured bones, especially in an infant where a fracture is unlikely to have occurred accidentally
- poisoning
- 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 or distrust 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 (absenteeism, lateness and/or school refusal) and/or poor academic outcomes
- parent-child conflict
- wearing long-sleeved clothes on hot days in an attempt to hide bruising or other injury
- becoming fearful when other children cry or shout
- being excessively friendly to strangers.

For older children and young people indicators can also include:

- moving away/running away from home
- entering a relationship early to escape the family home
- entering into other violent and/or unsafe relationships
- involvement in risk taking and/or unlawful activity
- alcohol and substance misuse.

For more information about family violence please visit here.

Identifying family violence in parents/carers

As a school staff member you will likely have contact with a child's parents/carers. Through interactions with parents and carers you may identify signs, or receive a disclosure that a child is experiencing family violence (noting that if a parent is experiencing family violence, it is highly likely that their child is also impacted).

You should always respond to any reasonable suspicion or belief that a child may be experiencing family violence by following the Four Critical Actions.

Key indicators that a family member is experiencing violence include:

- nervous, ashamed or evasive behaviour
- describing their partner as controlling or prone to anger
- appearing to be uncomfortable or anxious in the presence of their partner
- being accompanied by their partner, who does most of the talking
- having physical signs of violence such as bruising
- giving an unconvincing explanation of injuries that they (or their child) have sustained
- suffering anxiety, panic attacks, stress and/or depression.

Some alleged perpetrators of family violence may also be subject to court orders, including Family Violence Intervention Orders.

Details on Family Violence Intervention Orders can be found here.

EMOTIONAL CHILD ABUSE

CRITICAL INFORMATION

- Emotional child abuse occurs when a child is repeatedly rejected, isolated or frightened by threats.
- If you suspect that a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, emotional or psychological harm, you must follow the Four Critical Actions.

What is emotional abuse?

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

It also includes hostility, derogatory name-calling and put-downs, and persistent coldness from a person, to the extent that the child suffers, or is likely to suffer, emotional or psychological harm to their physical or developmental health.

What are the physical and behavioural 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.

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.

NEGLECT

CRITICAL INFORMATION

- Serious 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.
- If you suspect that a child is experiencing serious neglect, you must follow the Four Critical Actions.
- If you are concerned that a child may be experiencing neglect that is not "serious" you should refer the family to local community based services as appropriate (see Responding to Other Concerns About the Wellbeing of a Child) **UNLESS** the suspected neglect is committed in the school, where you should follow the actions detailed below.

What is neglect?

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

In some circumstances the neglect of a child:

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

The law differentiates between three different levels of neglect:

- 'Minor' neglect is low-level neglect that is trivial or temporary
- 'Significant' neglect is medium-level neglect that causes harm to a child that is more than trivial or temporary
- '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.

Please **see below** for guidance on what actions to take for each level of neglect.

Neglect committed by school staff, volunteers and contractors

Neglect of a child can be committed by parents or carers, but it can also be committed by those that work within the school, such as teachers, school staff, contractors or volunteers. 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.

Regardless of whether they are 'serious' or 'significant', concerns that a child is experiencing neglect must be responded to. The below table provides guidance for principals on how to report neglect, depending on the severity.

Minor/low levels of neglect

Committed by school staff, volunteers or contractors
Actions
Manage locally
If unsure or concerned, principals can seek advice from:

- Employee Conduct Branch (government schools)
- Diocesan Office (Catholic schools, see below).

Examples

- A child is accidentally left out in the rain and cold for a short period of time
- A teacher forgets to supervise a particular area of the school grounds for half an hour, and no harm comes to the children there.

Committed by other community members

Actions

Manage locally

- Refer child and family to local community based services if appropriate.
- Refer child and family to Child FIRST/Orange Door if appropriate.

Examples

- A carer fails to give a child pain medication for a minor headache
- A parent forgets to provide a child with their lunch on a single occasion.

Significant/medium levels of neglect

Committed by school staff, volunteers or contractors

Actions

If appropriate, refer child and family to local community based services.
Refer child and family to Child FIRST/Orange Door.
Principal to notify:

- Employee Conduct Branch (government schools)
- Diocesan Office (Catholic schools, see below).

If a principal remains concerned for a child's welfare, they can follow the Four Critical Actions.

Examples

- A first aid officer fails to examine or treat a child's bleeding cuts and bruises from falling over at school
- A teacher's 5 year old child (who does not attend the school) is seen playing near a busy highway on several occasions without adult supervision.

Committed by other community members

Actions

If appropriate, refer child and family to local community based services.
Refer child and family to Child FIRST/Orange Door.
If a principal remains concerned for a child's welfare, they can follow the Four Critical Actions.

Examples

- A carer leaves an 8 year old child alone for hours without supervision
- A parent does not provide their child with fresh clothes for a week at a time
- A carer consistently forgets to give a child prescribed medication for the attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Serious/high levels of neglect

Committed by school staff, volunteers or contractors

Actions

Follow the Four Critical Actions, including reporting to:

- Victoria Police
- Employee Conduct Branch (government schools)
- DET Security Services Unit (government schools)
- Diocesan Education Office (Catholic schools, see below).

Examples

- A teacher is overheard saying that he frequently gets his 6 year old child to look after his 12 month old when he goes out for drinks for hours after work
- A staff member responsible for providing anticonvulsant medication to a child with epilepsy on a week-long school camp fails to do so for the entire week.

Committed by other community members

Actions

Follow the Four Critical Actions, including reporting to:

- DHHS Child Protection
- DET Security Services Unit (government schools).

Examples

- A carer allows a child in their care to inject illegal drugs in their home and does not intervene
- A parent regularly does not provide warm clothing or closed shoes for a child during winter
- A child's home environment is filthy or hazardous and there is animal or human faeces or urine, and decomposing food in the house.

Catholic school principals can seek advice from their Diocesan education office:

- Archdiocese of Melbourne: Industrial Relations Unit on (03) 9267 0431 or by email on ceoir@cem.edu.au
- Diocese of Sale: Executive Manager Industrial Relations/Human Resources on (03) 5622 6600
- Diocese of Ballarat: Education Consultants or Co-ordinator for Professional Standards on (03) 5337 7124
- If the reportable conduct is in relation to a principal, contact the Director of Catholic Education on (03) 5337 7135 or by email on director@ceoballarat.catholic.edu.au
- Diocese of Sandhurst: Assistant to the Director: Legal, Industrial & Human Resources or Consultant: Pastoral Wellbeing on (03) 5443 2377.

What are the physical and behavioural 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.

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.

FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS: RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS, DISCLOSURES AND SUSPICIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

This section outlines Four Critical Actions which must be taken when responding to an incident, disclosure or suspicion of child abuse.

It includes critical detail and links to supporting documents (including the *Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: Template*, which it is strongly recommended for schools to complete when responding to any form of suspected abuse).

For easy reference a summary of these actions is available here as a printable PDF A3 poster. We recommend that this resource is displayed in a prominent position for all staff members to access.

YOU MUST ACT

CRITICAL INFORMATION

- As a school staff member, you **must** act as soon as 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).
- You should make sufficient enquiries to form a reasonable belief and to determine a child's immediate needs. However, once a reasonable belief has been formed, it is not your role to investigate. This is the role of DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police.
- Child abuse includes any instance of physical or sexual abuse (including grooming), emotional or psychological harm, serious or significant neglect and family violence involving a child.
- If you hold significant concerns for a child's wellbeing, which do not appear to be a result of child abuse you must still act (see Responding to Other Concerns About the Wellbeing of a Child).

This section steps you through when and how to respond if you:

- Witness an incident
- Form a suspicion/reasonable belief
- Receive a disclosure (current student)
- Receive a disclosure (former student).

It also outlines the threshold for forming a reasonable belief.

If, after considering this content you:

- are unsure whether a witnessed incident, suspicion or disclosure should lead you to form a reasonable belief that child abuse has occurred, or is at risk of occurring, you should seek further advice from:
    - DHHS Child Protection and/or Victoria Police
    - Student Incident and Recovery Unit on (03) 9637 2934 for student related concerns and/or DET Employee Conduct Branch on (03) 9637 2594 for concerns related to staff (Government schools only)
    - Diocesan Education Office (Catholic schools only).

- hold significant concerns for a child's wellbeing, which do not appear to be a result of child abuse you should still act (see Responding to Other Concerns About the Wellbeing of a Child which will support you in making appropriate referrals to Child FIRST/Orange Door, DHHS Child Protection and Victoria Police).

Witnessing an incident

If you witness an incident where you believe a child has been subject to or may be at risk of abuse, including exposure to family violence, you must take immediate action to protect the safety of children involved. Go straight to:

- Action 1: Responding to an Emergency if there is an immediate risk to health and safety
- Action 2: Reporting to Authorities if there is no immediate risk to health and safety.

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. See guidance on forming a reasonable belief.

Receiving a disclosure (current student)

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.

For further guidance on managing the disclosure see Strategies for Managing a Disclosure.

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.

Please visit here.

This guidance will support you to:

- report any allegations of abuse, by contacting your local Victoria Police station and/ or by contacting the SANO Task Force at sanotaskforce@police.vic.gov.au
- respond to a belief that another person is at immediate risk by contacting Victoria Police on 000.

This guidance will also support:

- government schools to report to relevant areas within the Department (this may include the principal of the school, the regional office, the Employee Conduct Branch and the Security Services Unit)
- Catholic schools to contact their Diocesan education office
- independent schools to notify their School Board.

Documenting your actions
As a school staff member, you must keep clear and comprehensive notes relating to incidents, disclosures and allegations of child abuse. To do this, it is strongly recommended that you use the Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: Template (see the PROTECT website).

When using the template, you should aim to provide as much information within the template as possible. These records will be helpful in making a report of the abuse to the relevant authorities. Note that you only need to complete the relevant sections of the template.

Even if you decide not to make a report, you must still document the incident, disclosure or allegation and the reasons for your decision.

This information 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 your decisions (see Complying with subpoenas or court attendance).

If you do not use the template, you must still ensure you are making an effort to collect all the information that is required by the template.

Due to the nature of mandatory reporting and other child abuse reporting records, schools must ensure that the records are kept securely. For example, if you have a hard copy file, you should make sure it is kept in a locked cabinet. If you have an electronic record, you need to make sure it is password protected and only staff members who need the information have access.
Schools should ensure that mandatory reporting and other child abuse reporting documents are not destroyed as they may be needed at a later time (e.g. as evidence in future court proceedings).

Strategies for managing a disclosure

When managing a disclosure of abuse, it is important that you respond in an appropriate and supportive manner. All disclosures of abuse must be taken seriously and addressed immediately by following the Four Critical Actions.

Disclosures from a student

It is the role of school staff members to listen and respond appropriately to a child's concerns. When a disclosure of abuse is made and/or you are concerned that a child has been abused or is at risk of being abused, you must help the child to understand that you need to seek assistance for them and cannot keep the discussion and/or their disclosure confidential between you and the student.

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

- To a younger student: 'I need some help to support you and am not going to be able to keep what you have told me between you and me, I will need to tell …[who you will tell]…..to work out what to do to support you'
- To an older student: 'The information you have given me has made me very concerned for your welfare and I will need to share this information with my manager to identify how we may be able to support you. I may also need to talk to people who work in the child safety area, to help keep you safe.'

In instances where the abuse involves a family member (i.e. family violence) it may be appropriate to reassure the child that sharing this information is an important part of making their family safer and that you will be talking with other professionals who will help identify the next steps (see: Contacting parents and carers).

You must keep clear and comprehensive notes relating to incidents, disclosures and allegations of child abuse. You must keep such notes whether or not you decide to make a report. It is strongly recommended that you do this by using the Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: Template (see the PROTECT website). If you do not use the template, you must still ensure you are making an effort to collect all the information that is required by the template. This may be critical for further investigations and/or legal proceedings.

The information below includes advice on how best to manage a disclosure and what to avoid.

When managing a disclosure, staff should:

- listen to the student and allow them to speak
- stay calm and use a neutral tone with no urgency and where possible use the child's language and vocabulary (you do not want to frighten the child or interrupt the child)
- be gentle, patient and non-judgmental throughout
- highlight to the student it was important for them to tell you about what has happened
- assure them that they are not to blame for what has occurred
- do not ask leading questions, for example gently ask, "What happened next?" rather than "Why?"

- be patient and allow the child to talk at their own pace and in their own words
- do not pressure the child into telling you more than they want to, they will be asked a lot of questions by other professionals and it is important not to force them to retell what has occurred multiple times
- reassure the child that you believe them and that disclosing the matter was important for them to do
- use verbal facilitators such as, "*I see*", restate the child's previous statement, and use non-suggestive words of encouragement, designed to keep the child talking in an open-ended way ("*what happened next?*")
- tell the child in age appropriate language you are required to report to the relevant authority to help stop the abuse, and explain the role of these authorities if appropriate (for a young child this may be as simple as saying "I will need to talk to people to work out what to do next to help you").

When managing a disclosure, staff should AVOID:

- displaying expressions of panic or shock
- asking questions that are investigative and potentially invasive (this may make the child feel uncomfortable and may cause the child to withdraw)
- going over the information repeatedly (you are only gathering information to help you form a belief on reasonable grounds that you need to make a report to the relevant authority)
- making any comments that would lead the student to believe that what has happened is their fault
- making promises to the child about what will occur next or that things will be different given the process can be unpredictable and different for each child depending on their circumstances (instead reassure them that you and others will do your best to help).

Disclosures from a parent/carer or sibling

There may be circumstances where a student's sibling or parent/carer discloses abuse. For example a student's parent or carer may disclose family violence (noting that if a child's parent or carer is experiencing family violence it is highly likely that the child is experiencing abuse).

In this circumstance it is important to draw on the same strategies that you would for a student (i.e. listen, be non-judgemental, patient and do not apply pressure). In relation to experiences of family violence, it is particularly critical to remain non-judgemental, avoid apportioning blame to the victim/s and highlight that everyone has the right to feel safe.

This can be done by focusing questions to determine what the risk of harm may be and what (if any) supports and interventions are in place to protect the wellbeing of the child and avoiding statements like "why don't you leave".

For example, you could use questions to explore the victim's view about their level of risk and risk to their child, such as 'Do you think the violence will continue? Is the violence getting worse?'

It is also important to remember that many victims of family violence experience fear for their safety (and the safety of their children) in disclosing their experiences. They may have been threatened by the perpetrator of violence, or threats made about their children's lives.

See here for further information on supports for students experiencing family violence.

Forming a reasonable belief

If you witness, suspect, or receive a disclosure of child abuse including exposure to family violence, you will need to determine whether you have formed a 'reasonable belief' or a 'belief on reasonable grounds' that a child has or is being abused or is at risk of being abused.

A reasonable belief is a deliberately low threshold:

- so that people are encouraged to report suspected abuse to the relevant authorities and agencies, enabling authorities to investigate the allegations and take further action to prevent or stop any further abuse
- which does not require proof, but does require something more than a mere rumour or speculation
- and is met if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds.

Forming a belief on reasonable grounds may include:

- a 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)
- other signs such as family violence, parental substance misuse, psychiatric illness or intellectual disability that is impacting on the child's safety, stability or development.

ACTION 1: RESPONDING TO AN EMERGENCY

CRITICAL INFORMATION

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

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

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

Ensuring immediate safety

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

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

Preserving evidence

Where an incident of suspected child abuse occurs at the school, you may need to take action to preserve any items that may amount to evidence of the abuse. Consider all of the following:

- **Environment**

Do not clean up the area and do preserve the sites where the alleged incidents occurred. Cordon off the relevant area/room/building and take reasonable steps to ensure that no one enters these areas.

- **Clothing**

  If sexual abuse/physical abuse is suspected you may also need to ensure that the person who has allegedly committed the abuse and the child who has allegedly been abused remain in their clothing and, if this is not possible, ensure that the clothes are not washed, are handled as little as possible, and stored in a sealable bag.

- **Other physical Items**

  If there are any other items that may amount to evidence, e.g. weapons, bedding, condoms, try to ensure that these things remain untouched.

- **Potential witnesses**

  Reasonable precautions must be taken to prevent discussion of the incident between those involved in the alleged incident (including any other children who may have witnessed the incident). If the incident involves:
  - two or more students, a staff member should be allocated to remain with each student involved in separate rooms
  - a staff member, including volunteers or contractors, they should be asked to remain with a member of the school's leadership team and be instructed not to discuss the incident with any staff/student/s carers/family members.

ACTION 2: REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES

CRITICAL INFORMATION

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

Within the school

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

- contact Victoria Police (via your local police station)
- ALSO report as soon as possible **internally** to:
  - School principal/leadership team (all instances)
  - Government schools: Principals are to contact the Employee Conduct Branch and Security Services Unit as soon as possible
  - Catholic schools: Diocesan education office.

Within the family or community

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

- report to DHHS Child Protection if a child is considered to be:
  - in need of protection due to child abuse; or
  - at risk of being harmed (or has been harmed) and the harm has had, or is likely to have, a serious impact on the child's safety, stability or development; and
  - the child's parents/carers have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from harm.
- ALSO report suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police
- ALSO report **internally** to:
  - School principal and/or leadership team (all instances)

- Government Schools: DET Security Services Unit
- Catholic Schools: Diocesan education office
- Independent Schools: School principal and/ or school chairperson.

Government schools may also wish to contact the Student Incident and Recovery Unit on (03) 9637 2934 for advice and support in managing the incident.

You must identify a contact person at the school for future liaison with Victoria Police and/or DHHS Child Protection and seek advice about contacting parents/carers (see Action Three).

Other Concerns

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/The Orange Door.

Following any incident, suspicion or disclosure of child abuse you must make a report as soon as possible. Failure to report physical and sexual child abuse may amount to a criminal offence.

This section steps you through the process for:

- Reporting when the source of the suspected abuse is a person within the school
- Reporting when the source of suspected abuse is within the family or community
- Reporting if the incident, disclosure or suspicion relates to an international student
- How to proceed if the principal/leadership team advises you not to report
- Making additional reports (in circumstances where a report has already been made).

What will happen if I report to DHHS?

The grounds for statutory intervention when a child is in need of protection are set out in the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (CYFA). Under the CYFA, DHHS Child Protection places the best interests of the child at the centre when taking action regarding a child, including the need to:

- protect the child from harm
- protect the child's rights
- promote the child's development (taking into account their age and stage of development).

Child Protection officers will undertake a risk assessment to consider potential for harm and the best interests of a child and to determine a course of action. Information on the outcomes of your report will only be shared with you if this is in the best interest of the child.

Reporting when the source of suspected abuse is a person within the school

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

- contact Victoria Police via your local police station (it is important that you first contact your local Police station; where appropriate they will refer you to the local Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Team)

- ALSO report internally* to:
    - School principal/leadership team (all instances)
    - Government schools: Principals are to contact the Employee Conduct Branch on (03) 9637 2595 and Security Services Unit on (03) 9589 6266
    - Catholic schools: Diocesan education office.

You **must** also identify a contact person at the school for future liaison with DHHS Child Protection and Victoria Police and seek advice about contacting parents/carers (see Action 4).

**Please note that reporting internally does not mean that reporting obligations have been met. The staff member who has formed a reasonable belief regarding child abuse or neglect must also ensure a report is made to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police if the child is at immediate risk of harm.*

Reporting when the source of suspected abuse is within the family or community

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

- report to DHHS Child Protection if a child is considered to be:
    - in need of protection due to child abuse; or
    - at risk of being, harmed (or has been harmed), and the harm has had, or is likely to have, a serious impact on the child's safety, stability or development; and
    - the child's parents/carers have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from the harm.
- ALSO report suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police
- ALSO report internally* to:
    - School principal and/or leadership team (all instances), highlighting:
        - the details of the suspected child abuse or risk of abuse including the name/s of those involved
        - any immediate actions taken to protect the safety of the child
        - your report or intention to report to DHHS Child Protection, Victoria Police and/ or Child FIRST/Orange Door
        - possible steps that can be taken to contact parents (if appropriate) and support the student.
    - Government Schools: DET Security Services Unit
    - Catholic Schools: Diocesan education office, including:
        - Archdiocese of Melbourne: Office of Professional Conduct, Ethics & Investigation on 03 9267 0228
        - Diocese of Sale: Executive Manager Industrial Relations/Human Resources on (03) 5622 6600
        - Diocese of Ballarat: Child Safety on 03 5337 7135
        - Diocese of Sandhurst: Child Protection Officer on 03 5443 2377.
    - Independent Schools: School principal and/ or school chairperson.

    Government schools may also wish to contact the Student Incident and Recovery Unit on 03 9637 2934 for advice and support in managing the incident.

**Please note that reporting internally does not mean that reporting obligations have been met. The staff member who has formed a reasonable belief regarding child abuse or neglect must also ensure a report is made to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police if the child is in immediate risk of harm.*

Taking action when you do not suspect abuse, but you hold significant concerns for wellbeing

If you believe that a child is not subject to abuse, but you still hold significant concerns for their wellbeing, you should consider making a referral to Child FIRST/The Orange Door. These concerns could include risk taking behaviour, parenting difficulties, isolation of a family or lack of support.

In some circumstances you may still need to contact DHHS Child Protection and/or Victoria Police e.g. extreme risk taking behaviour, harm to an unborn baby. (For further advice see Responding to Other Concerns about the Wellbeing of a Child).

Reporting if the incident, suspicion or disclosure relates to an international student

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

- Government schools must also contact International Education Division on 03 9637 2990
- Catholic and independent schools will need to contact the VRQA on 03 9637 2806 or via email at vrqa.schools@edumail.vic.gov.au if your school has issued a *Confirmation of Appropriate Accommodation and Welfare* (CAAW) letter in relation that student (thereby assuming responsibility for the for approving the child's accommodation, support and general welfare).

How to proceed if the principal/ leadership team advises you not to report

In some circumstances the principal and/or leadership team may advise you not to proceed with reporting suspected abuse.

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

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

If you decide not to report, it is strongly recommended that this decision should be documented within the Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: Template (see the PROTECT website).

Making additional reports

Reporting further reasonable grounds for belief

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

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

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

What if another person has already made a report?

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

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

However, there may be times when two or more school staff members, for example a teacher and a principal, have formed a belief about the same child on the same occasion and based on the same information. In this situation it is sufficient that only one of the staff members make a report. The other person should ensure that the report has been made and that all the grounds for their own belief were included in the report made by the other person.

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

In circumstances where a report to the Employee Conduct Branch is required, the principal should make the report.

What if you don't think the child is at risk of abuse but you still hold concerns about a student's wellbeing?

If you believe that a child is not subject to child abuse, but you still hold "significant concerns" for their wellbeing you may still need to contact DHHS Child Protection and/or Victoria Police and/or make a referral to Child FIRST/Orange Door. For further advice see Responding to other concerns about the wellbeing of a child.

ACTION 3: CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

CRITICAL INFORMATION

In many cases where it is suspected that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused, it is extremely important that parents/carers are notified as soon as possible, but not if this may impact an investigation or place a child or their parent (victim of violence) at risk.

However, AFTER you have you have formed a suspicion/reasonable belief that a child is subject to abuse and **BEFORE** contacting parents/carers, principals **must** seek advice from DHHS Child Protection and/or Victoria Police (depending on who the report was made to).

This is critical to ensure the safety of the child and not to compromise any investigation being conducted by the relevant authorities or agencies

Where DHHS Child Protection and Victoria Police have advised that it is appropriate, schools should make sensitive and professional contact with parents/carers as soon as possible on the day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion.

Please note in cases of family violence you:

- **MUST** take care not to inadvertently alert the alleged perpetrator that there is a suspicion or disclosure of abuse (this could increase the risk of harm to the child, other family members and possibly to staff members at the school)
- may already be in communication with a parent/carer who is experiencing family violence (i.e. if they disclose the violence)- see advice on disclosures

can seek advice from DHHS Child Protection or Child FIRST/Orange Door about safe strategies for communicating with a parent/carer who is experiencing family violence and for advice on recommended family violence support services.

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

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

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

AFTER you have formed a suspicion/reasonable belief that a child is subject to abuse and **BEFORE** contacting parents/carers your principal (or delegate), you must seek advice from Victoria Police or DHHS Child Protection (depending on who the report has been made to). They will advise your principal (or delegate) about whether it is appropriate to contact parents/carers at this stage.

The principal (or delegate) may be advised not to contact parents/carers (or one particular parent/carer) in circumstances where:

- a parent/carer is alleged to have engaged in the abuse (including in circumstances of suspected family violence, where alerting the alleged perpetrator may place others at greater risk)
- a disclosure to the parents/carers may subject the child to further or more severe abuse.
- the child is deemed a mature minor (assessed to be sufficiently mature and intelligent to make such decisions on his or her own behalf) and has requested that their parents/carers not be notified (in these circumstances ideally the child will nominate another responsible adult to be contacted). For further

information on mature minors see here. Victorian Government school staff can also contact the DET Legal Division on (03) 9637 3146 for further advice on assessing whether a student is a mature minor.

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

Advice for communicating with parents

Where advised by Police and DHHS to be appropriate to contact the parents, the principal and/or reporting staff member (ideally together) should make sensitive and professional contact with the appropriate parents/carers as soon as possible on the day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion. During this conversation it is important to:

- Remain calm
- Be empathetic to feelings
- Validate concerns
- Provide appropriate details of the incident, disclosure and/or suspicion of child abuse
- Outline the action the school staff have taken to date , including who the incident, disclosure and/or suspicion has been reported to if appropriate (noting that the anonymity of the person who made the report to DHHS Child Protection must be protected if this is their wish)
- If appropriate provide the name and contact phone number of DHHS Child Protection and/or the police officer who is investigating (this should be provided to the student if they are a mature minor)
- Provide information on whether they are likely to be contacted by DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police (if known or appropriate)
- Inform them that the investigation may take some time and ask what further information they would like and how school staff can assist them (see referring to external supports)
- Assure them that school wellbeing staff can provide support to their child (Victorian Government school staff can make referrals to Student Support Services or other wellbeing staff based at the school)
- Invite the parents/carers to attend a Student Support Group meeting where a Student Support Plan can be prepared to ensure that appropriate support can be provided for their child.

What to do if a student returns home before DHHS/Victoria Police advice is received

Ideally you will have received clear advice from Victoria Police/DHHS Child Protection on what information to share with parents/carers before their child returns to their care.

In some circumstances, a child may return to the care of their parent/carer before this advice has been received.

In these circumstances you should NOT SHARE ANY INFORMATION:

- that may place the child or any other person at risk (e.g. risk of further harm, destruction of evidence or risk of retaliation against an allegation/incident)
- if the student is an adult or mature minor and requests that you do not contact their parents /carers (unless you consider it necessary to inform the parents/carers in order to lessen or prevent a serious risk to the student's safety).

After consideration, the school principal (or delegate) may decide that it is in the best interest of the child to provide the parent/carer with information:

- on a disclosure or an alleged incident (providing only enough information so that the parent/carer can best protect and support their child)

- (if appropriate) that a report has been made to DHHS and/or Victoria Police and it is likely they will be in contact
- that there are supports available.

For advice and support on contacting parents/carers:

- Government schools can contact the Student Incident and Recovery Unit on 03 9651 3179
- Catholic schools can contact their Diocesan education office including:
    - Archdiocese of Melbourne: Legal Services on 03 9267 0228
    - Diocese of Sale: Executive Manager Industrial Relations/Human Resources on (03) 5622 6600
    - Diocese of Ballarat: Legal Services on (03) 5337 7124
    - Diocese of Sandhurst: Assistant to the Director: Legal, Industrial & Human Resources Consultant: Pastoral Wellbeing on (03) 5443 2377
    - Independent schools can contact Independent Schools Victoria on 03 9825 7200.

For more advice on what information can be shared, please see Privacy and Information Sharing.

For guidance on sharing information about an incident to the school community.

ACTION 4: PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

CRITICAL INFORMATION

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

Support can include direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals and community services and should involve the development of a Student Support Plan.

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

Support must be provided to any impacted staff members.

Experiences of child abuse, including exposure to family violence, can cause long-term trauma and significantly impact on the mental health and wellbeing of children. In addition to reporting suspected abuse to the relevant authorities, as a school staff member you play a central role in addressing this trauma and have a duty of care to ensure that the student feels safe and is supported at school.

This section outlines actions that schools must take, where deemed appropriate, to support students who are impacted by child abuse, including:

- Working together and planning support
- Engaging allied health and wellbeing supports (with appropriate consent)
- Referring to external supports
- Providing developmentally and culturally appropriate support
- Providing support for impacted school staff members
- Supporting students in interviews conducted at school
- Complying with subpoenas or court attendance
- Responding to complaints or concerns.

In the context of student-to-student offending school staff have a duty of care to support all students who are impacted by the abuse – this will include the students who were subjected to the abuse, the students who perpetrated the abuse, and any students who witnessed or were otherwise impacted by the abuse.

If the abuse concerns an incident of student sexual offending see: Identifying and Responding to Student Sexual Offending.

Resilience and protective factors

Schools also play a critical role in building student's resilience and protective factors, which can significantly reduce the long-term impact of child abuse. One of the simplest ways to build resilience is to ensure that an impacted student is provided with time and opportunity to be supported and heard by a school staff member they trust.

This can be further supported through planning and engagement with allied health and wellbeing supports.

Working together and planning support

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

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

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

Engaging allied health and wellbeing professionals

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

For example schools can engage/ engage with:

- Student Support Services (government schools only)
- School wellbeing staff members
- Respectful Relationships Liaison Officers (in instances of family violence)
- allied health and wellbeing professionals engaged by the student and families.

Allied health and wellbeing professionals can provide:

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

Government schools can contact their Regional Office for further information on the range of school based support services that may be locally available.

SAFEMinds

Schools are encouraged to use SAFEMinds (a professional learning and resource package). SAFEMinds is available for schools and families to:

- enhance early intervention mental health support for children and young people in schools; specifically regarding mild mood disorders (anxiety and depression) and self-harm
- increase engagement of parents and carers with schools to more effectively support their child's mental health
- develop clear and effective referral pathways between schools and community youth and mental health services.

Further information can be found here.

Catholic schools can contact their Diocesan education office for further detail, specifically:

- Archdiocese of Melbourne: Student Wellbeing Information Line on 03 9267 0228
- Diocese of Sale: Executive Manager Industrial Relations/Human Resources on (03) 5622 6600
- Diocese of Ballarat: Child Safety on (03) 5337 7135
- Diocese of Sandhurst: Consultant: Pastoral Wellbeing on (03) 5443 2377

Referring to external supports

School staff can also refer to the wide range of non-school based support services, which specialise in providing tailored support and advice for children impacted by abuse.

For example schools may consider referrals to:

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

Further information on counselling/support organisations is available here.

All schools can contact their local government for advice on available local services.

Government schools can contact their Regional Office for advice on local and specialised services.

Catholic schools can contact their Diocesan education office for further detail, including:

- Archdiocese of Melbourne: Student Wellbeing Information Line on 03 9267 0228
- Diocese of Sale: Executive Manager Industrial Relations/Human Resources on (03) 5622 6600
- Diocese of Ballarat: Child Safety on (03) 5337 7135
- Diocese of Sandhurst: Consultant: Pastoral Wellbeing on (03) 5443 2377

Independent schools can contact Independent Schools Victoria on 03 9825 7200.

Family Violence Service Network

For families experiencing family violence there are a wide range of local and state-wide services and supports available. The Lookout is a Victorian Government initiative in partnership with the Domestic Violence Resources Centre Victoria, providing information, evidence-based resources and services to help professionals respond to family violence (including professionals in mainstream services, like schools).

The Lookout includes a service directory, with a lookup function, where you can enter a postcode and identify locally available family violence support services.

Safe Steps

Safe steps offers free access to professional support to women and their children living with family violence, through a comprehensive range of services to enable them to become – and stay – free from violence. They offer a 24/7 advice line (1800 015 188) and resources on their website.

Victims of family violence can also be encouraged to contact RESPECT (1800 737 732), to talk or chat online to a counsellor from the National Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence hotline.

See further information on counselling/support organisations.

Providing developmentally and culturally appropriate support

While a child's background should not impact on a decision to report suspected abuse, school staff need to be sensitive to a child's individual circumstances when providing support and working with families impacted by abuse.

It is a requirement under the Child Safe Standards that school governing authorities must "take account of the diversity of all children", including (but not limited to) the needs of:

Children with disabilities

When supporting a child with a disability who has been impacted by child abuse it is critical to consider the child's:

- chronological age, developmental age and their cognitive functioning in order to tailor developmentally appropriate support strategies
- vulnerability to ongoing abuse (children with disabilities disproportionally fall prey to child abuse, in particular child sexual abuse) when considering the need to make a further report and/or implement risk mitigation strategies.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

When supporting an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child who has been impacted by child abuse it is essential that school staff provide culturally appropriate support. Principals from government schools must notify their Regional Office to ensure that the Koorie Engagement Support Officer can arrange appropriate support for the child and/or advise on culturally appropriate support strategies. Principals from Catholic schools must notify their Diocesan education office to ensure that the Diocesan Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer can arrange appropriate support for the child and advise on culturally appropriate support strategies.

Principals from independent schools may choose to contact Independent Schools Victoria for advice.

Children from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds

When supporting a child from CALD backgrounds who has been impacted by child abuse it is essential that schools provide culturally appropriate support. However this should not detract from ensuring the child's safety and wellbeing.

Where possible schools should work with relevant cultural support services (ensuring that the confidentiality of the student and family is maintained) and engage an interpreter when communicating with the student's family if needed.

Students with refugee backgrounds

When working with children from refugee backgrounds who have been impacted by child abuse it is important to recognise that they (and their families) may also be experiencing trauma, dislocation and loss. This trauma may significantly affect family wellbeing and parenting capacity and whilst these issues also require sensitive consideration, they should not detract from ensuring the child's safety and wellbeing (or impact on decisions to report suspected abuse).

School staff should consider contacting services that specialise in providing support to refugees (ensuring that the confidentiality of the child and their family is maintained).

Schools should also engage an interpreter when communicating with the student's family if needed.

International students

Principals must ensure appropriate measures are taken for the welfare of international students. This may require additional support given that the child's family may not be present to provide support within the home environment.

See Reporting if the incident, disclosure or suspicion involves an international student for details on who must be contacted in the event that an international student is involved in suspected abuse.

Providing support for other impacted children

It can be stressful for other children involved in any incidents, disclosures or suspicions of child abuse. Principals must ensure that other impacted children are offered and provided appropriate support.

Providing support for impacted school staff members

It can also be stressful for staff involved in any incidents, disclosures or suspicions of child abuse including family violence. It is important to remember that staff members may also have experienced, or be experiencing family violence and/or abuse in their own lives. Principals must support impacted staff members to access necessary support.

School staff requiring wellbeing support can contact:

- Government Schools: DET Employee Assistance Program (EAP) on 1300 361 008
  - For further information on specific Departmental supports for staff experiencing family violence, please see: HR Web – Family Violence
- Catholic Schools:
  - Archdiocese of Melbourne: School's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider and/or seek further advice from Office of Professional Conduct, Ethics & Investigation on 03 9267 0228

- Diocese of Sale: ACCESS EAP on 1300 66 77 00 or Executive Manager Industrial Relations/Human Resources on (03) 5622 6600
- Diocese of Ballarat: Child Safety on 03 5337 7135
- Diocese of Sandhurst: ACCESS EAP on 1800 222 125.

- Independent schools can contact Independent Schools Victoria on 03 9825 7200.

Supporting children who are interviewed at school

All children (including children who are alleged to have perpetrated abuse) must be independently supported in any interviews conducted by Victoria Police or DHHS Child Protection at school.

Where possible and appropriate the child's parents/carers should be present for these interviews. However if this is not appropriate or practicable the principal (or delegate) may be identified as the independent person or support person for the child for the purpose of the interview.

Government school should ensure they comply with the SPAG – Police and DHHS Interviews when considering Victoria Police of DHHS requests to interview a child at school.

Police interviews

In the event Victoria Police schedule an interview with a child at the school, the principal (or delegate) must advise the child's parents/carers (where advised to be appropriate) as well as:

- Government schools:
  - Koorie Engagement Support Officer if the child is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
  - International Division if the child is an international student on 03 9637 3990.
- Catholic schools:
  - Archdiocese of Melbourne: Policy 2.19a Police and Department of Human Services Interview Protocols at www.cem.edu.au and Student Wellbeing Information Line on 03 9267 0228
  - Diocese of Sale: Executive Manager Industrial Relations/Human Resources on (03) 5622 6600
  - Diocese of Ballarat: Child Safety on 03 5337 7135
  - Diocese of Sandhurst: Assistant to the Director: Legal, Industrial & Human Resources on 03 5443 2377.

The table below includes critical detail on when and how police interviews are conducted at school and what role the principal or delegate should play if they are nominated as the support person.

Police interviews at school where the child is the alleged victim or witness

- Police should only interview children at school as a matter of urgency or necessity
- A request must be made to the principal (or delegate) who must be advised of the reason for the interview and the reason why the interview must be conducted at the school.
- The child's parents/carers should be present where it is practical and appropriate to make these arrangements. If a parent/carer is not able to be present, an independent person must be present during the interview (the role of the independent person is to ensure the child understands what is happening and to provide support).
- Principals (or delegate) may if necessary, act as an independent person where the child is a victim, unless they believe it will place them in a conflict of interest to do so.
- As an independent person, school staff must refrain from providing their opinions or accounts of events during interviews.

Police interviews at school where a student has allegedly abused another child

If the police need to speak with a student who has allegedly abused another child this should preferably be done in the presence of the parents/carers, or another independent person that is not a school staff member.

DHHS Child Protection interviews

DHHS Child Protection may conduct interviews of children at Victorian schools without parental knowledge or consent of the parents/carers (although this will only occur in exceptional circumstances and if it is in the child's best interests to proceed in this manner). The table below includes critical detail on when and how DHHS Child Protection interviews are conducted at school without parental knowledge or consent and what role the principal or delegate should play if they are nominated as the support person.

DHHS Child Protection interviews at school

DHHS Child Protection will notify the school staff of any intention to interview a child at the school. This may occur regardless of whether the school staff member is the source of the report to DHHS Child Protection.

When DHHS Child Protection practitioners arrive at the school, the school principal or their nominee should ask to see their identification before allowing DHHS Child Protection to have access to the child. For further advice on Visitors in Schools, see here (government schools only).

The principal should nominate themselves or an appropriate school staff member to be present as a support person for the child during interviews. If the child is too young to understand the significance, a supportive adult should be provided even though the child may not have consented or requested this to occur.

Prior to the commencement of the interview, the DHHS Child Protection practitioner should always authorise the staff member of the school to receive information regarding DHHS Child Protection's investigation. This could be conducted verbally or in writing using the relevant DHHS Child Protection proforma.

As an independent person, school staff must refrain from providing their opinions or accounts of events during interviews.

Complying with subpoenas or court attendance

A subpoena/witness summons is a court order that compels you to produce documents, or attend court and give evidence, or to do both of these things.

You are usually issued with a subpoena/witness summons because one of the parties to the legal proceedings believes that you may have information/documentation that is relevant to the legal proceeding.

If a government school staff member receives a subpoena/witness summons in the context of their employment with the DET, they should contact the Legal Division on 03 9637 3146 for advice and assistance in meeting their legal obligations.

Responding to complaints or concerns

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

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

Government school complaints process

Principals or delegates of government schools should follow the Department's standard parent complaints process, including:

- considering meeting the complainant/s to clarify their concerns (a face-to-face meeting with the principal will often resolve the matter)
- documenting the concerns, clarifying the issues, explaining and gaining agreement to further action
- linking the complainant/s to the responsible Regional Office (e.g. the Regional Director) if the issues are not quickly resolved
- advising complainants of internal and external supports including the role of parent groups to provide independent advice and support
- advising complainants of their rights to:

- escalate their complaint, in writing, to: Deputy Secretary Regional Services Group
- write to the Victorian Government Ombudsman if they have exhausted the internal procedures and remain dissatisfied.

If the complaint is related to sexual abuse, government school principals or delegates should seek advice from the Student Incident and Recovery Unit on 03 9651 3179 and the Legal Division on 03 9637 3146.

For additional information on managing parent complaints please see here.

Catholic school complaints process

For support in managing complaints Catholic schools should contact:

- Archdiocese of Melbourne: Office of Professional Conduct, Ethics & Investigation on (03) 9267 0228 or refer to Policy 2.20: Complaints.
- Diocese of Sale: Executive Manager Industrial Relations/Human Resources on (03) 5622 6600
- Diocese of Ballarat: Education Consultants on (03) 5337 7135
- Diocese of Sandhurst: Assistant to the Director: Legal, Industrial & Human Resources on 03 5443 2377.

Independent school complaints process

- Independent schools should follow their own complaints process. If support is required, they can contact Independent Schools Victoria on 03 9825 7200.

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 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/Orange Door 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 believe that the child and/or family will act on the referral and be 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 or any other person.

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.

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/Orange Door
- 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 4: Providing Ongoing Support for advice on how to engage relevant allied health professionals and plan and document support strategies via a Student Support Planning process.

WHEN TO REPORT WELLBEING CONCERNS TO CHILD FIRST/ORANGE DOOR

Child FIRST (Family Information, Referral and Support Team)/Orange Door 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/Orange Door if:

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

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

- parenting problems
- 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 (or anyone else involved) 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 or any other person.

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 hold wellbeing concerns for a child including all concerns that:

- have a serious impact on a child's safety, stability or development (including abandonment, death or incapacity, extreme risk-taking behaviour, or harm to an unborn child)
- are persistent and entrenched and likely to have a serious impact on a child's safety, stability or development
- relate to a parent/s who cannot or will not protect the child from significant harm
- include a belief that the family is likely to be uncooperative in seeking assistance.

Common grounds for DHHS Child Protection intervention 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 or any other person.

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.

PRIVACY AND INFORMATION SHARING

CRITICAL INFORMATION

As a school staff member you are permitted to share certain information about a child who has been impacted (or is suspected to have been impacted) by abuse with:

- parents/carers, subject to certain exceptions
- other staff members in order to enable staff to best support and protect that child
- an officer from DHHS Child Protection, if the information requested may be of assistance to DHHS Child Protection in their investigation of protective concerns
- Victoria Police if the information may assist in the investigation of potential criminal offences, or may aid in the immediate protection and safety of the child.

This section provides detail on the specific information sharing requirements, including:

- Information sharing with school staff
- Information sharing with DHHS and Victoria Police
- Information sharing with family services
- Information sharing with the school community.

Please note that in incidents of suspected family violence, you should seek advice from DHHS and/or Victoria Police on the safe sharing of information with parents/carers (see Contacting parents/carers).

Government school principals can contact the Department's Legal Division on 03 9637 3146 for advice and assistance if they are unsure of when information can be shared.

Catholic school principals can contact:

- Archdiocese of Melbourne: Student Wellbeing Information Line on 03 9267 0228
- Diocese of Sale: Executive Manager Industrial Relations/Human Resources on (03) 5622 6600
- Diocese of Ballarat: Child Safety on 03 5337 7135
- Diocese of Sandhurst: Assistant to the Director: Legal, Industrial & Human Resources on 03 5443 2377.

Independent school principals can contact Independent Schools Victoria on 03 9825 7200.

INFORMATION SHARING WITH SCHOOL STAFF

Privacy laws allow school staff to share a child's personal and health information for the primary purpose it was collected. In the school context this purpose includes to:

- support the education of the student, plan for individual needs and address any barriers to learning
- support the social and emotional wellbeing and health of the student
- fulfil duty of care obligations to the student, other students, staff and visitors
- make reasonable adjustments if the student has a disability, including a medical condition or mental illness
- provide a safe, inclusive and secure workplace.

As a school staff member you are permitted to share certain information about a child with other staff members for these purposes without needing to obtain the consent of parents/guardians.

For government school staff, the Department communicates to parents/guardians how it uses personal and health information through the Schools Privacy Policy see here and here.

The type of information that may be appropriate to share with other school staff about a child who is impacted, or suspected to be impacted by child abuse, will depend on the staff member's role but may include:

- that the child is in a difficult situation

- that the child should be monitored and may need support
- the content of any *Student Support Plan*, including any signs or symptoms that the child may display when they are in need of support, and any strategies or support services that have been put in place to support the child while they are at school

INFORMATION SHARING WITH DHHS AND VICTORIA POLICE

As a school staff member, privacy laws permit you to disclose personal and health information about a child to DHHS Child Protection and Victoria police in a number of circumstances. This includes:

- where the disclosure is authorised or permitted by law
- necessary to lessen or prevent a serious risk to health safety or welfare of any person
- to report unlawful activity to relevant authorities or assist with law enforcement purposes.

Reporting concerns to DHHS and Victoria Police

Reporting suspected child abuse to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police does not constitute a breach of Victorian or Commonwealth privacy laws because these disclosures are specifically permitted under relevant legislation (i.e.: *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic) and *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic).

Making a report to, or otherwise disclosing information to DHHS Child Protection or reporting a suspected child sexual offence to Victoria Police in good faith does not constitute unprofessional conduct or a breach of professional ethics. It also cannot expose the person disclosing the information to any legal liability. This means that you cannot be successfully sued or suffer formal adverse consequences in your work.

If you've made a report or referral your identity will be protected, unless you consent to its disclosure or the disclosure is specifically authorised by a Court or tribunal.

Responding to requests for information from DHHS and Victoria Police

An authorised DHHS officer who has received a protective intervention report about a child may seek information relevant to the protection or development of the child from specified "information holders" including school staff.

Victoria Police may seek information from school staff as part of investigating an allegation that a child is the victim of a sexual offence. This may include requests for staff to provide documents, witness statements or attend interviews.

In these cases, school staff are permitted to share the requested information and documents but are not compelled to do so.

If you receive such a request it is recommended that you:

- obtain the request for information in writing
- ensure that the written request includes the following information:
    - the name of the officer, the organisation in which they work, and their contact details
    - description of the information and documents that are being sought
    - the reasons why the information and documents are being sought
    - what authority the person or their organisation believes that they have to access the requested information and documents.

If government school staff are unsure about how to respond to a request from DHHS or Victoria Police, they can contact the Department's Legal Division on (03) 9637 3147 for advice.

INFORMATION SHARING WITH FAMILY SERVICES

Once a family service (or other service agency) commences providing services to a child and their family, as a school staff member you should generally only share information with this agency with the consent of the child's parents (and the child if they are old enough to consent).

This is because service provision in these circumstances is by voluntary agreement between the family and the service provider.

There may still be some circumstances where school staff need to share information without consent. For instance where a person is at risk of serious harm, or where staff have further wellbeing concerns for the child and report these to the family service.

Family services are allowed to consult with DHHS Child Protection at any time, if necessary.

INFORMATION SHARING WITH THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Planning and care should be taken before providing any information about suspected child abuse to the school community. You and your principal should be aware that even confirming the existence of an allegation can lead to the identification of a victim, and may lead to the breach of the child and family's privacy.

If principals are uncertain about how to respond to a particular request for information and documentation, they can contact:

- Government schools: Legal Division on 03 9637 3146
- Catholic schools:
    - Archdiocese of Melbourne: Student Wellbeing Information Line on 03 9267 0228
    - Diocese of Sale: Executive Manager Industrial Relations/Human Resources on (03) 5622 6600
    - Diocese of Ballarat: Child Safety on 03 5337 7135
    - Diocese of Sandhurst: Assistant to the Director: Legal, Industrial & Human Resources on 03 5443 2377
- Independent schools can contact Independent Schools Victoria on 03 9825 7200.

See *Requests for Information About Students* for the Department's detailed policy on information sharing.

CONTACT DETAILS AND MORE INFORMATION

SUPPORT ROLES WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Within the Department of Education and Training, there are a number of supports available to Victorian government schools responding to incidents, disclosures or suspicions of child abuse, including:

Security Services Unit (SSU)

The Security Services Unit provides a 24-hour communications centre for schools and Departmental staff to report a range of incidents. On receiving notification of an incident involving child abuse the Security Services Unit immediately alerts the Student Incident and Recovery Unit (SIRU) and relevant staff within the Central and Regional Office.

Regional Offices

Principals of Victorian government schools are required to maintain ongoing contact with their Regional Office throughout any incidents, disclosures or suspicions of child abuse.

Each region has an emergency management contact/s. These officers can provide initial advice and support to Victorian government schools during and after incidents, and assists schools to minimise the effects of trauma and enhance recovery.

Student Incident and Recovery Unit (SIRU)

The Student Incident and Recovery Unit (SIRU) works with Victorian Government schools following incidents of a sexual nature to ensure appropriate advice and supports are in place that prioritises the health and wellbeing of the children involved. The SIRU is notified by the Security Services Unit as soon as an incident involving sexual abuse (or problem sexual behaviour) is reported.

SIRU will:

- provide timely and appropriate advice to Victorian Government schools
- support regions and Victorian Government schools to respond to critical incidents of a sexual nature
- advise Victorian Government schools to meet their legal obligations and duty of care responsibilities
- assist Principals and senior school staff from Victorian Government schools to manage incidents of a sexual nature in a manner that ensures adverse impact on the school community is minimised
- provide advice on appropriate response measures, such as counselling and management strategies to support those involved in allegations of sexual offending or problem sexual behaviour
- provide advice on the provision of a suitable level of support to school staff and members of the school community on whom the incident has impacted.

SIRU works closely with other key agencies, such as Victoria Police Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Teams and the DHHS, and with organisations such as the Centre against Sexual Assault (CASA) to support student wellbeing in Victorian Government schools.

Student Support Services

The role of the Student Support Services is to provide support to Victorian Government schools including:

- establishing a relationship with students and possibly their families
- providing a supportive, calm approach and acknowledging the issues raised
- clarifying the needs of the child
- evaluating the child ’s present strengths and resources
- evaluating possible ways of accommodating the child ’s -identified needs, such as referral for specialist counselling and school-based supports
- documenting information and actions
- identifying the process for follow up and review
- ascertaining which intervention programs are most appropriate in meeting an individual child’s needs

- working with the school staff on the appropriate strategies and supports needed for individual children.

Respectful Relationships

Schools can contact their Local Areas to seek advice from Respectful Relationships Liaison Officers on strengthening their capacity to support students and school community members impacted by family violence.

The role of the Respectful Relationships Liaison Officer is to:

- build schools' capacity to respond to family violence
- provide advice about evidence-based approaches and interventions
- liaise with community and specialist family violence services.

See the Respectful Relationships website for further details.

Employee Conduct Branch

The Employee Conduct Branch is responsible for the implementation of policy and the provision of advice on complaint resolution procedures, unsatisfactory performance, serious misconduct and Reportable Conduct (which would include allegations of child abuse), criminal records checks and police liaison, as it relates to Victorian Government school and DET employees, volunteers and contractors.

The branch also manages discipline matters involving members of the teaching service (including Principal Class Officers) and public servants. A key role of the branch is to support principals or designated officers in their management of processes, and provide advice to them concerning legislative and procedural frameworks.

The Employee Conduct Branch must be contacted on all issues of alleged serious misconduct and Reportable Conduct including allegations of child abuse and grooming which involve a staff member employed by the Department, contractor or volunteer. This includes teachers and principals.

Legal Division

The Department's Legal Division provides specific advice to government school principals on a broad range of legal issues, including in relation to incidents, disclosures and suspicions of child abuse, duty of care, privacy laws and personal injury claims made by parents/carers/students.

Communications Division

The Department's Communications Division manages all Departmental media liaison, and can support principals of Victorian government schools in responding to media enquiries relating to incidents, disclosures and suspicions of child abuse.

SUPPORT ROLES WITHIN CATHOLIC EDUCATION AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Catholic Education

Within Catholic education, there are a number of supports available to schools when responding to incidents, disclosures or suspicions of child abuse. Catholic schools should contact their Diocesan education office for support and advice.

- Archdiocese of Melbourne: Student Wellbeing Information Line on 03 9267 0228
- Diocese of Sale: Executive Manager Industrial Relations/Human Resources on (03) 5622 6600
- Diocese of Ballarat: Child Safety on 03 5337 7135
- Diocese of Sandhurst: Child Protection Officer on 03 5443 2377.

Independent Schools

Independent Schools Victoria can provide guidance and support to independent schools and can be contacted on 03 9825 7200

ROLES OF OTHER RELEVANT AUTHORITIES

DHHS Child Protection

Under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has a responsibility to provide child protection services for all children and young people under the age of 17 years, or where a protection order is in place, for children under the age of 18.

The main functions of DHHS Child Protection are to:

- receive reports from people who believe that a child is in need of protection or have significant concerns about the wellbeing of a child
- provide consultation and advice to people making reports
- investigate matters where it is believed that a child is at risk of significant harm
- refer children and families to services that assist in providing for the ongoing safety and wellbeing of children.

DHHS Child Protection will also intervene and bring cases before the Children's Court if a child's safety cannot be managed without intervention. DHHS Child Protection has a responsibility to provide adequate supervision, care and protection for children in accordance with orders granted by the Children's Court.

Child FIRST/Orange Door

Child and Family Information, Referral and Support Teams (Child FIRST)/Orange Door were introduced to give families an opportunity to obtain family services earlier at their own request or following a referral from others, including school staff.

Child FIRST/Orange Door is staffed by family services practitioners who are experienced in assessing the needs of vulnerable children and their families. Child FIRST/Orange Door teams work closely with community-based DHHS Child Protection workers.

The role of Child FIRST/Orange Door includes:

- providing a point of entry to a local network of family services
- receiving reports about vulnerable children where there are significant concerns about their wellbeing
- undertaking an initial identification and assessment of the risks to the child and the child's needs in consultation with DHHS Child Protection and other services
- identifying appropriate service responses for families.

The Orange Door has become the intake service for Child FIRST in a number of locations. Please see here for more information.

Victoria Police

Both DHHS and Victoria Police have statutory responsibilities under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* in relation to the protection of children. DHHS Child Protection is the lead agency responsible for the care and protection of children, while Victoria Police is responsible for criminal investigations into alleged child abuse.

Members of Victoria Police are protective interveners and mandatory reporters under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*. The predominant role of police in child abuse incidents is to detect and investigate alleged child physical and sexual abuse and to initiate legal proceedings where appropriate, against the alleged offender/s.

The key responsibilities of Victoria Police in relation to child abuse are to:

- ensure all police members are aware of relevant legislation and their responsibilities
- ensure all police accept and carry out their responsibilities under the *Children, Youth and Families Act*
- conduct all investigations on the basis that the safety and welfare of the child are paramount
- plan investigations in collaboration with other, relevant agencies
- work with other agencies in accordance with agreed work practices
- provide information to other, relevant agencies
- provide training for staff.

Victoria Police Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Teams (SOCIT) have been established to ensure that appropriately trained and qualified police officers are available to respond to and investigate allegations of child abuse and sexual offences.

The Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP)

Under the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005,* the CCYP is given powers to provide independent scrutiny of the systems and processes put in place by an organisation to prevent and respond to allegations of child abuse.

The main functions of the CCYP are to:

- provide independent scrutiny and oversight of services for children and young people, particularly those in the out-of-home-care, child protection and youth justice systems;
- advocate for best practice policy, program and service responses to meet the needs of children and young people;
- support and regulate organisations that work with children and young people to prevent abuse and make sure these organisations have child safe practices, including by oversighting the Child Safe Standards and reportable conduct scheme;
- bring the views and experiences of children and young people to the attention of government and the community; and
- promote the rights, safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

COUNSELLING/SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

The Lookout

The Lookout is a Victorian Government initiative in partnership with the Domestic Violence Resources Centre Victoria, providing information, evidence-based resources and services to help professionals respond to family violence (including professionals in mainstream services, like schools).

The Lookout includes a service directory, with a lookup function, where you can enter a postcode and identify locally available family violence support services.

www.thelookout.org.au

Safe Steps

Safe steps offers at no cost to women, their children (family and friends) living with family violence, access to professional support through a comprehensive range of services to enable them to become – and stay – free from violence.

http://www.safesteps.org.au/

1800 015 188 (24/7 advice line)

1800 RESPECT

1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732), is a 24 hour, seven day a week National Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence hotline. Victims of family violence and/or sexual assault are encouraged to talk or chat online to a counsellor from the service.

www.1800respect.org.au

The Centre Against Sexual Assault

There are 15 Centres Against Sexual Assault, which work to ensure that women, children and men who are victim/survivors of sexual offending have access to comprehensive and timely support and intervention to address their needs.

http://www.casa.org.au/

1800 806 292

Gatehouse Centre, Royal Children's Hospital

Provides support and assistance to children and young people affected by sexual offending or problem sexual behaviours.

https://www.rch.org.au/gatehouse/

Children's Protection Society

Provide advice and support to children and families to help them break out of the cycle of abuse, neglect, poverty and disadvantage through a creative portfolio of programs, resources and services.

http://www.cps.org.au/

03 9450 0900

Australian Childhood Foundation

Provide recognised programs that counsel and support children to recovery; help professionals who work with children to better support at risk children; raise awareness of the causes and consequences of abuse.

http://www.childhood.org.au/home/

1800 176 453

Djirra

Djirra is an Aboriginal community controlled organisation, providing support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence and sexual assault. They work directly with families affected by violence.

https://djirra.org.au/

1800 105 303

Child Wise

Child Wise is Australia's leading international child protection charity committed to the prevention and reduction of sexual abuse and exploitation of children around the world.

http://www.childwise.org.au/

03 9695 8900

Headspace

Headspace is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation providing early intervention mental health services to 12-25 year olds, along with assistance in promoting young peoples' wellbeing. This covers four core areas: mental health, physical health, work and study support and alcohol and other drug services.

Information and services for young people, their families and friends as well as health professionals can be accessed through this website, headspace centres, online counselling service eheadspace, and post-vention suicide support program headspace School Support.

http://headspace.org.au/

CONTACT INFORMATION

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 9651 3622
- Legal Division - 03 9637 3146
- Employee Assistance Program - 1300 361 008
- Employee Health - 03 9637 2395
- Privacy Unit - 03 9637 3601
- International Division - 03 9651 3976
- Communications Division - 03 9637 2871

Catholic Education

- Archdiocese of Melbourne – 03 9267 0228:
    - Office of Professional Conduct, Ethics & Investigation
    - Legal Services
    - Student Wellbeing Information Line
    - Communications & Marketing Unit (Media Advisor)
- Diocese of Sale - 03 5622 6600
- Diocese of Ballarat - 03 5337 7135
- Diocese of Sandhurst - 03 5443 2377

Independent Schools

- Independent Schools Victoria - 03 9825 7200

Regional

North Eastern Victoria

- General enquiries - 1300 333 231
- Benalla office - 03 8392 9500
- Glen Waverley office - 03 8392 9300

North Western Victoria

- Bendigo office - 03 5440 3111
- Coburg office - 03 9488 9488

South Eastern Victoria

- Dandenong office - 03 8765 5600
- Moe office - 03 5127 0400

South Western Victoria

- General enquiries - 1300 333 232

- Ballarat office - 03 5337 8444
- Footscray office - 03 8397 0300
- Geelong office - 03 5225 1000
- Horsham office - 03 5310 5300
- Warrnambool office - 1300 333 232

Department of Health and Human Services Child Protection

Northern and western suburban Local Government Areas

Banyule, Brimbank, Darebin, Hobsons Bay, Hume, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Melton, Moonee Valley, Moreland, Nillumbik, Whittlesea, Wyndham, Yarra.

Phone number: 1300 664 977

Eastern suburban Local Government Areas

Boroondara, Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Monash, Whitehorse, Yarra Ranges.

Phone number: 1300 360 391

Southern suburban Local Government Areas

Bayside, Cardinia, Casey, Frankston, Glen Eira, Greater Dandenong, Kingston, Mornington Peninsula, Port Phillip, Stonnington.

Phone number: 1300 655 795

West Rural and Regional Local Government Areas

Ararat, Ballarat, Golden Plains, Hepburn, Hindmarsh, Horsham, Moorabool, Northern Grampians, Pyrenees, West Wimmera, Yarriambiack, Colac-Otway, Corangamite, Glenelg, Greater Geelong, Moyne, Queenscliff, Southern Grampians, Surf Coast, Warrnambool.

Phone number: 1800 075 599

North-western rural and regional Local Government Areas

Buloke, Campaspe, Central Goldfields, Gannawarra, Greater Bendigo, Loddon, Macedon Ranges, Mildura, Mount Alexander, Swan Hill.

Phone number: 1800 675 598

North-eastern rural and regional Local Government Areas

Alpine, Benalla, Greater Shepparton, Indigo, Mansfield, Mitchell, Moira, Murrindindi, Strathbogie, Towong, Wangaratta, Wodonga.

Phone number: 1800 650 227

Eastern and south-eastern rural and regional Local Government Areas

Bass Coast, Baw Baw, East Gippsland, Latrobe, South Gippsland, Wellington.

Phone number: 1800 020 202

Child First/Orange Door

- Alpine - 1800 705 211
- Ararat - 1300 783 341
- Ballarat - 1300 783 341
- Banyule - 03 9450 0955
- Bass Coast - 03 5662 5150
- Baw Baw - 1800 339 100
- Bayside - 1300 367 441
- Benalla - 1800 705 211
- Boroondara - 1300 762 125
- Brimbank - 1300 138 180
- Buloke - 1300 665 218
- Campaspe - 1800 260 338
- Cardinia - 03 9705 3939
- Cardinia - Aboriginal children and families - 03 9794 5973
- Casey - 03 9705 3939
- Casey - Aboriginal children and families - 03 9794 5973
- Central Goldfields - 1800 260 338
- Colac-Otway - 03 5232 5500
- Corangamite - 03 5232 5500
- Darebin - 03 9450 0955
- East Gippsland - 03 5152 0052
- Frankston - 1300 721 383
- Gannawarra - 1300 665 218
- Glen Eira - 1300 367 441
- Glenelg - 1300 543 779
- Golden Plains - 1300 783 341
- Greater Bendigo - 1800 260 338
- Greater Dandenong - 03 9705 3939
- Greater Dandenong - Aboriginal children and families - 03 9794 5973
- Greater Geelong - 1300 551 948
- Greater Shepparton - 1300 854 944
- Hepburn - 1300 783 341
- Hindmarsh - 1800 195 114
- Hobson's Bay - 1300 775 160
- Horsham - 1800 195 114
- Hume - 1300 786 433
- Indigo - 1800 705 211
- Kingston - 1300 367 441
- Knox - 1300 369 146
- La Trobe - 1800 339 100
- Loddon - 1800 260 338
- Macedon Ranges - 1800 260 338
- Manningham - 1300 762 125
- Mansfield - 1800 705 211
- Maribyrnong - 1300 775 160
- Maroondah - 1300 369 146

- Melbourne - 1300 775 160
- Melton - 1300 138 180
- Mildura - 1300 625 533
- Mitchell - 1800 663 107
- Moira - 1300 854 944
- Monash - 1300 762 125
- Moonee Valley - 1300 775 160
- Macedon Ranges - 1300 783 341
- Moorabool - 1300 786 433
- Moreland - 1300 721 383
- Mornington Peninsula - 1800 260 338
- Mount Alexander - 1300 543 779
- Moyne - 1800 663 107
- Nillumbik - 03 9450 0955
- Northern Grampians - 1800 195 114
- Port Phillip - 1300 367 441
- Pyrenees - 1300 783 341
- Queenscliff - 1300 551 948
- South Gippsland - 03 5662 5150
- Southern Grampians - 1300 543 779
- Stonnington - 1300 367 441
- Strathbogie - 1300 854 944
- Surf Coast - 1300 551 948
- Swan Hill - 1300 665 218
- Towong - 1800 705 211
- Wangaratta - 1800 705 211
- Warrnambool - 1300 543 779
- Wellington - 03 5144 7777
- West Wimmera - 1800 195 114
- Whitehorse - 1300 762 125
- Whittlesea - 03 9450 0955
- Wodonga - 1800 705 211
- Wyndham - 1300 775 160
- Yarra - 03 9450 0955
- Yarra Ranges - 1300 369 146
- Yarriambiak - 1800 195 114

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