

Child Safety Support Resource 1



Stella Maris School internal school process for mandatory reporting

Introduction

Protection for children and young people is based upon the belief that each person is made in the image and likeness of God and that the inherent dignity of all should be recognised and fostered.

Catholic schools are entrusted with the holistic education of the child, in partnership with parents, guardians and caregivers, who are the primary educators of their children. Catholic school staff therefore have a duty of care to students to take reasonable care to avoid acts or omissions that they can reasonably foresee would be likely to result in harm or injury to the student, and to work for the positive wellbeing of the child.

Under the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020*, protecting children is everyone's responsibility - parents, communities, governments and businesses all have a role to play.

In Victoria, a joint protocol, *Protect: Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools*, involving the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET), the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) and Independent Schools Victoria (ISV) exists to protect the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

DET has also produced *Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse* and *Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: A Template for all Victorian Schools*, both of which are referred to in the joint protocol.

All teachers, other staff members, volunteers, contractors, other service providers, parish priests, canonical and religious order administrators of Catholic schools within Victoria must understand and abide by the professional, moral and legal obligations to implement child protection and child safety policies, protocols and practices.

FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

YOU MUST TAKE ACTION

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

- You **must** act, by following the Four Critical Actions, as soon as you witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a reasonable belief* that a child has, or is at risk of being abused.
- You **must** act if you form a suspicion/ reasonable belief, even if you are unsure and have not directly observed child abuse (e.g. if the victim or another person tells you about the abuse).
- It is strongly recommended that you use the **Responding to Suspected Child Abuse template** to keep clear and comprehensive notes, even if you make a decision not to report.

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

1 RESPONDING TO AN EMERGENCY

If there is no risk of immediate harm go to **Action 2**.

If a child is at immediate risk of harm you **must** ensure their safety by:

- separating alleged victims and others involved
- administering first aid
- calling **000 for urgent medical and/ or police assistance** to respond to immediate health or safety concerns
- identifying a contact person at the school for future liaison with Police.

Where necessary you may also need to maintain the integrity of the potential crime scene and preserve evidence.

2 REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES / REFERRING TO SERVICES

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

Q: Where does the source of suspected abuse come from?

WITHIN THE SCHOOL

VICTORIA POLICE

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

You **must** also report internally to:

- GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**
 - School principal and/or leadership team
 - Employee Conduct Branch
 - DET Incident Support and Operations Centre.
- CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**
 - School principal and/or leadership team
 - Diocesan education office.
- INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**
 - School principal and/or school chairperson
 - Commission for Children and Young People on **1300 782 978**.

All allegations of 'reportable conduct' **must** be reported as soon as possible to:

- GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**
 - Employee Conduct Branch
- CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**
 - Diocesan education office
- INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**
 - Commission for Children and Young People on **1300 782 978**.

WITHIN THE FAMILY OR COMMUNITY

DHHS CHILD PROTECTION

You **must** report to DHHS Child Protection if a child is considered to be:

- in need of protection from child abuse
- at risk of being harmed (or has been harmed) and the harm has had, or is likely to have, a serious impact on the child's safety, stability or development.

VICTORIA POLICE

You **must** also report all instances of suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police.

You **must** also report internally to:

- GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**
 - School principal and/or leadership team
 - DET Incident Support and Operations Centre.
- CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**
 - School principal and/or leadership team
 - Diocesan education office.
- INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**
 - School principal and/or chairperson.

3 CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

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

- not to contact** the parents/carer (e.g. in circumstances where the parents are alleged to have engaged in the abuse or the child is a mature minor and does not wish for their parent/carer to be contacted)
- to contact** the parents/carers and provide agreed information that **must** be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion
- how to communicate** with all relevant parties with consideration for their safety.

4 PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

Your school **must** provide support for children impacted by abuse. This should include the development of a **Student Support Plan** in consultation with wellbeing professionals. This is an essential part of your duty of care requirements. Strategies may include development of a safety plan, direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals and support.

You **must** follow the **Four Critical Actions** every time you become aware of a further instance or risk of abuse. This includes reporting new information to authorities.

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

CONTACT

<p>DHHS CHILD PROTECTION</p> <p>AREA</p> <p>North Division 1300 664 977</p> <p>South Division 1300 655 795</p> <p>East Division 1300 360 391</p> <p>West Division (Rural) 1800 075 599</p> <p>West Division (Metrol) 1300 664 977</p> <p>AFTER HOURS</p> <p>After hours, weekends, public holidays 13 17 78</p> <p>CHILD FIRST</p> <p>https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/referral-and-support-teams</p> <p>ORANGE DOOR</p> <p>https://www.vic.gov.au/familyviolence/the-orange-door.html</p>	<p>VICTORIA POLICE</p> <p>000 or your local police station</p> <p>DET INCIDENT SUPPORT AND OPERATIONS CENTRE</p> <p>1800 126 126</p> <p>INCIDENT MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT UNIT</p> <p>1800 126 126</p> <p>EMPLOYEE CONDUCT BRANCH</p> <p>(03) 9637 2595</p> <p>DIOCESAN OFFICE</p> <p>Melbourne (03) 9267 0228</p> <p>Ballarat (03) 5337 7125</p> <p>Sale (03) 5622 6600</p> <p>Sandhurst (03) 5443 2377</p>	<p>INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS VICTORIA</p> <p>(03) 9825 7200</p> <p>THE LOOKOUT</p> <p>The LOOKOUT has a service directory, information, and evidence based guidance to help you report to family violence: http://www.lookout.org.au</p> <p>Family violence victims/survivors can be referred to 1800 Respect for counselling, information and a referral service: 1800 737 732.</p>
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Mandatory Reporting

Mandatory reporting is a legal requirement under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic.) to protect children from harm relating to physical injury and sexual abuse. A child, for the purpose of the relevant parts of this Act, is any person 17 years of age or younger. The principal, teachers, medical practitioners and nurses at a school are mandatory reporters under this Act.

If, in the course of carrying out their duties, a mandatory reporter forms a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection from physical harm or sexual abuse, and that the child's parents are unwilling or unable to protect the child, they must report that belief to DHHS Child Protection and/or Victoria Police, including the information prescribed in the *Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: A Template for all Victorian Schools*, as soon as possible after forming the belief.

A subsequent report must be made on each occasion on which the mandatory reporter becomes aware of further reasonable grounds for the belief and even if the reporter knows that another report has been made concerning the same child and suspected abuse.

The threshold for reporting child protection incidents, disclosures, concerns or suspicions has been set deliberately low by the joint protocol *Protect: Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools*. This protocol focuses on *Four Critical Actions* (refer to Appendix 1) that all school staff must take if they form a suspicion or reasonable belief that child abuse has occurred, or that a child is at risk of suffering abuse.

All staff at Stella Maris School complete annually the Mandatory Reporting and other obligations module and a register of completion is kept to ensure compliance.

Record keeping is the responsibility of the Principal.

Resources

https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/protect/PROTECT_Responding_TemplateSchools.pdf