

# REPORTING CHILD ABUSE POLICY AND TEMPLATE

**Definition:** For the purposes of this policy, and in reference to the child safe standards, child abuse constitutes any act committed against a child involving: physical violence, sexual offences, serious emotional or psychological abuse and serious neglect – see Appendix A for examples. All reporting is confidential and must be reported, on the attached template, to the 'Child Safety Officer' or their nominee if there is a conflict of interest.

**Rationale:** The child safe standards require organisations that provide services for children to have processes for responding to, and reporting, suspected child abuse within the organisation.

**Aims:** To ensure that all members of the school community know how to identify, and report, instances of child abuse committed within the school organisation.

## **Implementation:**

To create and maintain a child safe organisation, an applicable entity to which the standards apply must have:

**Standard 1: Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements.**

**Standard 2: A child safe policy or statement of commitment to child safety.**

**Standard 3: A code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children.**

**Standard 4: Screening, supervision, training and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel.**

**Standard 5: Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse.**

**Standard 6: Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse.**

**Standard 7: Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children.**

- At the start of each school year the principal will ask for volunteers from the school Leadership Team to undertake duties as the Child Safety Officer.
- The Child Safety Officer is to ensure that all staff are given regular professional development around the child safe standards throughout the year.
- Staff document folders are to contain the Child Safe Policy, Child Safe Code of Conduct and Reporting Child Abuse policy.
- When an incident of child abuse is alleged the witness will be given support to fill out the Reporting of Child Abuse form that will be handed to the Child Safety Officer, or their nominee where there is a conflict of interest:

## If a child discloses an incident of abuse to you

- Try and separate them from the other children discreetly and listen to them carefully.
- Let the child use their own words to explain what has occurred.
- Reassure the child that you take what they are saying seriously, and it is not their fault and that they are doing the right thing.
- Explain to them that this information may need to be shared others, such as with their parent/carer, specific people in your organisation, or the police.
- Do not make promises to the child such as promising not to tell anyone about the incident, except that you will do your best to keep them safe.

- Do not leave the child in a distressed state. If they seem at ease in your company, stay with them.
- Provide them with an incident report form to complete, or complete it together, if you think the child is able to do this.
- As soon as possible after the disclosure, record the information using the child's words and report the disclosure to your manager or your organisation's child safety officer, police or child protection.
- Ensure the disclosure is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely.

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

- Explain that your organisation has processes to ensure all abuse allegations are taken very seriously.
- Ask about the wellbeing of the child.
- Allow the parent/carer to talk through the incident in their own words.
- Advise the parent/carer that you will take notes during the discussion to capture all details.
- Explain to them the information may need to be repeated to authorities or others, such as the organisation's management or Child Safety Officer, the police or child protection.
- Do not make promises at this early stage, except that you will do your best to keep the child safe.
- Provide them with an incident report form to complete, or complete it together.
- Ask them what action they would like to take and advise them of what the immediate next steps will be.
- Ensure the report is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely.
  - The Child Safety Officer, or their nominee, will notify the child's family, and investigate the alleged incident as quickly as possible.
  - All parties to the alleged incident will be ensured confidentiality throughout the process.
  - Where the alleged abuse is confirmed, and committed by a staff member, the staff member involved will be disciplined according to the department's misconduct guidelines.
  - Where the alleged abuse is confirmed, and committed by a volunteer or service provider, the Department of Education's legal service will be contacted to determine the most appropriate course of action.
  - Copies of all allegations, notes and outcome statements will be kept in a locked confidential file marked, 'To Be Opened by the Principal Only.'

<b>Evaluation: Following each incident of report</b>	
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# REPORTING CHILD ABUSE FORM

The child safe standards require organisations that provide services for children to have processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse. This template must be provided to a child or their family if they disclose an allegation of abuse or safety concern in your organisation. Staff can also use this resource to record disclosures.

All incident reports must be stored securely.

## Incident details

Date of incident:	
Time of incident:	
Location of incident:	
Name(s) of child/children involved:	
Name(s) of staff/volunteer involved:	

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

## Does the child identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?

*(Mark with an 'X' as applicable)*

No

Yes, Aboriginal

Yes, Torres Strait Islander

## Please categorise the incident

Physical violence

Sexual offence

Serious emotional or psychological abuse

Serious neglect

## Please describe the incident

When did it take place?	
Who was involved?	

<b>What did you see?</b>	
<b>Other information</b>	

### Office use:

<b>Date incident report received:</b>	
<b>Staff member managing incident:</b>	
<b>Follow-up date:</b>	
<b>Incident ref. number:</b>	

### Has the incident been reported?

<b>Child protection</b>	
<b>Police</b>	
<b>Another third party (please specify):</b>	

### Incident reporter wishes to remain anonymous?

*(Mark with an 'X' as applicable)*

Yes  No

**Registered schools** can contact the Department of Education and Training:  
[child.safe.schools@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:child.safe.schools@edumail.vic.gov.au)

## APPENDIX A      What is child abuse?

The child safe standards aim to protect children from abuse in organisations. Under the Act, child abuse includes five categories of abuse as outlined below.<sup>1</sup>

While the standards apply specifically to child abuse, organisations should look to promote children's health and wellbeing in a broader sense.

### Physical violence

Physical violence occurs when a child suffers or is likely to suffer significant harm from a non-accidental injury or injuries inflicted by another person. Physical violence can be inflicted in many ways, including beating, shaking, burning or use of weapons (such as, belts and paddles).

Possible physical indicators:

- Unexplained bruises
- Burns and/or fractured bones

Possible behavioural indicators:

- Showing wariness or distrust of adults
- Wearing long sleeved clothes on hot days (to hide bruising or other injury)
- Fear of specific people
- Unexplained absences
- Academic problems

### Sexual offences

Sexual offences occur when a person involves the child in sexual activity, or deliberately puts the child in the presence of sexual behaviours that are exploitative or inappropriate to his/her age and development. Child sexual abuse can involve a range of sexual activity including fondling, masturbation, penetration, voyeurism and exhibitionism. It can also include exposure to or exploitation through pornography or prostitution, as well as grooming behaviour.<sup>2</sup>

Possible physical indicators:

- Presence of sexually transmitted diseases
- Pregnancy
- Vaginal or anal bleeding or discharge

Possible behavioural indicators:

- Displaying sexual behaviour or knowledge that is unusual for the child's age
- Difficulty sleeping
- Being withdrawn
- Complaining of headaches or stomach pains
- Fear of specific people
- Showing wariness or distrust of adults
- Displaying aggressive behaviour

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<sup>1</sup> These definitions are based on the Victorian *Child Protection Practice Manual*: <[www.dhs.vic.gov.au/cpmanual/practice-context/child-protection-program-overview/1008-abuse-and-harm-legal-and-practice-definitions](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/cpmanual/practice-context/child-protection-program-overview/1008-abuse-and-harm-legal-and-practice-definitions)>

<sup>2</sup> A new grooming offence commenced in Victoria on 9 April 2014. Further information is available on the [Department of Justice website](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/grooming+offence) <[www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/grooming+offence](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/grooming+offence)>

## Serious emotional or psychological abuse

Serious emotional or psychological abuse occurs when harm is inflicted on a child through repeated rejection, isolation, or by threats or violence. It can include derogatory name-calling and put-downs, or persistent and deliberate coldness from a person, to the extent where the behaviour of the child is disturbed or their emotional development is at serious risk of being impaired. Serious emotional or psychological abuse could also result from conduct that exploits a child without necessarily being criminal, such as encouraging a child to engage in inappropriate or risky behaviours.

Possible physical indicators:

- Delays in emotional, mental, or even physical development
- Physical signs of self-harming

Possible behavioural indicators:

- Exhibiting low self-esteem
- Exhibiting high anxiety
- Displaying aggressive or demanding behaviour
- Being withdrawn, passive and/or tearful
- Self-harming

## Serious neglect

Serious neglect is 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.

Possible physical indicators:

- Frequent hunger
- Malnutrition
- Poor hygiene
- Inappropriate clothing

Possible behavioural indicators:

- Stealing food
- Staying at school outside of school hours
- Aggressive behaviour
- Misusing alcohol or drugs
- Academic issues

**Call the police on 000 if you have immediate concerns for a child's safety.**

**Organisations need to consider the cultural safety of Aboriginal children and be sensitive to the special needs of children with disability; trans gender children, and children from culturally diverse backgrounds across the implementation of all the standards.**