



# CHILD SAFETY RESPONDING AND REPORTING OBLIGATIONS POLICY

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all staff and members of our school community understand the various legal and other reporting obligations related to child safety that apply to Sandringham East Primary School. The specific procedures that are applicable at our school are contained at Appendix A.

## SCOPE

This policy applies to all school staff, volunteers and school community members. It also applies to all staff and students engaged in any school and school council-run events and activities.

## POLICY

All children and young people have the right to protection in their best interests.

Sandringham East Primary School understands the important role our school plays in protecting children from abuse including:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse (including sexual exploitation)
- Family violence
- Emotional abuse
- Neglect (including medical neglect)
- Grooming

The staff at Sandringham East Primary School are required by law to comply with various child safety reporting obligations. For detailed information about each obligation, please refer to [Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#).

At Sandringham East Primary School we also recognise the diversity of the children and young people at our school and take account of their individual needs and backgrounds when considering child safety.

### Mandatory Reporting

The following individuals are mandatory reporters under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic):

- Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registered teachers, including principals
- school staff who have been granted permission to teach by the VIT
- registered medical practitioners and nurses
- registered psychologists
- all members of the police force
- people in religious ministry
- staff who provide direct support to students for mental, emotional or psychological wellbeing, including (but not limited to) school health and wellbeing staff, primary welfare coordinators, student wellbeing coordinators, mental health practitioners, chaplains, and Student Support Services staff

All mandatory reporters must make a report to the Department of Health and Human Services (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.

A mandatory reporter who fails to comply with this legal obligation may be committing a criminal offence. It is important for all staff at Sandringham East Primary School to be aware that they are legally obliged to make a mandatory report on each occasion that they form a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection and they must make a mandatory report even if the principal does not share their belief that a report is necessary.

At our school, all mandated school staff must undertake the *Mandatory Reporting and Other Obligations eLearning Module* annually. We also encourage all other staff, such as Education Support staff, to undertake this module, even where they are not mandatory reporters.

For more information about Mandatory Reporting see the Department's *Policy and Advisory Library*: [Protecting Children – Reporting and Other Legal Obligations](#).

### **Child in need of protection**

Any person can make a report to DHHS Child Protection (131 278 – 24 hour service) if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection.

**The policy of the Department of Education and Training (DET) requires all staff who form a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection to report their concerns to DHHS or Victoria Police, and discuss their concerns with the school leadership team.**

For more information about making a report to DHHS Child Protection, see the Department's *Policy and Advisory Library*: [Protecting Children – Reporting and Other Legal Obligations](#) and [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse](#).

At Sandringham East Primary School we also encourage all staff to make a referral to Child FIRST when they have significant concern for a child's wellbeing. For more information about making a referral to Child FIRST see the *Policy and Advisory Library*: [Protecting Children – Reporting and Other Legal Obligations](#) .

### **Making a report or referral – the *Four Critical Actions* summary**

School staff must follow the *Four Critical Actions* when responding to an incident, disclosure or suspicion of child abuse. Refer to the steps for responding to incidents, disclosures and suspicions of child abuse at [https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/protect/FourCriticalActions\\_ChildAbuse.pdf](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/protect/FourCriticalActions_ChildAbuse.pdf). Refer also below to 'Appendix A: Child Safety responding and reporting procedures at Sandringham East Primary School'.

#### **Critical Action 1: Responding to an emergency**

If there is not risk of immediate harm go to Action 2. If a child is at immediate risk of harm school staff 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.

### Critical Action 2: Reporting to authorities/referring to services

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed school staff must report all incidents, suspicions and disclosures of child abuse as soon as practicable. Failure to report physical and sexual child abuse may amount to a criminal offence. For more information and details of the procedures refer to the *Four Critical Actions for Schools*.

### Critical Action 3: contacting parents/carers

The principal must consult with Child Protection or Victoria Police (call your local police station) to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers. For more information and details of the procedures refer to the *Four Critical Actions for Schools*.

### Critical Action 4: providing ongoing support

The school must provide support for children impacted by abuse. This can include the development of a student support plan in consultation with wellbeing professionals. This is an essential part of the school's duty of care requirements. Strategies may include development of a safety plan, direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals and support services. School staff must follow the *Four Critical Actions* every time they become aware of a further instance or risk of abuse. This includes reporting new information to authorities.

## **Reportable Conduct**

Our school must notify the Department's Employee Conduct Branch (9637 2594) if we become aware of an allegation of 'reportable conduct'.

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

- a sexual offence (even prior to criminal proceedings commencing), sexual misconduct or physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of a child;
- behaviour causing significant emotional or physical harm to a child;
- significant neglect of a child; or
- misconduct involving any of the above.

The Department, through the Employee Conduct Branch, has a legal obligation to inform the Commission for Children and Young People when an allegation of reportable conduct is made.

Our principal must notify the Department's Employee Conduct Branch of any reportable conduct allegations involving current or former teachers, contractors, volunteers (including parents), allied health staff and school council employees.

If school staff become aware of reportable conduct by any person in the above positions, they should notify the school principal immediately. If the allegation relates to the principal, they should notify the Regional Director.

For more information about Reportable Conduct see the Department's *Policy and Advisory Library: [Reportable Conduct](#)*.

## **Failure to disclose offence**

Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults (ie persons aged 18 years and over), not just professionals who work with children, have a legal obligation to report to Victoria Police, as soon as practicable, where they form a 'reasonable belief' that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under the age of 16 by another person aged 18 years or over.

Failure to disclose information to Victoria Police (by calling 000 or local police station) as soon as practicable may amount to a criminal offence unless a person has a 'reasonable excuse' or exemption from doing so.

"Reasonable belief" is not the same as having proof. A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds.

For example, a 'reasonable belief' might be formed when:

- a child states that they have been sexually abused
- a child states that they know someone who has been sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves)
- someone who knows a child states that the child has been sexually abused
- professional observations of the child's behaviour or development leads a mandated professional to form a belief that the child has been sexually abused
- signs of sexual abuse leads to a belief that the child has been sexually abused.

"Reasonable excuse" is defined by law and includes:

- fear for the safety of any person including yourself or the potential victim (but not including the alleged perpetrator or an organisation)
- where the information has already been disclosed, for example, through a mandatory report to DHHS Child Protection.

### **Failure to protect offence**

This reporting obligation applies to school staff in a position of authority. This can include principals, assistant principals and campus principals. Any staff member in a position of authority who becomes aware that an adult associated with their school (such as an employee, contractor, volunteer or visitor) poses a risk of sexual abuse to a child under the age of 16 under their care, authority or supervision, must take all reasonable steps to remove or reduce that risk.

This may include removing the adult (ie persons aged 18 years and over) from working with children pending an investigation and reporting your concerns to Victoria Police.

If a school staff member in a position of authority fails to take reasonable steps in these circumstances, this may amount to a criminal offence.

### **Grooming**

Grooming is a criminal offence under the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic). This offence targets predatory conduct undertaken by an adult to prepare a child, under the age of 16, to engage in sexual activity at a later time. Grooming can include communicating and/or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent/carer.

### **Further information**

For more information about these offences and reporting obligations see: [Protecting Children – Reporting and Other Legal Obligations](#).

## **RELATED POLICIES AND FURTHER INFORMATION**

The following are available on the school website or by request to the school's leadership team:

- Sandringham East Primary School's *Child Safe Policy inc. Code of Conduct*
- Sandringham East Primary School's *Commitment to Child Safety*

Refer below **Appendix A:** Child Safety responding and reporting procedures at Sandringham East Primary School.

*The Four Critical Actions for Schools -*

[https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/protect/FourCriticalActions\\_ChildAbuse.pdf](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/protect/FourCriticalActions_ChildAbuse.pdf)

## REVIEW CYCLE

This policy was last updated on **June 2021** and is to be reviewed every **4 years**, or sooner as required e.g. to align with changes in laws and/or Department policy or procedures.



## **MANAGING DISCLOSURES MADE BY STUDENTS**

*Our aim is for students to:*

- feel safe to speak to any staff member to raise any concerns about their safety or any other concerns that they have
- know who to approach at Sandringham East Primary School as an appropriate first port of call, such as their class teacher or another staff member with whom they have rapport
- be fully supported in the event of a disclosure.

*When managing a disclosure you 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 you 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).

## GENERAL PROCEDURES

Our school will follow the [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse](#) (Four Critical Actions) when responding to incidents, disclosures and suspicions of child abuse.

All staff at our school who believe that a child is in need of protection, even if it doesn't meet the threshold required for mandatory reporting or the staff member is not a mandatory reporter, should in the first instance, speak to the Principal Lauren Walton or an Assistant Principal, Russell Watson or Ryan McCulloch. All staff must ensure that the Principal team is aware of any incidents, suspicions or disclosures of child abuse as soon as possible after they occur. Mandatory reports do NOT need permission from school leadership in order to make a report, and must act if required by law to do so.

### 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.

At our school the school's Principal team will be responsible for monitoring overall school compliance with this procedure. To ensure communication and to be able to support staff before, during and after making a report, staff should speak to the Principal or Assistant Principal. Staff may also engage the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) confidentially.

**Nothing in this procedure prevents a staff member or any other person from reporting to the relevant authorities if they form a reasonable belief that a child is at risk of abuse.**

## REPORTING SUSPICIONS, DISCLOSURES OR INCIDENTS OF CHILD ABUSE

### *Responsibilities of all school staff*

If a school staff member reasonably suspects or witnesses an incident of child abuse or receives a disclosure of child abuse, they must:

- If a child is at immediate risk of harm, separate alleged victims and others involved, administer first aid and call 000.
- Speak to a member of the Principal team as soon as possible, who will ensure the [Four Critical Actions](#) are followed.
- Make detailed notes of the incident or disclosure and ensure that those notes are kept and stored securely in.

If the staff member is a mandatory reporter and reasonably believes that a student has suffered physical and/or sexual abuse from which the child's parents have not protected the child, they must make a report to DHHS Child Protection.

In circumstances where a member of the leadership team disagrees that a report needs to be made, but the staff member has formed a 'reasonable belief' that the child is in need of protection and/or has been the victim of sexual abuse, the staff member **MUST** still contact DHHS Child Protection and/or Victoria Police to make the report.

### *Responsibilities of the Principal and Assistant Principal/s*

The Principal and Assistant Principal/s are responsible for promptly managing the school's response to an incident, suspicion or disclosure of child abuse, and ensuring that the incident, suspicion or disclosure is taken seriously. The Principal team is also responsible for responding appropriately to a child who makes or is affected by an allegation of child abuse.

If a member of the Principal team receives a report from a school staff member or member of the school community of a suspicion, disclosure or incident of child abuse, they must:

- Follow the [Four Critical Actions](#) as soon as possible, including:
  - Responding to an emergency
  - Reporting to authorities/referring to services
  - Contacting parents/carers and
  - Providing ongoing support.
- Make detailed notes of the incident or disclosure, including actions taken using the [Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: Template](#) and ensure that those notes are kept and stored securely. They are also responsible for ensuring that any staff member who reported the incident, disclosure or suspicion to them also makes and keeps notes of the incident.
- At Sandringham East Primary School, the Principal team will be responsible for ensuring that there is a prompt response to the disclosure and that the child is appropriately supported.

If the principal/other nominated staff member responsible above is unavailable, staff should seek support from the Learning Specialists or their Learning Leader.

### **Duty of care and ongoing support for students**

Fulfilling the requirements in this procedure does not displace or discharge any other obligations that arise if a person reasonably believes that a child is at risk of abuse.

All staff have a duty of care to take reasonable steps to prevent reasonably foreseeable harm to students. All staff must ensure that the Principal team is aware of any incidents, suspicions or disclosures of child abuse as soon as possible after they occur. This will allow appropriate supports to be put in place for the student affected.

### **For school visitors, volunteers and school community members**

All community members aged 18 years or over should be aware of their legal obligations – see *Failure to disclose offence* above, in this Policy. Any person can make a report to DHHS Child Protection if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection. For contact details see the *Four Critical Actions* -

[https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/protect/FourCriticalActions\\_ChildAbuse.pdf](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/protect/FourCriticalActions_ChildAbuse.pdf)

There is no requirement for community members to inform the school if they are making a disclosure to DHHS Child Protection or the Victoria Police. However, where a community member is concerned about the safety of a child or children at the school, and where disclosure of that concern will not compromise any potential police investigation, the community member should report this concern to the principal so that appropriate steps to support the student can be taken.