

# Mandatory Reporting



## RATIONALE:

Pakenham Secondary College staff have a duty of care to protect the safety, health and wellbeing of children in their care. If a staff member has concerns about the safety, health and wellbeing of children in their care it is important to take immediate action.

## REPORTING CRIMINAL CHILD ABUSE

Any staff member who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria by an adult against a child under 16 must disclose that information to police. Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence, except in limited circumstances such as where the information has already been reported to DHHS Child Protection.

School staff have a duty of care to protect the safety, health and wellbeing of children in their care. If a staff member has concerns about the safety, health and wellbeing of children in their care it is important to take immediate action.

In the case of a child who may be in need of protection or therapeutic treatment, or where there are significant concerns about the wellbeing of a child, school staff can discharge this duty of care by taking action which includes the following:

- Notifying the principal or a member of the school leadership team of their concerns and the reasons for those concerns.
- Reporting their concerns to the DHHS Child Protection or another appropriate agency (as identified above)

All adults, not just professionals who work with children, have a legal obligation to report to Victoria Police where they form a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under the age of 16. Failure to disclose the information may amount to a criminal offence unless you have a “reasonable excuse” or have an “exemption” from doing so.

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

The offence applies only to adults in a position of authority within an organisation. In a school context, this may include Principals, Assistant Principals, and Campus Principals.

## FORMING A 'REASONABLE BELIEF'

A 'reasonable belief' or a 'belief on reasonable grounds' is not the same as having proof but is more than mere rumour or speculation.

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 if:

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

## TYPES OF CHILD ABUSE AND INDICATORS OF HARM

Child abuse can have a significant effect on a child's physical or emotional health, development and wellbeing. The younger a child the more vulnerable he/she is and the more serious the consequences are likely to be.

### Types of child abuse include:

- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- emotional abuse
- neglect
- medical neglect
- family violence
- human trafficking (including forced marriage).

### Other reports to DHHS Child Protection may be needed for:

- risk-taking behavior
- female genital mutilation
- risk to unborn child
- young person exhibiting sexually-abusive behaviours.

## WHEN TO REPORT

The following section sets out when to report a concern that a child or a young person has been abused, or is in need of protection.

### ***Mandatory Reporting - DHHS Child Protection***

Mandatory reporters must make a report as soon as practicable if, in the course of practising their profession or carrying out their duties, they form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child or young person is in need of protection, as a result of physical injury or sexual abuse, and the child's parents are unable or unwilling to protect the child.

#### Reported by:

##### *Mandatory reporters*

- Teachers registered to teach or who have permission to teach pursuant to the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Vic)
- Principals of government and non-government schools
- Registered medical practitioners, Nurses and all members of the police force

#### To:

- DHHS Child Protection

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

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 any of the following reasons:

- The child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm as a result of:
  - physical injury and their parents are unable or unwilling to protect the child
  - sexual abuse and their parents are unable or unwilling to protect the child
  - emotional or psychological harm and their parents are unable or unwilling to protect the child
- The child has been abandoned and there is no other suitable person who is willing and able to care for the child.
- The child's parents are dead or incapacitated and there is no other suitable person who is willing and able to care for the child.
- The child's physical development or health has been, or is likely to be significantly harmed and the parents are unable or unwilling to provide basic care, or effective medical or other remedial care.

#### Reported by:

Department policy requires all staff who form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child or young person is in need of protection to report their concerns to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police.

#### To:

- DHHS Child Protection
- Victoria Police

***Child in need of therapeutic treatment***

Any person may make a report if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child who is 10 years of age or over, but under 15 years of age, is in need of therapeutic treatment because he or she has exhibited sexually-abusive behaviours.

Reported by:

- Any person

To:

- DHHS Child Protection

***Significant concerns about wellbeing of a child***

Any person may make a report if they have significant concerns for the wellbeing of a child. A significant concern for the wellbeing of a child may arise, for instance, where any of the following factors may have a significant adverse impact on a child's care, welfare or development:

- significant parenting problems
- family conflict or family breakdown
- 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.

Reported by:

- Any person

To:

- DHHS Child Protection
- Child FIRST

***Reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under 16.***

Any adult who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria by an adult against a child under 16 must report that information to police.

Reported by:

- Any person aged 18 or over

To:

- Victoria Police
- DHHS Child Protection

**Department policy requires all staff who form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child or young person is in need of protection to report their concerns to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police.**

**In the case of school staff, they must also discuss their concerns with the principal or a member of the school leadership team and then complete the "Responding to an incident, disclosure or suspicion of Child Abuse" template on Compass.**

**MAKING A REPORT**

This table describes how to make a mandatory report, to report child abuse or child protection concerns.

## Step Description

1	<p><b>In case of emergency or if a child is in immediate danger contact Triple Zero (000) or the local police station.</b></p> <p>Alternatively, to report concerns about the immediate safety of a child within their family unit to DHHS Child Protection, call the Child Protection Crisis Line on 13 12 78 (24 hours 7 days, toll free)</p>
2	<p>Keep comprehensive notes that are dated and include the following information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a description of the concerns (e.g. physical injuries, student behaviour)</li> <li>• the source of those concerns (e.g. observation, report from child or another person)</li> <li>• the actions taken as a result of the concerns (e.g. consultation with principal, report to DHHS Child Protection etc.).</li> </ul>
3	<p>Discuss any concerns about the safety and wellbeing of students with the Principal or a member of the school leadership team.</p>
4	<p>Gather the relevant information necessary to make the report. This should include the following information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• full name, date of birth, and residential address of the child or young person</li> <li>• the details of the concerns and the reasons for those concerns</li> <li>• the individual staff member's involvement with the child and young person</li> <li>• details of any other agencies who may be involved with the child or young person.</li> </ul>
5	<p>Make a report to the relevant agency</p> <p>To report concerns that are life threatening phone 000 or the local police station. To report concerns about the immediate safety of a child within their family unit to DHHS Child Protection, call the Child Protection Crisis Line on 13 12 78 (24 hrs 7 days, toll free)</p>
6	<p>Make a written record of the report by using the College's "Responding to an incident, disclosure or suspicion of Child Abuse" which is listed on Compass.</p>
7	<p>Notify relevant school staff and/or Department staff of a report to DHHS Child Protection or Child FIRST.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School staff must advise the principal or a member of the leadership team if they have made a report.</li> <li>• In the case of international students, the principal must notify the Department's International Education Division on (03) 9637 2990 to ensure that appropriate support is arranged for the student.</li> <li>• In the case of Koorie students, the principal must notify the Regional Office to ensure that the regional Koorie support officer can arrange appropriate support for the student.</li> </ul>

## POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF MAKING A REPORT

This table describes the potential consequences of making a report.

Potential consequence	Description
Confidentiality	<p>The identity of a reporter must remain confidential unless:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the reporter chooses to inform the child, young person or parent of the report.</li> <li>• the reporter consents in writing to their identity being disclosed.</li> <li>• a Court or Tribunal decides that it necessary for the identity of the reporter to be disclosed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child.</li> <li>• a Court or Tribunal decides that, in the interests of justice, the reporter is required to provide evidence.</li> </ul>
Professional Protection	<p>If a report is made in good faith:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• it does not constitute unprofessional conduct or a breach of professional ethics on the part of the reporter.</li> <li>• the reporter cannot be held legally liable in respect of the report.</li> </ul>
Interviews	<p>DHHS Child Protection and/or Victoria Police may conduct interviews of children and young people at the school without the parent's knowledge or consent.</p> <p>Interviewing children and young people at school should only occur in exceptional circumstances and if it is in the best interests of the child to proceed in this manner.</p> <p>DHHS Child Protection and/or Victoria Police will notify the principal or a member of the leadership team of their intention to interview the child or young person on the school premises.</p> <p>When DHHS Child Protection practitioners/Victoria Police officers come to the school premises, the principal or a member of the leadership team should request to see identification before permitting them to have access to the child or young person.</p> <p>When a child or young person is being interviewed by DHHS Child Protection and/or Victoria Police, school staff must arrange to have a supportive adult present with the child or young person.</p>
Support for the child or young person	<p>The roles and responsibilities of staff members in supporting children who are involved with DHHS Child Protection may include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• acting as a support person for the child or young person</li> <li>• attending DHHS Child Protection case planning meetings</li> <li>• observing and monitoring the child's behaviour</li> <li>• liaising with professionals.</li> </ul>
Requests for Information	<p>DHHS Child Protection and/or Child FIRST and/or Victoria Police may request information about the child or family for the purpose of investigating a report and assessing the risk to the child or young person.</p> <p>In certain circumstances, DHHS Child Protection can also direct school staff and Department staff to provide information or documents about the protection or development of the child. Such directions should be in writing and only be made by authorised persons within DHHS Child Protection.</p>
Witness Summons	<p>If DHHS Child Protection makes a Protection Application in the Children's Court of Victoria, any party to the application may issue a Witness Summons to produce documents and/or to give evidence in the proceedings.</p>

**CHILD SAFE STANDARDS**

The Child Safe Standards are compulsory minimum standards for all Victorian early childhood services and schools to ensure they are well prepared to protect children from abuse and neglect. The Standards support all Victorian early childhood services and schools to embed a culture of no tolerance for child abuse but, where necessary, to respond appropriately to actual or suspected abuse.

This policy works in conjunction with Pakenham Secondary College's Child Safe Policy

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