



Little Yarra
STEINER SCHOOL

Student Care: Child Protection Policy

(January 2019)

This policy applies to all employees, contractors, and service providers and includes specific advice on:

1. Understanding the legal obligations to protect children
2. Identifying signs of child abuse
3. Four critical actions for schools: responding to incidents, disclosures and suspicions of child abuse
4. Reportable Conduct

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1.The legal obligations to protect children

All members of a community have a moral obligation to protect any child under their care and supervision from foreseeable harm. As a school, staff members play a critical role in protecting children and must meet a range of legal obligations to identify, respond and report child abuse. The Little Yarra Steiner School is committed to the development of policies, procedures, measures and practices in accordance with Ministerial Order No. 870 Child Safe Standards. The easiest way to comply with our legal and moral obligations is to remember that staff must report any reasonable suspicion that a child has been abused, or is at risk of being abused.

Failure to disclose

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 under section 327 of the Crimes Act 1958 (Victoria) and applies to all adults in Victoria, not just professionals who work with children. The obligation is to disclose that information to the police as soon as it is practicable to do so, except in limited circumstances such as where the information has already been reported to DHHS Child Protection.

Failure to protect

Any staff member in a position of authority who becomes aware that an adult associated with their organisation (such as an employee, contractor, volunteer, sport coach or visitor) poses a risk of sexual abuse to a child under 16 who is in the care or supervision of the organisation must take all reasonable steps to reduce or remove that risk.

Failure to take reasonable steps to protect a child in the organisation from the risk of sexual abuse from an adult associated with the organisation is a criminal offence contained in section 49C (2) of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic.).

2. Identifying the signs of abuse

Physical 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 (FGM).

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

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, suicide or self-harm

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 (e.g. kissing or fondling a child in a sexual way, masturbation, oral sex or penetration) 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.

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.

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 victim, and are disproportionately abused.

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).

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

over, a family friend or stranger, any person 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 peer or child 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 to be capable of committing an offence. Any suspected sexual behaviour displayed by children under 10 is referred to as problem sexual behaviour.

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, prostitution or attempted suicide
- sudden decline in academic performance, poor memory and concentration
- promiscuity
- wearing layers of clothing to hide injuries and bruises

Staff must follow the Four Critical Actions for Schools if they feel uncomfortable about the way an adult interacts with a child/children, and/or suspect that the adult may be engaging in sexual abuse of a child/children, and/or suspect that the adult is grooming the child/children for the purpose of engaging in sexual activity, and/or reasonably believe that the adult is at risk of engaging in sexual behaviour with a child/children.

Staff 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.

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 boyfriend and girlfriend
- 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
- 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

Grooming is when a person engages in predatory conduct to prepare a child for 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.

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, force or use of authority (this can make a child fearful to report unwanted behaviour)
- making close physical contact sexual, 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).

Online grooming is a criminal offence and 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.

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

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' etc
- 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'

Emotional abuse

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

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. Emotional abuse may occur with or without other forms of 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 with other children

Neglect

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.

In some circumstances the neglect of a child:

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

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

Family violence

Family violence is behaviour towards a family member that may include:

- physical violence or threats of violence
- verbal abuse, including threats
- emotional or psychological abuse
- sexual abuse

- financial and social abuse.

A child's exposure to family violence constitutes child abuse. This exposure can be very harmful and may result in long-term physical, psychological and emotional trauma. Action must be taken to protect the child, and to mitigate or limit their trauma.

PHYSICAL indicators of family violence 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)
- internal injuries

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 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 and/or poor academic outcomes
- parent-child conflict

For older children and young people indicators can also include:

- moving away/running away from home
- entering into a relationship early to escape the family home
- experiencing violence in their own dating relationships
- involvement in criminal activity
- alcohol and substance abuse

3. Four Critical Actions for Schools

All school staff members play a critical role in protecting children in their care.

- Staff must follow the 4 critical actions as soon as they witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a reasonable belief that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused.
- Staff must act if they form a suspicion/reasonable belief, even if they are unsure and have not directly observed child abuse (e.g. if the victim or another person tells them about the abuse).

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, their safety must be ensured by:

- separating alleged victims and others involved
- notifying the office immediately in case first aid is required
- The Education Administrator or their delegate will call 000 for urgent

medical and/or police assistance if there are immediate health or safety concerns.

Where necessary it may be important to maintain the integrity of the potential crime scene and to preserve evidence.

ACTION 2: REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES

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

The Education Administrator must report all instances of suspected child abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police.

The Education Administrator 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.

If the Education Administrator is suspected to be the perpetrator of abuse, a member of the Board will fulfil the reporting requirements above.

ACTION 3: CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

The Education Administrator 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/carers (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 parents/carers to be contacted)
- to contact the parents/carers and provide agreed information (this must be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion).

ACTION 4: PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

The school must provide support for children impacted by abuse. This should include the development of a Student Support Plan in consultation with wellbeing professionals. Strategies may include development of a safety plan, direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals etc.

4. Reportable Conduct

The Reportable Conduct Scheme seeks to improve organisations' responses to allegations of child abuse and neglect by their workers and volunteers. The scheme is established by the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005.

It has been designed to ensure that the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) will be aware of every allegation of certain types of employee misconduct involving children in relevant organisations that identified in the schedules below.

The Commission will also share information where appropriate, including with the Working with Children Check Unit relevant regulators and Victoria Police, to prevent and protect children from abuse.

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

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

The scope of 'reportable conduct' is wide and is not limited to criminal conduct. This means that reportable conduct includes:

- sexual abuse
- grooming
- sexting
- inappropriate physical contact
- sexualised behaviour with a child.

Reportable conduct includes information about something that is alleged to have occurred outside the course of the person's employment or engagement with the school.

The Reportable Conduct Scheme requires the Education Administrator to

- have in place systems to prevent child abuse and if alleged ensure the allegation can be brought to the attention of the appropriate person for investigation and response
- notify the Commission for Children and Young People of the allegation within 3 days of receiving the allegation.
- keep the Commission updated on the school's response to an allegation and any investigation that has taken place within 30 days of receiving the allegation.