



# Responding to and reporting allegations of child abuse

## Context

Child abuse can take many forms including sexual offences, grooming, physical violence, serious emotional or psychological harm, serious neglect and a child's exposure to family violence. The abuser may be a parent, carer, staff member, volunteer, another adult or even another child. Unfortunately the nature of child abuse is complex. The abuse may occur over time and potential risk indicators are often difficult to detect. Even our legal obligations for reporting allegations of child abuse can vary depending on the circumstances of the incident.

The School will take appropriate, prompt action in response to all allegations or disclosures of abuse, neglect, inappropriate behaviour or concerns about child safety by reporting all matters to the Victorian Child Protection Service or the Police, depending on the allegation or disclosure made.

Sunshine Christian School has established simple and accessible procedures for anyone to report a child abuse concern internally to one of the School's Child Protection Officers.

Sunshine Christian School has developed and implemented procedures for Council members, staff and volunteers for responding to allegations and disclosures of child abuse, or suspected child abuse, including procedures for support following a disclosure by a student..

Reporting procedures for third party contractors, external education providers, parents/carers and other community members are also included in our Child Protection and Safety Policy which is available on our public website.

Age appropriate reporting procedures for students are developed through our pastoral care program.

## Implementation

This section describes our work systems, practices, policies and procedures for responding to and reporting allegations of child abuse both internally and externally. These include:

- Managing Your Initial Response to a Child Protection Incident
- Reporting a Child Abuse Concern Internally
- General Le
- Mandatory Reporting
- Conduct that is Reportable to the Victorian Institute of Teachers (VIT)
- Record Keeping
- Confidentiality & Privacy

All of the School's procedures for reporting and responding to allegation of child abuse are designed and implemented taking into account the diverse characteristics of the School community.

A summary of these procedures are made publicly available on the School's website through our Child Protection and Safety Policy and are accessible to all children, school staff and the wider community. The School principal will take responsibility for maintaining the school's compliance with this procedure.

The School will respond to all allegations of child abuse in an appropriate manner including:

- informing the appropriate authorities and fully cooperating with any resulting investigation;
- protecting any child connected to the allegation until it is resolved and providing ongoing support to those affected;



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- taking particular measures in response to an allegation that concerns a culturally diverse child or a child with a disability; and
- securing and retaining records of the allegation and the School's response to it

## Observation of Risk Indicators

The different types of child abuse and their key risk indicators are set out in detail in the earlier section of this program Child Abuse – Definition and Key Risk Indicators.

The process of identifying child abuse purely through observation of risk indicators can be complex and may occur over time. The complexity is magnified by the fact that many of the key risk indicators described may also occur as a result of other factors, not related to child abuse.

If you form a concern that a child may be being abused you should make written notes of your observations recording both dates and times. You should also report the matter internally to a School Child Protection Officer.

## Private Disclosure by a Child

If a student discloses a situation of abuse or neglect to you privately, you should stay calm and not display expressions of panic or shock.

You should reassure and support the child. You can do this by:

- stating clearly that the abuse is not the child's fault;
- reassuring the child that you believe them; and
- telling the child that disclosing the matter is the right thing to do.

You should be patient, and allow the child to talk at their own pace. When responding you should use the child's language and vocabulary.

Sometimes a student may try to elicit a promise from you that you will not tell anyone about the allegation. You must not make this promise, as you are responsible for reporting the matter.

Finally remember that your role is not to investigate the allegation. You should not interrogate the child and pressure them to tell you more than they want to.

Once a disclosure is made you must report the matter internally to a School Child Protection Officer as soon as possible. You should also make written notes of the circumstances of the disclosure recording both dates and times.

Following a disclosure of abuse or neglect by a student, staff should follow the steps set out in the School's Support Following Disclosure policy.

## Public Disclosure by a Child

Public disclosure occurs where you observe a child disclosing abuse to another child, or group of children.

In his circumstance you should use a strategy of "protective interrupting".



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The aim of “protective interrupting” is to prevent a child from disclosing details of abuse in front of other children, whilst at the same time providing the child with the opportunity to disclose later, in a safe and confidential manner.

You can do this by:

- asking the child if you can talk privately; and
- moving the child away from the other students to a quiet space,
- and then following the guidelines with respect to managing a private disclosure.

Following a disclosure of abuse or neglect by a student, staff should follow the steps set out in the School's Support Following Disclosure policy.

## Third Party Disclosure

A third party such as a friend of the child, a relative or another parent may provide you with information relating to child abuse.

In this situation you should:

- listen to the person’s concerns seeking clarification where required;
- thank the person for raising their concern;
- advise the person that we have procedures for dealing with situations like this; and
- advise the person that you will discuss their concerns with the relevant authorities.
- As with Private Disclosure you should reassure and support the person providing the information.

Sometimes a person may try to elicit a promise from you that you will not tell anyone about the allegation. You must not make this promise, as you are responsible for reporting the matter.

Finally remember that your role is not to investigate the allegation. You should not interrogate the third party and pressure them to tell you more than they want to.

Once a third party disclosure is made you must report the matter internally to a School Child Protection Officer as soon as possible. You should also make written notes of the circumstances of the disclosure recording both dates and times.

## Support Following Disclosure

You should take the following steps to support and assist a child after a disclosure of child abuse or neglect is made.

The range of measures employed will depend on:

- the degree of severity of the situation;
- the risk of harm to the child; and
- the capability and willingness of the parent to protect the child from harm.

After a disclosure is made:

- do not promise the child that you will not tell anyone about the allegation;
- reassure the child that it was the right thing to do to tell an adult;



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- tell the child what you plan to do next;
- do not confront the person believed to be the perpetrator;
- report the matter to one of the School's Child Protection Officers who will be able to assist you in developing additional support strategies; and
- whenever there are concerns that a child is in immediate danger the Police should be called on 000.

### Reporting a Child Abuse Concern Internally

Child abuse situations can be very complex, not only from the perspective of ascertaining whether abuse has occurred but also in understanding what steps to take to protect a child.

It is important to remember at all times that the safety and welfare of the child are paramount.

Therefore, if you have a concern that a child may be experiencing abuse, whether or not you have formed a belief on reasonable grounds that the abuse has occurred, you should immediately raise your concerns with one of the School's Child Protection Officers. The School's Child Protection Officers will be able to assist you in clarifying your concerns and managing the next steps.

Contact details for our Child Protection Officers are set out here.

Please note that reporting the matter internally does not release you from other legal and regulatory reporting obligations you may have, namely:

- The Obligation to Report a Sexual Offence
- The Obligation to Act to Protect; and
- The Obligation to Make a Mandatory Report.