

Child Abuse Response Plan

Purpose and Scope

This policy provides an overview of how a member of staff may become aware that a child may be experiencing abuse and identifies The Knox School's recommended strategies for managing and supporting such situations.

Responsibilities

The different types of child abuse and the key risk indicators with respect to each type of abuse are set out in detail in the Child Protection Program.

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 Child Protection Officer.

In Victoria there are specific criminal offences which impose general obligations on persons:

- aged 18 years or over to report any belief that a sexual offence has been committed, against a child under the age of 16 years, by a person over the age of 18 years (Crimes Act (Vic) S327); and
- in authority within a school to act to remove or reduce a substantial risk that a sexual offence will be committed against a child (Crimes Act (Vic) S49C).

Authorities

In all matters relating to the reporting of child abuse, authority within the School resides with the Principal. At all times, the laws of the State of Victoria apply.

Compliance

This policy is intended to comply with the Victorian Child Safe Standards, and in particular, standard 5.

This policy is an internal document, outlining the expectations The Knox School has in regards to the reporting of child abuse. It must be noted that this expectation exists alongside all employees' obligations in the State of Victoria:

- The obligation to report a sexual offence
- The obligation to act to protect

For staff registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching, it also exists alongside the obligation to make a mandatory report.

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Definitions

Victorian Child Safe Standards: A set of standards introduced in 2016 through Ministerial Order 870 in the wake of the findings from the Victorian Betrayal of Trust Royal Commission.

Child Protection Officer: A number of senior staff members are nominated as Child Protection Officers. Child Protection Officers receive additional specialised training with respect to child protection issues. They are the first point of contact for raising child protection concerns within the School. They are also responsible for championing child protection within the School and assisting in coordinating responses to child protection incidents.

Child Protection Program: The Knox School's Child Protection Program relates to all aspects of protecting children from abuse and establishes work systems, practices, policies and procedures to protect children from abuse.

Child Protection and Safety Policy: This policy is an overarching document that articulates The Knox School's approach to protecting children from child abuse.

Child abuse: Child abuse is defined in section 3 of the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) as including:

- any act committed against a child involving a sexual offence or a grooming offence listed in the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic);
- the infliction of physical violence, serious emotional or psychological harm; and
- the serious neglect of a child.

A child is defined by the Act as a person who is under the age of 18 years.

Code of Conduct: The Knox School's Child Safety Code of Conduct establishes acceptable and unacceptable behaviours by members of the School community. It creates professional boundaries for employees of the School, ethical behaviour and the parameters of acceptable and unacceptable relationships.

Staff: Includes all teaching and non-teaching staff (including casual and relief staff) as well as all volunteers who could potentially have direct unsupervised contact with students during the normal course of providing the volunteer service (including sport coaches, contract cleaners, grounds staff and maintenance workers) ('Direct Contact Volunteers').

Policy

Private Disclosure by a Child

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

Reassure and support the child. This can be achieved 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.

Be patient, and allow the child to talk at their own pace. When responding, use the child's language and vocabulary. Ensure your questions are open ended, and be mindful not to ask questions which are leading.

Sometimes a student may try to elicit a promise 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.

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Some examples of open ended questions could include:

- could you tell me more about that
- what happened next
- what else happened
- is there anything else you wanted to add
- tell me more about it
 - what did he/ or she do
 - what did he/ or she say

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

Public Disclosure by a Child

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

In this circumstance you should use a strategy of “protective interrupting”.

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 follow the guidelines with respect to managing a private disclosure.

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 a 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 Child Protection Officer as soon as possible. You should also make written notes of the circumstances of the disclosure recording both dates and times.

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Procedure

Support Following Disclosure

Staff and volunteers at the School 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;
- 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.

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 our Child Protection Officers. Our Child Protection Officers will be able to assist you in clarifying your concerns and managing the next steps.

The School's Child Protection Officers are:

- Mr Cameron Bacholer, Vice Principal
- Ms Toni-Ann Bright, Head of Secondary School
- Ms Heather Ablett, Head of Junior School
- Mr Alex Wilson, Head of Sport

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Associated Documents

The Child Abuse Response Plan is a component of the Child Protection Program and its implementation is in conjunction with, and linked to, the following internal policies, documents and practices:

- Duty of Care – Crimes Act 1958 Vic Policy
- Mandatory Reporting
- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Child Protection and Safety Policy
- Staff and Student Appropriate Conduct Policy
- Human resources practices

Further Information

The Child Abuse Response Plan is reviewed annually by the Wellbeing Committee.

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