



Northern School for Autism

"Learning for Life"

STANDARD 5

Processes for Responding to & Reporting Suspected Child Abuse

Policy & Guidance

- Mandatory reporters must make a report to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) (Child Protection) as soon as practicable if, in the course of practising their profession or carrying out their duties, they form a reasonable belief 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 from that abuse.
- Any person who forms a belief on reasonable grounds that a child or young person is in need of protection may report their concerns to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police.

Purpose

- To ensure Northern School for Autism complies with the legislative requirements of MO 870.
- To ensure the school demonstrates its commitment to creating a child safe environment.
- To raise awareness of the importance of child safety with staff and the community.
- To ensure the school develops procedures and practices that reduce the risk of child abuse and are compliant with the Child Safe Standard 5.
- To ensure the school discharges its duty of care to students.

Implementation

- This policy is intended for School Leadership, staff, School Council, visitors, volunteers and contractors.
- The safety and wellbeing of all children is a high priority for this school.
- The school has **zero tolerance of child abuse**.
- The school has a process for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse.
- Teachers as mandatory reporters and non-teaching staff are expected to report to DHHS or the police as soon as possible if they form a reasonable belief that a child or young person is in need of protection
- The Principal should be informed as soon as practicable.
- Staff are to use the Incident Report Form to record any incident, disclosure or suspicion that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused. The Incident Report Form/s can be provided to a child or their family if they disclose an allegation of abuse or safety concern in our school.

When to use the Incident Report Form

- Staff should use the Incident Report Form/s to document any incident, disclosure or suspicion that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused. The Incident Report Form (a separate

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document) should be used in conjunction with the: Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse. (Please refer to Appendix A)

- Completing the Incident Report Form should not impact on reporting times. If a child is in immediate danger, school staff should report immediately to Victoria Police on 000.
- Whilst the school staff may need to gather the information to make a report, remember it is not the role of school staff to investigate abuse. Leave this to Victoria Police and/or DHHS Child Protection.
- When completing the Incident Report Forms, staff should collect and provide as much information as possible. This information will be critical to any reports and may be sought at a later date if the matter is the subject of Court proceedings. These notes may also later assist the school staff if they are required to provide evidence to support any decisions.
- The incident may involve physical injury or emotional disturbance. The incident may occur in the school environment or outside. It may involve staff, students or those close to them. The network of those involved in a traumatic event can be wide, especially if it directly involves the school.
- If deemed necessary, counselling will be provided for all those who may be impacted by the incident. A Critical Incident Recovery Team may be formed to manage the short-term and long-term effects. For full details, please refer to the school's *Reporting & Managing School Incidents (Including Emergencies) Policy*.
- While school should operate as normally as possible, some degree of flexibility should exist.
- With due regard to information privacy, it is essential that people be given clear, accurate information at all times.
- Please refer also to the school's *Protecting Children - Reporting and Other Legal Obligations) Policy, Police & DHHS Interviews Policy* and the *Student Sexual Offending & Other Problem Behaviour Policy*.

Evaluation

- This policy will be reviewed every two years as per the VRQA requirements or earlier if there are legislative or other changes required in the interim (latest PROTECT update August 2020).

A mandatory policy

School Council Approval Not Required for this policy, but the Principal may choose to table this policy with Council for noting

References:

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/school/pal/child-safe-standards>
<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/protect/Pages/default.aspx?Redirect=1>

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APPENDIX A

FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

All staff members must implement the four critical actions set out below.

However, all staff members are required also to notify the Principal if they have formed a belief about child abuse and therefore are obligated to make a report. All staff members will be supported through this process by the Principal.

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 you 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.

Where necessary you may also need to maintain the integrity of the potential crime scene and preserve evidence.

ACTION 2: REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES

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

IF THE SOURCE OF SUSPECTED ABUSE IS FROM WITHIN THE SCHOOL:

VICTORIA POLICE

You must report all instances of suspected child abuse involving a school staff member, contractor or volunteer to Victoria Police.

You **must also** report **internally** to:

- School Principal
- Employee Conduct Branch

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- DET Security Services Unit

IF THE SOURCE OF SUSPECTED ABUSE IS FROM WITHIN THE FAMILY OR COMMUNITY

DHHS CHILD PROTECTION

You **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.

VICTORIA POLICE

You **must also** report all instances of suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police.

You **must also** report **internally** to:

- School Principal
- DET Security Services Unit

ACTION 3: CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

Your Principal **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

Your school **must** provide support for children impacted by abuse. This should include the development of a Student Support Plan in consultation with wellbeing professionals. This is an essential part of your duty of care requirements.

Strategies may include development of a safety plan, direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals etc.

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You **must** follow the Four Critical Actions every time you become aware of a further instance or risk of abuse. This includes reporting new information to authorities.

If you believe that a child is not subject to abuse, but you still hold **significant concerns** for their wellbeing you must still act. This may include making a referral or seeking advice from **Child FIRST** (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support), or to **DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police**.

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