



4 Critical Actions - Synopsis - Responding to allegations of child abuse CS7

Information for parents, staff, volunteers and School Councillors

Action one: Ensuring immediate safety – Critical Information

If a child has just been abused, or is at immediate risk of harm school staff must take reasonable steps to protect them. These include:

- Separating the alleged victim and others involved, ensuring both parties are supervised by a school staff member
- Arranging and providing urgent medical assistance where necessary by: administering first aid assistance
- **Calling 000 for an ambulance and following any instructions from emergency service officers/paramedics.**
- **Calling 000 for urgent police assistance if the person who is alleged to have engaged in the abuse poses an immediate risk to the health and safety of any person**
- Taking reasonable steps to preserve the environment, the clothing, other items, and potential witnesses until the police or other relevant authorities arrive on the premises.

Action two: Reporting to authorities – Critical Information

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed school staff **must report** all incidents, suspicions and disclosures of child abuse as soon as possible. Failure to report physical and child sexual abuse may amount to a criminal offence. The form: **DHHS CHILD PROTECTION/POLICE/CHILD FIRST REPORT CS2 is to be used.**

If the source of suspected abuse comes from **within the school** (this includes any forms of suspected child abuse involving a school staff member, contractor or volunteer) school staff **must:**

- **Contact Victoria Police - via the local police station –** this is important (they may refer the school to a local Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Team)

School staff **must ALSO** report internally to:

- School Principal and/or Leadership Team/ (all instances)
- Government Schools: Employee Conduct Branch and Security Services Unit

If the source of suspected abuse comes from **within the family** or **community** school staff **must:** Report to **DHHS Child Protection** if a child is considered to be:

- In need of protection due to 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

School staff **must ALSO** report suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to:

- **Victoria Police**

School staff **must ALSO** report internally to:

- The School Principal and/or leadership team (all instances)
- Government Schools: DET Security Services Unit on (03) 9637 2934

The school **must** identify a contact person at the school for future liaison with Victoria Police and/or DHHS Child Protection and **seek advice about contacting parents/carers.** (See Action 3) the school should consider reporting to Child FIRST if there are other reasonable concerns for the wellbeing of a child such as conflict within the family, parenting difficulties, isolation of a family or lack of apparent support



Action three: Contacting parents/carers – Critical Information

In many cases where it is suspected that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused, it is extremely important that parents/carers are notified as soon as practicable.

- However, before contacting parents, **Principals must seek advice** from DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police (depending on who the report was made to).
- This is critical to ensure the safety of the child as well as to avoid any compromise to the investigations being conducted by the relevant authorities or agencies.
- **Where advised (by DHHS or Victoria Police) for contact to be appropriate**, the Principal should make sensitive and professional contact with parents as soon as possible on the day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion. This enables parents/carers to take steps to:
 - Prevent or limit their child's exposure to further abuse.
 - Ensure that their child receives the support that they require.

There are some circumstances where contacting parents may place a child at greater risk.

Action Four: Providing on-going support – Critical Information

In addition to reporting suspected abuse, school staff members have a critical role in supporting students impacted by abuse and have a **Duty of Care** to ensure that the child feels safe and supported at school.

Support can include direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals and community services and should involve the development of a **Student Support Plan** and the establishment of a **Student Support Group**. Principals are responsible for ensuring students are supported during interviews at school conducted by Victoria Police or DHHS Child Protection and school staff may be required to respond to subpoenas to attend

The school must take actions, where deemed appropriate, to support students who are impacted by child abuse, including:

- Working Together and Planning Support
- Engaging Allied Health and Wellbeing Supports
- Referring to Non-School Based Supports
- Providing Developmentally and Culturally Appropriate Support
- Providing Support for Impacted School Staff Members
- Supporting Students in Interviews Conducted at School
- Responding to Subpoenas or Court Attendance
- Responding to Complaints or Concerns.

School staff need to be sensitive to a child's individual circumstances when providing support and working with families impacted by abuse including: culturally appropriate support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the children of families with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds as well as appropriate support for children with disabilities

Support must also be provided to any impacted staff members



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

CHILD PROTECTION:

A report to DHHS Child Protection should be made in any of the following circumstances:

- Physical abuse (**mandatory reporters must report - Refer to the school's Mandatory Reporting policy**)
- Sexual abuse (**mandatory reporters must report - Refer to the school's Mandatory Reporting policy**)
- Emotional abuse
- Neglect/Medical neglect
- Family violence
- Human trafficking (including forced marriage)
- Sexual exploitation (including pornography and prostitution)

A report should also be made to DHHS Child Protection in circumstance where, for example:

- The child is engaging in risk-taking behaviour
- Female genital mutilation has occurred, or there is risk of it occurring
- There is risk to an unborn child
- A child or young person is exhibiting sexually-abusive behaviours
- There are indicators that a child is being groomed

Child in need of protection:

Any person may make a report if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection for any of the following reasons:

- 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 has suffered or likely to suffer significant harm as a result of sexual abuse and their parents are unable or unwilling to protect the child.
- The child has suffered or is likely to suffer emotional or psychological harm and the parents are unable or unwilling to protect 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.

Child FIRST:

A referral to Child FIRST may be the best way of connecting children, young people and their families to the services they need, where families exhibit any of the following factors that may impact upon a child's safety, stability or development:

- Significant parenting problems that may be affecting the child's development
- Family conflict, including family breakdown
- Families under pressure due to a family member's physical or mental illness, substance abuse, disability or bereavement
- Young, isolated and/or unsupported families
- Significant social or economic disadvantage that may adversely impact on a child's care or development

Legal Obligations:

Failure to disclose is a criminal offence **requires all adults** (aged 18 and over) who hold a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria by an adult against a child under 16 to disclose that information to police (unless they have a reasonable excuse not to, for example because they fear for their safety or the safety of another). Whilst **failure to disclose covers**



child sexual abuse, all adults should report other forms of child abuse to authorities. Failure to disclose does not change mandatory reporting responsibilities.

Failure to protect: A person in a position of authority in an organisation will commit this offence if they know of the risk of abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.