

CHILD SAFE – RESPONSE AND SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WHO DISCLOSE

*The Currajong School takes a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse and is fully committed to ensuring that its strategies, policies, procedures and practices meet all **Child Safe Standards as specified in Ministerial Order No. 1359 (2022)***

RATIONALE

It is critical that schools have in place clear protocols to respond quickly and effectively to students who disclose abuse that is occurring or has occurred. It is not the role of staff to counsel students or investigate their claims. Child protection workers or police will undertake investigations and professional counsellors are available to provide counselling.

Disclosures may refer to physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, exposure to violence and/or sexual abuse. The impact will be different for every child or young person depending on the nature and severity of the abuse, their age, the reaction of the family and school, and their own inner resources and resilience.

1. Failure to disclose or retraction of a disclosure:

There are many reasons why children may fail to disclose abuse or retract a disclosure of abuse. These include:

- i. Pressure or threats from the perpetrator
- ii. Close relationship to, or dependence on the perpetrator
- iii. Fear of dire consequences if they tell
- iv. Pressure from the family or friends not to tell
- v. Fear of negative/shocked/disbelieving reactions from family or school
- vi. Embarrassment, shame, self-blame or anxiety
- vi. Fears of stigmatisation, being labelled a victim or called homophobic names

2. Staff response to disclosure:

The response of adults to a disclosure of abuse can be central to a child's feelings of safety and their recovery from the trauma of abuse. If a child has decided to speak

to you at school, then it is very likely that they trust you. Simply by calmly and empathically listening and offering support, you are assisting the child to deal with something very traumatic. During a disclosure you should:

- i. Give the child your full attention and maintain a calm appearance
- ii. Reassure the child that it is right to tell and that they will not be in trouble for doing so
- iii. Accept that the child will disclose only what they can manage at the time
- iv. Allow the child to take his or her time and to use his or her own words
- v. Don't put words into his/her mouth or ask leading questions
- vi. Don't make promises that you can't keep e.g. not telling anyone
- vii. Tell the child what you plan to do and be reassuring that the adults will take care of what needs to happen next
- viii. Do not confront the alleged or suspected perpetrator
- ix. Follow the School's Child Safe policies and procedures re reporting the disclosure to Child Protection and/or the Police
- x. Seek support for yourself

3. Student behaviours following a disclosure may include:

- i. Further disclosures: when a child has made a disclosure and been taken seriously, further disclosures may follow regarding the incident or other incidents
- ii. Regression of behaviour: thumb-sucking, speech difficulties, toileting issues
- iii. Increased emotional needs: clinginess, separation anxiety, fear of the dark
- iv. Heightened vulnerability: emotional outbursts, tearfulness, anger, aggression to self or others, inability to calm down, sadness, mood swings
- v. Sleep problems: difficulties getting to sleep, night terrors/nightmares, fear of sleeping on their own
- vi. Social difficulties: withdrawal from friends, anxiety in groups, fear of strangers
- vii. School problems: school refusal, poor concentration, loss of interest in previously enjoyed lessons and activities
- viii. Physical complaints: headaches, stomach aches

4. Supporting an abused child in the classroom:

In addition to creating a safe classroom environment, staff can support an abused child in the following ways:

Expectations: Recognise the strength and courage of the child by continuing to have high expectations. Set reasonable goals and provide the encouragement needed for the child to feel confident in his or her abilities. School can be a place

where children rebuild their self-esteem, assert themselves, and see themselves as successful.

Structure: The child may feel powerless to control much in their environment. In order to cope, they may refuse to involve themselves in, or seem to care about, what is happening around them. They may strive to manipulate by dominating peers or controlling games. They may express disproportionate feelings whenever they feel threatened. Allowing expression of feelings when appropriate through art, music, drama, and/or creative writing may help the child to deal with pentup emotion.

Identity: Being abused in ways that completely deny their own rights may result in children having little sense of personal identity or self-worth. Staff can help by pointing out the child's strengths and giving gentle encouragement and are in a position to help children learn that they are valued, accepted and capable by fostering an environment that recognises each child's uniqueness. Valuing differences will enable children to begin to see themselves as having something to contribute that others appreciate. With each successful completion of a classroom task or activity, the child's sense of competency can be fostered.

Sense of belonging: Children who have been abused may think that they did something wrong and that they are bad. Because they have kept a secret from everyone, they may assume there is a reason for them to be isolated from others. To facilitate a sense of belonging, staff may provide designated places for possessions, display work in the classroom, and check to ensure that they are included as much as possible in classroom and playground activities. Support through teaching social skills individually, in small group settings, and through cooperative learning may also help abused children gain practice in interacting positively with others in a safe environment.

Social skills: One of the impacts of abuse may be a focus on pleasing and meeting the wishes of others while neglecting their own needs. Having been introduced to the adult world through an abusive relationship, children may have learned very inappropriate behaviours and language. They may feel unworthy to interact on an equal basis with others and fear rejection. A classroom climate that fosters caring, appreciation for differences, consistent rules and boundaries, and recognition for small successes will help to nurture a child whose needs have not been recognised or met at home.

Tolerance of difference: Each child will respond in a unique way to abuse and therefore classroom behaviour will be variable. Some of the feelings an abused child may experience are anxiety, guilt, embarrassment, depression and anger. Understanding this will help to identify the emotions and behaviours that might result from the abuse. Consultation with a psychologist or therapist may assist staff in dealing with a child's problematic behaviours and emotional outbursts in the classroom.

Predictability: Staff can significantly support a child's need for structure by maintaining a consistent daily schedule, by having clear behavioural and learning expectations, and by allowing the child to learn and follow classroom rules and routines at his/her own pace.

In Summary:

Staff at The Currajong School can play a critical role in helping children manage the impact of abuse and trauma by responding to emotions and behaviours with tolerance, patience and understanding. The child who has been abused should be given clear guidelines about when, where and with whom they can speak about what has happened. Identifying safe adults to go to at home, school and other places where he/she regularly spends time can help to reduce anxiety and to rebuild confidence.

The routines and structure of school provide a sense of security and safety for children and therefore, as much as possible following a disclosure, normal rules and routines should be resumed and school values and expectations maintained. Staff have the opportunity to give an abused child the hope of a happier childhood, the joy of play and learning, and the sense of being cared for and protected by others.

EVALUATION

This policy will be reviewed as per our three-year review cycle or more often if necessary due to changes in regulations or circumstances.

Approval date:	Approved by:	Next review:
October 2021	School Board	October 2024



The Currajong School acknowledges the traditional owners of this country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures and to the Elders past, present and emerging.