

CHILD PROTECTION AND MANDATORY REPORTING POLICY

*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

All children have a right to feel safe and to be safe. As employees of the Currajong School, we have a legal and moral responsibility to respond to serious incidences involving abuse and neglect of the children with whom we have contact and to report instances that we believe involve physical abuse, sexual abuse or neglect.

AIM

To ensure that children's rights to be safe are maintained and each child is protected against physical and sexual abuse and neglect.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all staff and members of our school community understand the various legal and other reporting obligations related to child safety that apply to The Currajong School. The specific procedures that are applicable are contained at Appendix 1.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all school staff, volunteers and school community members. It also applies to all staff and students engaged in any school and School Board-run events, activities and services.

POLICY

All children and young people have the right to protection in their best interests.

The Currajong School understands the important role our school plays in protecting children from abuse which may relate to:

- Physical injury;
- Sexual abuse (including sexual exploitation);
- Family violence;
- Emotional or intellectual development;
- Physical development or health;
- Abandonment or parental incapacity; and
- Grooming.

The staff at The Currajong School are required by law to comply with various child safety reporting obligations.

At The Currajong School we also recognise the diversity of the children and young people at our school and take account of their individual needs and backgrounds when considering child safety.

(a) Mandatory Reporting

Principals, registered teachers and early childhood teachers, registered medical practitioners, nurses, midwives, school counsellors, out of home care workers, early childhood workers and people in religious ministry and police officers are mandatory reporters under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic).

All mandatory reporters must make a report to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Child Protection as soon as practicable if, during the course of carrying out their professional roles and responsibilities, they form a belief on reasonable grounds that:

- a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical injury and/ or sexual abuse, and
- the child's parents/carers have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from harm of that type.

A mandatory reporter who fails to comply with this legal obligation may be committing a criminal offence. It is important for all staff at The Currajong School to be aware that they are legally obliged to make a mandatory report on each occasion that they form a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection, and they must make a mandatory report even if the Principal does not share their belief that a report is necessary.

At our school, all mandated school staff must undertake the *Mandatory Reporting and Other Obligations eLearning Module* annually. We also require all other staff to undertake this module, even where they are not mandatory reporters.

The Principal advises the School Board Chair or Deputy Chair when a mandatory report is made.

(b) Child in Need of Protection

Any person can make a report to DFFH Child Protection (131 278 – 24 hour service) if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection.

The policy of The Currajong School requires **all staff** who form a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection to report their concerns to DFFH or Victoria Police and discuss their concerns with the School Leadership Team.

For more information about making a report to DFFH Child Protection can be found in the Department's *School Policy and Advisory Guide: Child Protection – Making a Report and Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse*.

At The Currajong School we also encourage all staff to make a referral to The Orange Door (previously Child FIRST) when they have significant concern for a child's wellbeing.

(c) Reportable Conduct

All employees at our school must notify the Principal if they become aware of an allegation of 'reportable conduct'.

There is an allegation of reportable conduct where a person has formed a reasonable belief that there has been:

- a sexual offence (even prior to criminal proceedings commencing), sexual misconduct or physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of a child;
- behaviour causing significant emotional or physical harm to a child;
- significant neglect of a child; or
- misconduct involving any of the above.

The Principal has a legal obligation to inform the Commission for Children and Young People when an allegation of reportable conduct is made.

Our Principal must notify the School Board and relevant organisations of reportable conduct allegations involving current or former staff, contractors, volunteers (including parents) and School Board members.

If school staff become aware of reportable conduct by any person in the above positions, they should notify the school Principal immediately. If the allegation relates to the Principal, they should notify the School Board.

(d) Failure to Disclose Offence

Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults (i.e. persons aged 18 years and over), not just professionals who work with children, have a legal obligation to report to Victoria Police, as soon as practicable, where they form a 'reasonable belief' that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child (aged under 16).

Failure to disclose information to Victoria Police (by calling 000 or local police station) as soon as practicable may amount to a criminal offence unless a person has a 'reasonable excuse' or exemption from doing so.

'Reasonable belief' is not the same as having proof. A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable person in the same circumstances as you would believe that a child is at risk of harm, for the same reasons you believed it.

For The Currajong School, a 'reasonable belief' might be formed when:

- a child states that they have been sexually abused
- a child states that they know someone who has been sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves)
- someone who knows a child states that the child has been sexually abused
- professional observations of the child's behaviour or development leads a mandated professional to form a belief that the child has been sexually abused
- signs of sexual abuse lead to a belief that the child has been sexually abused.

'Reasonable excuse' is defined by law and includes:

- reasonable fear for your safety or the safety of another person, except for the person you believe committed, or was involved in the sexual offence.
- belief on reasonable grounds that the information has already been disclosed through a mandatory report to DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police.

(e) Failure to Protect Offence

This reporting obligation applies to school staff who have the authority to reduce or remove the risk of child sexual abuse. This can include Principals, Assistant Principals and campus Principals. Any staff member in a position of authority who becomes aware that an adult associated with their school (such as an employee, contractor, volunteer or visitor) poses a risk of sexual abuse to a child under the age of 16 under their care, authority or supervision, must take all reasonable steps to remove or reduce that risk.

This may include removing the adult (i.e. persons aged 18 years and over) from working with children pending an investigation and reporting your concerns to Victoria Police.

If a school staff member in a position of authority fails to take reasonable steps in these circumstances, this may amount to a criminal offence.

(f) Grooming

Grooming is a criminal offence under the *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)*. This offence targets predatory conduct undertaken by an adult to prepare a child, under the age of 16, to engage in sexual activity at a later time. Grooming can include communicating and/or attempting to befriend or establish an inappropriate relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent/carer; or exercising inappropriate power or control over a young person.

IMPLEMENTATION

All staff members of The Currajong School must report signs of physical and/or sexual abuse, and neglect.

New staff will be informed of mandatory reporting responsibilities and procedures as part of their induction procedure.

Staff will be reminded of mandatory responsibilities annually.

All concerns must be reported immediately to the Principal, or in their absence, the person acting in the Leadership role.

The Principal will keep a record of all discussions and information about a student with whom there is a concern, and this will be confidentially recorded on Sentral.

If a belief has been formed by a staff member that sexual or physical abuse has taken place a "Mandatory Reporting Information Sheet", available from the Principal, must be completed and filed in the confidential section of Sentral.

The staff member and/or Principal will contact the DFFH by telephone as soon as possible to make an official notification on 1300 555 526 or after school hours crisis line 131278.

Members of the DFFH, or associated support or intervention services that visit the school following a notification, will interview staff and children only in the presence of the Principal or their nominee.

All reports, information sheets and subsequent discussions and information are to be recorded and remain strictly confidential.

All incidents to be monitored, and any subsequent signs or indications of abuse are also to be reported.

While only mandated by law to report incidents of physical and sexual abuse and neglect, teachers are also encouraged to report incidents or reasonable concerns of other significant harm, emotional abuse or neglect.

RELATED POLICIES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Child Safe Code of Conduct; Child Safe Response and Support for Children Who Disclose; Commitment to Child Safety Policy; Child Safe Informing the Community Policy; Child Safe Staff Selection Policy; Child Safe Child Friendly Information on the Right to Be safe Policy; Child Safe Leadership and Governance in a Child Safe Environment.

EVALUATION

This policy will be reviewed every two years or more often if necessary due to changes in regulations or circumstances.

Approval date:	Approved by:	Next review:
December 2023	School Board	December 2025



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.

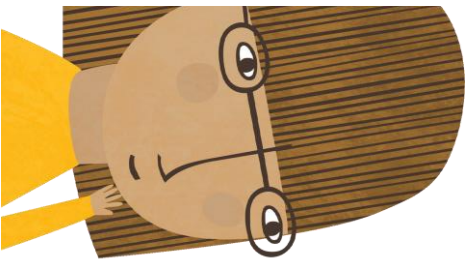
APPENDIX 1

The Currajong School Child Safety Reporting Process

The Principal, and Leadership team are responsible for ensuring that the School's child safety requirements are met. The Assistant Principal is The Currajong School's Child Safety officer. The Principal and the wellbeing leader or person acting in that position will:

- Ensure that all school staff have access to, and understand school child safety policies

- Ensure that child safety policies and procedures are followed and implemented
- Implement and monitor child safety policies, positive behaviour support framework, and procedures in school
- Will follow child safety reporting obligations and procedures policy and four critical actions if an allegation is made
- Review and update relevant policies in consultation with staff and School Board
- Provide relevant training in relation to child safety



FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

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 other involved
- administering first aid
- calling 000 for urgent medical and/or police assistance
- responding to immediate health or safety concerns
- identifying and contacting police at the school or future liaison with Police.

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

2 REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES / REFERRING TO SERVICES

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.

Q: Where does the source of suspected abuse come from?

WITHIN THE SCHOOL
You must report all instances of suspected child abuse involving a school staff member, contractor, volunteer or visitor to Victorian Police.

You must also report internally to:

- School principal and/or leadership team
- Employee Conduct Branch
- DET Incident Support and Operations Centre
- Diocesan education office.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS
School principal and/or leadership team

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS
School principal and/or school chaplain/Commissioner for Children and Young People on 1300 782 978.

GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS
Employee Conduct Branch

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS
Diocesan education office

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS
Commissioner for Children and Young People on 1300 782 978.

WITHIN THE FAMILY OR COMMUNITY
DHS CHILD PROTECTION
You must report to DHS 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 that 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 Victorian Police.

You must also report internally to:

- School principal and/or leadership team
- DET Incident Support and Operations Centre.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS
Diocesan education office.

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS
School principal and/or chaplain.

OTHER CONCERNS
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 The Orange Door (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support)
- DHS Child Protection
- Victorian Police.

YOU MUST TAKE ACTION

You must act by following the Four Critical Actions, as soon as you witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a reasonable belief* that a child has, or is at risk of being abused.

*A reasonable belief is a deliberate/low threshold. This means a teacher is to investigate and take action.

3 CONTACTING PARENTS/CAREERS

Your principal must consult with DHS Child Protection or Victorian Police to determine what information can be shared with parents/careers. They may advise:

- not to contact the parents/carer (e.g. in circumstances where the parent/carer alleges the child is in the care of a parent/carer who does not wish for their parent/carer to be contacted)
- to contact the parents/carer and provide agreed information (e.g. preferredly on the same day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion)
- how to communicate with all relevant parties with consideration for their safety.

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 and support.

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

CONTACT

DHS CHILD PROTECTION
A REA
North Division 1300 664 977
South Division 1300 665 795
East Division (Rural) 800 075 599
West Division (Metro) 1300 664 977

AFTERHOURS
After hours, weekends, public holidays 13 12 78.

CHILD FIRST
Referral and support teams
https://services.dhs.vic.gov.au/referral-and-support-teams

ORANGE DOOR
https://www.vic.gov.au/familyviolence/the-orange-door.html

VICTORIA POLICE
000 or your local police station

DET INCIDENT SUPPORT AND OPERATIONS CENTRE
1800 126 126

INCIDENT MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT UNIT
1800 126 126

EMPLOYEE CONDUCT BRANCH
(03) 9637 2955

DIOCESAN OFFICE
Melbourne (03) 92670228
Ballarat (03) 53377195
Site (03) 96226600
Sandhurst (03) 5443 2377

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS VICTORIA
(03) 9825 7200

THE LOOKOUT
The LOOKOUT has a service directory, information and evidence based guidance to help you respond to family violence: <http://www.lookout.vic.gov.au>. Family violence victims/survivors can be referred to 1800 Respect for counselling information and a referral service 800 737732.

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VICTORIA Education and Training

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