

## FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

# Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

### YOU MUST TAKE ACTION

As a school staff member, you play a **critical role** in protecting children in your care.

- 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.
- You **must** act if you form a suspicion/ reasonable belief, even if you are unsure and have not directly observed child abuse (e.g. if the victim or another person tells you about the abuse).
- It is strongly recommended that you use the **Responding to Suspected Child Abuse template** to keep clear and comprehensive notes, even if you make a decision not to report.

\*A reasonable belief is a deliberately low threshold. This enables authorities to investigate and take 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.

## 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

#### VICTORIA POLICE

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

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

- GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**
  - School principal and/or leadership team
  - Employee Conduct Branch
  - DET Security Services Unit.
- CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**
  - School principal and/or leadership team
  - Diocesan education office.

#### CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

- School principal and/or leadership team
- Diocesan education office.

#### INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

- School principal and/or school chairperson
- Commission for Children and Young People on **1300 782 978**.

All allegations of 'reportable conduct' **must** be reported as soon as possible to:

- GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**
  - Employee Conduct Branch
- CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**
  - Diocesan education office
- INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**
  - Commission for Children and Young People on **1300 782 978**.

### 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:

- GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**
  - School principal and/or leadership team
  - DET Security Services Unit.
- CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**
  - School principal and/or leadership team
  - Diocesan education office.
- INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**
  - School principal and/or chairperson.

For suspected student sexual assault, please follow the **Four Critical Actions: Student Sexual Offending**.

### 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 FRST/The Orange Door (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support)
- DHHS Child Protection
- Victoria Police.

## 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/carer (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 parent/carer 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)
- 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 instance or risk of abuse. This includes reporting new information to authorities.

### CONTACT

#### DHHS CHILD PROTECTION

AREA  
North Division **1300 664 9777**  
South Division **1300 655 795**  
East Division **1300 360 391**  
West Division (Rural) **1800 075 599**  
West Division (Metro) **1300 664 9777**

#### AFTER HOURS

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

#### CHILD FIRST

<https://services.dhhs.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 SECURITY SERVICES UNIT (03) 9589 6266**

**STUDENT INCIDENT AND RECOVERY UNIT (03) 9651 3622**

**EMPLOYEE CONDUCT BRANCH (03) 9637 2595**

**DIOCESAN OFFICE**  
Melbourne **(03) 9267 0228**  
Ballarat **(03) 5337 7135**  
Sale **(03) 5622 6600**  
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.org.au>

Family violence victims/survivors can be referred to **1800 Respect** for counselling information and a referral service: **1800 737 732**.

