



# Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to outline the procedures our school has in place to respond to complaints or concerns relating to child abuse and to ensure that all staff and members of our school community understand and follow the various legal obligations that apply to the reporting of child abuse to relevant authorities.

## **Scope**

This policy applies to complaints and concerns relating to child abuse made by or in relation to a child or student, school staff, volunteers, contractors, service providers, visitors or any other person while connected to the school (physical and online).

## **Definitions**

### **Child abuse**

Child abuse includes:

- physical violence inflicted on a child
- sexual offences committed against a child
- grooming of a child by an adult
- family violence committed against or in the presence of a child
- serious emotional or psychological harm to a child
- serious neglect of a child.

The definition of child abuse is broad and can include student to student incidents and concerns, as well as behaviour committed by an adult.

### **Grooming**

Grooming is a criminal offence under the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic) and is a form of child abuse and sexual misconduct. This offence targets predatory conduct undertaken by an adult to prepare a child under the age of 16 to engage in sexual activity, either with the groomer or another adult, at a later date. Grooming can include communicating (including electronic communications and communicating by conduct) and/or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent or carer.

### **School staff member**

For the purpose of this policy a school staff member includes a contractor engaged by the school or school council to perform child-related work.

## **Policy**

Wimba Primary School understands the key role our school plays in protecting children from abuse. We have a range of policies and measures in place to prevent child abuse from occurring at our school or during school activities.

## Information for students

- All students should feel safe to speak to any staff member to raise any concerns about their safety or any other concerns that they have.
- If a student does not know who to approach at Wimba Primary School they should start with their classroom teacher, Assistant Principal or Principal
- Lessons are taught to students during our Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) classes, through the Respectful Relationships program to help them identify who to speak with if they need support. EAL students and younger kids will also be catered for in these settings.
- Posters placed around the school in child friendly language that provide clear advice on who to go to and where to find them if a child has any concerns.

## Identifying child abuse

To ensure we can respond in the best interests of students and children when complaints or concerns relating to child abuse are raised, all staff and relevant volunteers must:

- understand how to identify signs of child abuse and behavioural indicators of perpetrators - for detailed information on identifying child abuse and behavioural indicators of perpetrators refer to [Identify child abuse](#).
- understand their various legal obligations in relation to reporting child abuse to relevant authorities - for detailed information on the various legal obligations refer to Appendix A
- follow the below procedures for responding to complaints or concerns relating to child abuse, which ensure our school acts in the best interests of students and children and complies with both our legal and Department policy obligations.

At Wimba Primary School, we recognise the diversity of the children, young people, and families at our school and take account of their individual needs and backgrounds when considering and responding to child safety incidents or concerns.

## Procedures for responding to an incident, disclosure, allegation, or suspicion of child abuse

In responding to a child safety incident, disclosure, allegation or suspicion, Wimba Primary School will follow:

- the [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#) for complaints and concerns relating to all forms of child abuse
- the [Four Critical Actions: Student Sexual Offending](#) for complaints and concerns relating to student sexual offending
- our Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy and Bullying Prevention Policy for complaints and concerns relating to student physical violence or other harmful student behaviours.

## School staff and volunteer responsibilities

### 1. Immediate action

If a school staff member or volunteer witnesses an incident of child abuse, or reasonably believes, suspects, or receives a disclosure or allegation that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused, they must:

- if a child is at immediate risk of harm, separate alleged victims and others involved, administer first aid (appropriate to their level of training), and call 000 for urgent medical or police assistance where required to respond to immediate health or safety concerns
- notify the Principal or Assistant Principal as soon as possible, who will ensure our school follows the steps in these procedures.

NOTE for staff and volunteers:

- if you are uncertain if an incident, disclosure, allegation, or suspicion gives rise to a concern about child abuse you must always err on the side of caution and report the concern to the Principal or Assistant Principal
- if the Principal or Assistant Principal is unavailable, the School Wellbeing Coordinator will take on this role
- if the concerns relates to the conduct of the Principal or Assistant Principal, notify the Principal or the South West Regional Office at 1300 333 232 or via email: [swvr@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:swvr@education.vic.gov.au) who must then take on responsibility for ensuring our school follows these procedures.

Refer to **Appendix B** for guidance on how to respond to a disclosure of child abuse.

## 2. Reporting to authorities and referring to services

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed, and relevant school staff have been informed, the Principal or Assistant Principal **must** report all incidents, suspicions, and disclosures of child abuse as soon as possible.

The following steps will ensure our school complies with the four critical actions as well as additional actions required under the Child Safe Standards.

The Principal or Assistant Principal must ensure:

- all relevant information is reported to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Child Protection, Victoria Police or relevant services where required
- the incident is reported to the Department's [eduSafe Plus portal](#) or the Incident Support and Operations Centre (1800 126 126) in accordance with the severity rating outlined in the [Managing and Reporting School Incidents Policy](#)
- all [reportable conduct](#) allegations or incidents are reported by the Principal to the Department's Employee Conduct Branch (03 7022 0005) – where a reportable conduct allegation is made against the Principal, the Regional Director must be informed who will then make a report to Employee Conduct Branch

NOTE: In circumstances where staff members are legally required to report child abuse to DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police and they are unable to confirm that the information has been reported by another person at the school or the designated member of school staff does not agree that a report needs to be made, the staff member who has formed the reasonable belief must still contact DFFH Child Protection and Victoria Police to make the report.

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 or The Orange Door (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support) DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police.

## 3. Contacting parents or carers

The Principal or Assistant Principal must ensure parents and carers are notified unless advised otherwise by DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police, or there are other safety and wellbeing concerns in relation to informing parents/carers.

Principals may contact the Department of Education Legal Division for advice on notifying parents and carers, and where relevant, the wider school community.

For further guidance, refer to [PROTECT Contacting parents and carers](#)

## 4. Ongoing protection and support

The Principal or Assistant Principal must ensure appropriate steps are taken by the school to protect the child and other children from any continued risk of abuse. These steps must be taken in consultation with any relevant external agency or Department staff such as DFFH Child Protection, Victoria Police, Legal Division or Employee Conduct Branch. Ongoing protection will also include further reports to authorities if new information becomes known or further incidents occur.

Appropriate, culturally sensitive, and ongoing support must be offered and provided to all affected students. Ongoing support will be based on any available advice from the Department, parents and carers, health practitioners, and other authorities (such as DFFH or Victoria Police) and may include referral to wellbeing professionals, development of a safety plan, student support group meetings, and, for student-to-student incidents, behaviour management and support measures.

## 5. Recordkeeping

The Principal or Assistant Principal will ensure that:

- detailed notes of the incident, disclosure, allegation, or suspicion are taken using the [Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: Template](#) or the [Responding to Student Sexual Offending: template](#) including, where possible, by the staff member or volunteer who reported the incident, disclosure, or suspicion to them

- detailed notes are taken of any immediate or ongoing action taken by the school to respond to the incident, disclosure, allegation, or suspicion
- all notes and other records relating to the incident, disclosure, allegation, or suspicion, including the schools immediate and ongoing actions, are stored securely in a locked filing cabinet in the administration office. Digital records will be stored in a confidential section of Compass only accessible to the Leadership team.

### **For school visitors and school community members**

All community members aged 18 years or over have legal obligations relating to reporting child abuse – refer to **Appendix A** for detailed information.

Any person can make a report to DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection. For contact details, refer to the [Four Critical Actions](#).

Members of the community do not have to inform the school if they are making a disclosure to DFFH Child Protection or the Victoria Police. However, where a community member is concerned about the safety of a child or children at the school, the community member should report this concern to the principal so that appropriate steps to support the student can be taken.

### **Additional requirements for all staff**

All staff play a significant role in supporting student safety and wellbeing and have a duty of care to take reasonable steps to prevent reasonably foreseeable harm to students.

Fulfilling the roles and responsibilities in the above procedure does not displace or discharge any other obligations that arise if a person reasonably believes that a child is at risk of child abuse. This means that if, after following the actions outlined in the procedure, a staff member reasonably believes that a child remains at risk of abuse, they must take the following steps:

- if they are concerned that the school has not taken reasonable steps to prevent or reduce the risk, raise these concerns with the principal in the first instance, and escalate to the regional office if they remain unsatisfied.
- report the matter to the relevant authorities where they are unable to confirm that the information has been reported by another staff member.

Staff must refer to Appendix A for further information on their obligations relating to reporting to authorities.

### **Communication**

This policy will be communicated to our school community in the following ways:

- Available publicly on our school's website
- Included in staff induction processes and annual staff training
- Included in volunteer induction processes and training for relevant volunteers
- Discussed at annual staff briefings or meetings
- Included in staff handbook or manual
- Hard copy available from school administration upon request

### **Further information and resources**

The following Department of Education policies and guidance are relevant to this policy:

- [Child Safe Standards](#)
- [Protecting Children – Reporting and Other Legal Obligations](#)
- [Managing and Reporting School Incidents](#)
- [Reportable Conduct](#)
- [Restraint and Seclusion](#)
- [Identify child abuse](#)
- [Report child abuse in schools \(including four critical actions\)](#)
- [Identify and respond to student sexual offending](#)

The following school policies are also relevant to this policy:

- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Statement of Values and School Philosophy
- Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy
- Volunteer Policy
- Duty of Care Policy
- Inclusion and Diversity Policy

### Policy review and approval

Policy last reviewed	June 2023
Consultation	Consultation will take place with student representative groups, parent groups, school council and staff during Terms 1 and 2, 2024
Approved by	Principal
Next scheduled review date	June 2024- to ensure ongoing relevance and continuous improvement, this policy will be reviewed every 2 years thereafter.