

Procedure for responding and reporting incidents, disclosures and suspicions of abuse

If a child or young person discloses an incident of abuse to you:

YOU MUST TAKE ACTION

As an Organisation 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).
- You **must** use the Incident Report Template to keep clear and comprehensive notes

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

LISTEN

- ❖ Move to a suitable environment, free of distractions
- ❖ Be calm and patient – allow the child or young person to be heard
- ❖ Let the child or young person use their own words – avoid asking leading questions
- ❖ Avoid ‘quizzing’ the child or young person about the details of the abuse
- ❖ Listen supportively

REASSURE

- ❖ Reassure the child or young person that it is ok that they have told you what’s been happening
- ❖ Address any concerns about the child or young person’s safety (apply first aid if appropriate, Refer to Action 1)
- ❖ Reassure the child or young person that he or she is not at fault

RESPECT

- ❖ Respect that the child or young person may only reveal some details
- ❖ Acknowledge the child or young person’s bravery and strength
- ❖ Avoid making promises you can’t keep,
- ❖ Explain to the child or young person that in order to keep them safe you will need to report their experience with an appropriate person



- As soon as possible after the disclosure, seek support from the Child Safety Officers, Deputy CEO or CEO to report the disclosure (See Action 2 below, Reporting To Authorities)
- Record the information using the child's words on the Incident Report Form, ensure the disclosure is recorded accurately, and that the Incident Report Form is submitted to the CEO

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
- identify a contact person in your organisation for future liaison with Police.
- Where necessary you may also need to maintain the integrity of the potential crime scene and preserve evidence.
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ACTION 2: REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES

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.

IF THE SOURCE OF SUSPECTED ABUSE IS FROM WITHIN FOUNDATION LEARNING CENTRE

Refer to procedure for Responding and Reporting incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Abuse involving staff, volunteers and participants of Foundation Learning Centre.

IF THE SOURCE OF SUSPECTED ABUSE IS FROM 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:

Child Safety Officers, Deputy CEO or CEO



ACTION 3: CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

The relevant staff member **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/carers (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 parents/carers 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).

ACTION 4: PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

Foundation Learning Centre will provide support for children or young people impacted by abuse. This may include the development of a **Student Support Plan** developed in consultation with Student Welfare Staff or Professionals.

Strategies may include development of a safety plan, direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals.

Staff involved in the incident will receive debriefing and ongoing support as required. If it is deemed necessary, the staff member can access external support or counselling.

All staff 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.

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 (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support), or to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police.

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

www.dhs.vic.gov.au

VICTORIA POLICE

000 for an emergency or contact your local police station

If a parent/carer says their child has been abused in your organisation or raises a concern:

- Advise the parent/carer that you are required to follow the procedure for responding and reporting incidents, disclosures and suspicions of abuse involving staff, volunteers or participants of Foundation Learning Centre.
- Ask about the wellbeing of the child.
- Allow the parent/carer to talk through the incident in their own words.
- Advise the parent/carer that you will record the information
- Explain to them the information will need to be reported to authorities and others, such as the Child Safety Officers, Deputy CEO or CEO, the police or child protection.
- Provide them with an incident report form to complete, or complete it together.
- Ensure the report is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely.

Legal Responsibilities

While the Child Safe Standards focus on organisations, every adult who reasonably believes that a child has been abused, whether in their organisation or not, has an obligation to report that belief to authorities.

The **failure to disclose** 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).

Related Documents

Foundation Learning Centre Child Safe Policy

Foundation Learning Centre Staff and Volunteer Code of Conduct

Procedure for reporting suspected child abuse within Foundation Learning Centre