



## Sherbourne PS Child Safe Reporting Policy and Process - When an Allegation of Child Abuse Is Made

### **Purpose:**

Sherbourne Primary School has clear expectations for staff and volunteers in making a report about a child or young person who may be in need of protection. Immediate action should include reporting their concerns to the DHHS Child Protection or another appropriate agency and notifying the principal or a member of the school leadership team of their concerns and the reasons for those concerns. The school will take action to respond to a complaint.

The school's Child Safe policy and procedures for reporting a child safety concern or complaint can be found on the website or in the school office.

### **Aim:**

To ensure school staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities in protecting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and are able to:

- understand their various legal obligations to report and take other reasonable steps to discharge the duty of care that may be owed to the child or young person
- identify indicators that a child or young person has been, is being, or is at risk of being abused
- make a report about a child or young person who has been, is being, or is at risk of being abused.

### **Implementation**

This process and responsibility will be refreshed annually with all staff and School Council.

Protect resources will be displayed prominently in our environment including every classroom – 4 Critical Actions for Schools.

### **Process:**

#### **WHAT TO DO WHEN AN ALLEGATION OF CHILD ABUSE IS MADE**

The child safe standards require schools to have processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse.

#### **If a child discloses an incident of abuse to you:**

- Try and separate them from other children discreetly and listen to them carefully.
- Let the child use their own words to explain what has occurred.
- Reassure the child that you take what they are saying seriously, and it is not their fault and that they are doing the right thing.
- Explain to them that this information may need to be shared with others, such as with their parent/carer, specific people in your organisation, or the police.
- Do not make promises to the child such as promising not to tell anyone about the incident, except that you will do your best to keep them safe.
- Do not leave the child in a distressed state. If they seem at ease in your company, stay with them.
- Provide them with an incident report form to complete, or complete it together, if you think the child is able to do this.

- As soon as possible after the disclosure, record the information using the child's words and report the disclosure to your manager or your organisation's child safety officer, our Principal, police or child protection.
- Ensure the disclosure is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely.

**If a parent/carer says their child has been abused in our school or raises a concern:**

- Explain that our school has processes to ensure all abuse allegations are taken very seriously.
- 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 take notes during the discussion to capture all details.
- Explain to them the information may need to be repeated to authorities or others, such as the school's leadership or Child Safety Officer, the police or child protection.
- Do not make promises at this early stage, except that you will do your best to keep the child safe.
- Provide them with an incident report form to complete, or complete it together.
- Ask them what action they would like to take and advise them of what the immediate next steps will be.
- Ensure the report is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely.

Some people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds may face barriers in reporting allegations of abuse. For example, people from some cultures may experience anxiety when talking with police, and communicating in English may be a barrier for some. We need to be sensitive to these issues and meet people's needs where possible, such as having an interpreter present (who could be a friend or family member).

If an allegation of abuse involves an Aboriginal child, you will need to ensure a culturally appropriate response. A way to help ensure this could include engaging with parents of Aboriginal children, local Aboriginal communities or an Aboriginal community controlled organisations to review policies and procedures.

Some children with a disability may experience barriers disclosing an incident. For example, children with hearing or cognitive impairments may need support to help them explain the incident, including through sign language interpreters.

If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse **phone 000**.

**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).

While failure to disclose only covers child sexual abuse, all adults should report other forms of child abuse to authorities. Failure to disclose does not change mandatory reporting responsibilities.

**Mandatory reporters** (doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers (including early childhood teachers), principals and police) must report to child protection if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse.

The **failure to protect** criminal offence (commenced on 1 July 2015) applies where there is a substantial risk that a child under the age of 16 under the care, supervision or authority of a relevant organisation will become a victim of a sexual offence committed by an adult associated with that organisation. A person in a position of authority in the organisation will commit the offence if they know of the risk of abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently failed to do so.

**Related Policies:**

**This policy and process is to be read in conjunction with**

Sherbourne PS Mandatory Reporting policy.

Sherbourne PS Child Safe Policy and Statement of Commitment

Sherbourne PS Child Safe Code of Conduct.

Sherbourne PS Child Safe processes.

This document was endorsed by School Council	September 2018
Due for review:	September 2019

**References**

DET Protect Children website,

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/childprotection/Pages/default.aspx>

Protect resources including 4 Critical Actions.