



Responding to and reporting allegations of suspected child abuse Policy and Procedures

Principle

This policy has been developed to ensure that Ozford appropriately responds to and reports allegations of suspected child abuse. Ozford has zero tolerance to child abuse and is committed to the protection and wellbeing of all children in its school environment.

This policy is inclusive of the needs of all children, particularly students who are vulnerable due to age, family circumstances, abilities, or indigenous, cultural or linguistic background. This policy addresses the requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards and the Ministerial Order No. 870 - Child Safe Standards - Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools. This policy also addresses the legal obligations in relation to reporting suspected sexual child abuse. Failing to meet these obligations can constitute a criminal offence, including a:

- failure to disclose a sexual offence
- failure to protect a child (where it is known that a person associated with their organisation poses a substantial risk of sexually abusing children).

Scope

These procedures apply to allegations or disclosures of child abuse by or in relation to a child, school staff member, volunteer, contractor, parent or any other persons while connected to a school environment.

These procedures must be applied in any circumstance where there is an incident, allegation or a suspicion is formed that a student is victim to a student sexual offence and/or a student has committed a sexual offence. This includes suspected offences that have taken place outside of school grounds and hours.

All school staff members have a moral and legal obligation and a Duty of Care to protect any child under their care from foreseeable harm (not just staff who are classified as mandatory reporters). School staff must respond to any reasonable suspicion that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused.

These procedures do not replace any responsibilities under Mandatory reporting or Duty of Care Obligations and should be read in conjunction with those Ozford policy and procedures.

1. What is Child abuse?

There are many indicators of child abuse and neglect. The presence of a single indicator, or even several indicators, does not prove that abuse or neglect has occurred. However, the repeated occurrence of an indicator, or the occurrence of several indicators together, should alert teachers to the possibility of child abuse and neglect.

1.1 Physical violence

Physical violence occurs when a child suffers or is likely to suffer significant harm from a non-accidental injury or injuries inflicted by another person. Physical violence can be inflicted in many ways, including beating, shaking, burning or use of weapons (such as, belts and paddles).

1.1.1 Possible physical indicators:

- Unexplained bruises
- Burns and/or fractured bones

1.1.2 Possible behavioural indicators:

- Showing wariness or distrust of adults
- Wearing long sleeved clothes on hot days (to hide bruising or other injury)
- Fear of specific people
- Unexplained absences
- Academic problems

1.2 Sexual offences

Sexual offences occur when a person involves the child in sexual activity, or deliberately puts the child in the presence of sexual behaviours that are exploitative or inappropriate to his/her age and development. Child sexual abuse can involve a range of sexual activity including fondling, masturbation, penetration, voyeurism and exhibitionism. It can also include exposure to or exploitation through pornography or prostitution, as well as grooming behaviour.

1.2.1 Possible physical indicators:

- Presence of sexually transmitted diseases
- Pregnancy
- Vaginal or anal bleeding or discharge

1.2.2 Possible behavioural indicators:

- Displaying sexual behaviour or knowledge that is unusual for the child's age
- Difficulty sleeping
- Being withdrawn
- Complaining of headaches or stomach pains
- Fear of specific people
- Showing wariness or distrust of adults
- Displaying aggressive behaviour

1.3 Serious emotional or psychological abuse

Serious emotional or psychological abuse occurs when harm is inflicted on a child through repeated rejection, isolation, or by threats or violence. It can include derogatory name-calling and put-downs, or persistent and deliberate coldness from a person, to the extent where the behaviour of the child is disturbed or their emotional development is at serious risk of being impaired. Serious emotional or psychological abuse could also result from conduct that exploits a child without necessarily being criminal, such as encouraging a child to engage in inappropriate or risky behaviours.

1.3.1 Possible physical indicators:

- Delays in emotional, mental, or even physical development
- Physical signs of self-harming

1.3.2 Possible behavioural indicators:

- Exhibiting low self-esteem
- Exhibiting high anxiety
- Displaying aggressive or demanding behavior
- Being withdrawn, passive and/or tearful
- Self-harming

1.4 Serious neglect

Serious neglect is the continued failure to provide a child with the basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, shelter, hygiene, medical attention or adequate supervision, to the extent that the child's health, safety and/or development is, or is likely to be, jeopardised. Serious neglect can also occur if an adult fails to adequately ensure the safety of a child where the child is exposed to extremely dangerous or life threatening situations.

1.4.1 Possible physical indicators:

- Frequent hunger
- Malnutrition
- Poor hygiene
- Inappropriate clothing

1.4.2 Possible behavioural indicators:

- Stealing food
- Staying at school outside of school hours
- Aggressive behaviour
- Misusing alcohol or drugs
- Academic issues

Call the police on 000 if you have immediate concerns for a child's safety.

2. **Responsibilities**

2.1 Every adult who reasonably believes that a child has been abused, whether within the school environment or not, has an obligation to report that belief to authorities. Fulfilling the roles and responsibilities contained in this 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.

2.2 The following table identifies the roles of those who are responsible for various critical functions involved with these procedures.

Responsible for:	Who is responsible?
Promptly managing the school's response to an allegation or disclosure and ensuring that it is taken seriously.	Primary: Head of Education Programs Alternative 1: Academic Director/Principal Alternative 2: Head of Student Support
Responding appropriately to a child who makes or is affected by an allegation of child abuse.	All staff.
Monitoring school compliance with this procedure.	Academic Director/Principal
Protect any child connected to alleged child abuse until the allegation is resolved.	High School Coordinator Alternative 1: Head of Education Programs Alternative 2: Head of Student Support
Make, secure and retain records	Head of Student Support

3. Procedures

3.1 Responding to an allegation of suspected child abuse

3.1.1 If a child discloses an incident of abuse to you

- Try and separate them from the 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 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/champion,¹ police or child protection.

¹ A child safety officer/champion is a person in your organisation who has knowledge of child safety issues, and could be a point of contact for others who have questions or concerns or want to report an allegation of child abuse. You could consider including child safety officer/champion duties in the person's job description.

- Ensure the disclosure is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely.
- 3.1.2 If a parent/carer says their child has been abused in your organisation or raises a concern
- Explain that your organisation 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 organisation's management 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.
- 3.1.3 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. Staff 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).

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. Advice on communicating with people with a disability can be found on the Department of Health and Human Services website <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-business-and-community/community-involvement/people-with-a-disability-in-the-community/communicate-and-consult-with-people-with-a-disability/communication-with-people-with-disabilities>.

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

3.2 Reporting an allegation of suspected child abuse

- 3.2.1 If a staff member believes a child is at immediate risk of abuse phone 000.
- 3.2.2 If the source of suspected child abuse involves a school staff member, contractor or volunteer, or anyone connected to the school it must be reported to Victoria Police.

- 3.2.3 If the source of suspected child abuse involves a family member or anyone else not connected to the school, you must report to DHHS Child protection. If there is any suspicion of sexual abuse, including grooming, it must also be reported to Victoria Police.
- 3.2.4 In all of the above circumstances, you must also notify the Head of Student Support and the Principal that you have made (or intend to make) a report to the authorities.

3.3 Protection of any child connected to alleged child abuse

- 3.3.1 In order to protect a child from suspected child abuse, the staff member should contact the Head of Student Support who will arrange for suitable counselling and other support. The head of Student Support and the Head of Education Programs will ensure that the child is protected and supported throughout any incident involving a child abuse allegation.

3.4 Records of Allegations or Disclosures of Suspected Child Abuse

- 3.4.1 Whenever any disclosure or allegation of suspected child abuse has been made, the details will need to be appropriately recorded. In the first instance, these could take the form of notes on any form of paper available at the time to the respondent.
- 3.4.2 As soon as practicable, these should be transferred to the **Reporting Record Form**, including in addition to the details of the disclosure or allegation, the school response and action.
- 3.4.3 All records relating to a disclosure or allegation must be retained by Ozford in compliance with its records management procedures.

3.5 Other Resources for staff

- 3.5.1 Staff are encouraged to use the Victorian Department of Education and Training Protect resources. The resources are available at the following link:
- 3.5.2 Reporting Child abuse and neglect:
<https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/reporting-abuse-and-neglect>

Reporting authority	Further services / information	Contact details
Department of Health and Human Services (link is external)	The Child Protection Service is specifically targeted to those children and young people at risk of significant harm. For information about child protection and mandatory	For a list of regional and metropolitan phone numbers: Child Protection Contacts (link is external)

Reporting authority	Further services / information	Contact details
	reporting requirements in Victoria, refer to the department's Child Protection (link is external) webpage.	<p>After hours child protection emergency service</p> <p>Ph: 13 12 78</p>

CASA Forum: <https://www.casa.org.au/assets/Documents/mandatory-reporting.pdf>



OZFORD

College

310 King Street Melbourne

CRICOS No. 02427A

Registered School No. 2016

Reporting Record Form

Name and ID of student: _____ D.O.B _____

Residential Address: _____

Name of Staff Member: _____ Class: _____

Involvement with the child: _____

Time, date and place of incident: _____

Description of incident/injury and/or behaviour observed:

Staff Member's Reason for Believing that the Injury or Behaviour is the Result of Abuse or Neglect:

Action taken by Staff/Principal:

Comments and Date:

Report to High School Co-Ordinator

Report to DHHS Child Protection

Report to Police

Another third party (please specify)

Report made by: _____ on: (DD/MM/YY) _____

Response from DHS:

Name of person who received the report:

Parents/guardian notified (Y/N) If No, provide reason why:

Other action: _____
