



Background

The Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Limited (DOBCEL) Board is committed to:

- zero tolerance of child abuse
- listening to and empowering children and young people
- keeping children and young people safe.

The DOBCEL Board maintains governance oversight of DOBCEL schools. DOBCEL maintains a management arm to ensure that DOBCEL schools are safe for children and young people and are places where children and young people can flourish.

The DOBCEL Board is committed to supporting schools to take a proactive role in the care, wellbeing and protection of children and young people.

The Board has particular responsibilities for the safeguarding of children and young people as required by Ministerial Order 1359: Implementing the Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools and School Boarding Premises. This ministerial order places accountability for managing the risk of child abuse with the Board. Consistent with MO 1359, the Board requires schools governed by DOBCEL to have appropriate arrangements to regulate the conduct and decisions of school staff for the benefit of students. These arrangements include implementing and complying with the DOBCEL child safe policies and having clear and comprehensive procedures and reporting mechanisms. The objective for the Board and the wider school community is to be confident in the capacity of schools to make and implement appropriate decisions, with child safety as the guiding principle.

Becoming Aware of Student Sexual Offending

There are four main ways in which a school staff member may become aware that a child is a victim of a student sexual offending and/or a student has engaged in student sexual offending:

1. Witnessing an incident

If a school staff member witnesses an incident where they believe a child has been subjected to, or may be at risk of, abuse, including exposure to family violence, immediate action must be taken to protect the safety of the child or children involved (Action 1: Responding to an Emergency). Next, they must refer to Action 2: Reporting to Authorities. Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Student Sexual Offending.

2. Forming a suspicion or reasonable belief

All suspicions that a child is a victim of a student sexual offending and/or a student has engaged in student sexual offending must be taken seriously. This includes an offence that is suspected to have occurred outside of school premises and/or outside school hours. If a suspicion is formed that a student is victim of student sexual offending and/or a student has committed student sexual offending, action must be taken,

even if the student sexual offending has not been directly witnessed. In some circumstances, it may be surmised that a student's sexual behaviour is indicative of their own experience of child abuse. Physical or behavioural signs may be the only indication that a child is impacted by abuse. If reasonable belief can be formed that a student is engaged in student sexual offending and may have also been impacted by child abuse the following must be observed :[Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Student Sexual Offending](#) AND the [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse](#)

3. Receiving a disclosure about or from a current student if:

- a current student discloses that they have been, or are in danger of becoming a victim of student sexual offending, or
- a person (child or adult) discloses that they believe a current student has been, or is at risk of being a victim of student sexual offending, or
- a person (child or adult), discloses that they believe that a current student has engaged, or is at risk of engaging in student sexual offending, the disclosure must be treated seriously, and immediate action taken by following these [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Student Sexual Offending](#).

4. Receiving a disclosure about or from a former student

- If disclosure is received that a former student of the school is a victim of historical student sexual offending, action must be taken.
- If any student involved in the alleged historical student sexual offending is currently of school age and attending a Victorian school the following must be observed: [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Student Sexual Offending](#).
- If all impacted students are no longer of school age or attending a Victorian school, action must be taken. Contact Victoria Police to report the matter and advise DOBCEL Manager Safeguarding and Standards.

Notes and records

School staff members are to keep clear and comprehensive notes relating to incidents, disclosures and allegations of Student Sexual Offending using [Protect: Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: A Template for all Victorian Schools](#).

Even if a school staff member decides not to make a report, they must still accurately document their notes relating to the incident, disclosure or allegation of Student Sexual Offending *Protect: Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: A Template for all Victorian Schools*.

Notes and records must be kept securely on school grounds and must not be destroyed as they may be needed at a later time.

Disclosures

It is the role of school staff members to reassure and support a child or young person who makes a disclosure of student sexual offending. However, school staff members should never promise to keep any disclosures confidential as all disclosures of abuse must be reported.

The role of school staff remains the same if disclosures are made from a parent/carer or a sibling, or if disclosures involve family violence.

Strategies on how to manage a disclosure, can be found in [PROTECT: Identifying and Responding to Student Sexual Offending](#)

There are Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Student Sexual Offending which must be taken when responding to and reporting a child protection incident, disclosure or suspicion:

1. Responding to an Emergency
2. Reporting to Authorities/Referring to Services
3. Contacting Parents/Carers
4. Providing Ongoing Support.

Critical Action 1: Responding to an Emergency

If there is no risk of immediate harm Critical Action 2 is to be observed

If a child is at immediate risk of harm their safety must be ensured by:

- separating alleged victims and others involved, ensuring that if the parties involved are all present at the school, they are supervised separately by a school staff member
- 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.

If the alleged student sexual offending has occurred at the school, school staff should also ensure that reasonable steps are taken to preserve the environment, the clothing and other items and to prevent any potential witnesses (including school staff members, volunteers and contractors) from discussing the incident until Victoria Police or relevant authorities arrive on the premises.

Critical Action 2: Reporting to Authorities

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed incidents, suspicions, and disclosures of student sexual offending must be reported to:

- **VICTORIA POLICE:** All instances on **000**
- **DFFH Child Protection,** If it is believed that:
 - the victim's parent/carers are unable or unwilling to protect the child
 - the student who is alleged to have engaged in the student sexual offending is:
 - aged over 10 and under 15 years and may need therapeutic treatment to address these behaviours
 - may be displaying physical and behavioural indicators of being the victim of child abuse.

- **Internally**

Internal reports are to be made to:

- the Principal
- DOBCEL Manager Safeguarding and Standards
- DOBCEL Executive Director

A contact person at the school must be nominated for future liaison with Victoria Police and/or Child Protection and advice sought about contacting parents/carers (see **Action 3**)

- [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse](#) contains further guidance in reporting to authorities.

Critical Action 3: Contacting parents/carers

The Principal **must** consult with **Victoria Police** or **DFFH Child Protection** to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers. They may advise:

- **not to contact** the parents/carers (e.g. in circumstances where contacting the parents/carers is likely to affect adversely a Victoria Police investigation or where the student is a mature minor and has requested that their parent/carer not be notified).
- **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).

Critical Action 4: Providing continued support

The school **must** provide support for students who are victims of a student sexual offence AND students who have engaged in a sexual offence. This is an essential part of duty of care requirements.

This support should include the development of a student support plan in consultation with wellbeing professionals and which outlines support strategies.

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

Responsible Directorate member	Deputy Director Stewardship
Document Owner	Manager Safeguarding and Standards
Assigned Board Committee	Children and Young People Wellbeing and Safeguarding
Approval Date	February 2023
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FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Responding to Student Sexual Offending



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 4 critical actions as soon as you witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a suspicion that a student is a victim of a sexual offence and/or a student has engaged in sexual offending.
- You must use the Responding to Student Sexual Offending template to keep clear and comprehensive notes.

1 IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO AN INCIDENT

- 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

- As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed you must report incidents, suspicions and disclosures of student sexual offending as soon as possible.
- VICTORIA POLICE**
All instances on 000
- DHHS CHILD PROTECTION**
If you believe that:
 - the victim's parent/careers are unable or unwilling to protect the child
 - the student who is alleged to have engaged in the student sexual offending is:
 - aged over 10 and under 15 years and may be in need of therapeutic treatment to address these behaviours
 - may be displaying physical and behavioural indicators of being the victim of child abuse*.
- You must identify a contact person at the school for future liaison with Victoria Police and/or Child Protection and seek advice about contacting parents/careers (see Action 3).

*See the Four Critical Steps for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse for further guidance in these circumstances.

3 CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

- Your Principal must consult with Victoria Police or DHHS Child Protection to determine what information to be shared with parents/careers of all impacted students. They may advise:
 - not to contact the parents/careers (eg. in circumstances where contacting the parents/careers is likely to adversely affect a Victoria Police investigation or where a student has disclosed that their parent/carer not be notified)
 - to contact the parents/careers and provide agreed information (this may be done as part of the incident, disclosure or support).

- INTERNALLY**
ALSO report internally to:
 - School Principal and/or leadership team (all instances)
 - Government Schools: DET Security Services Unit
 - Catholic Schools: Diocesan education office

4 PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

- Your school must provide support for students who are victim to a student sexual offence AND students who have engaged in a sexual offence. This is an essential part of your duty of care requirements.
- This support should include the development of a Student Support Plan in consultation with wellbeing professionals, outlining support strategies.
- Strategies may include the development of a safety plan, direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals.

CONTACT

DHHS CHILD PROTECTION AREA North Division 1800 664 977 South Division 1800 665 796 East Division 1800 360 391 West Division (toll) 1800 075 599 West Division (toll) 1800 664 977	CHILD FIRST www.dhs.vic.gov.au VICTORIA POLICE 000 or contact your local police station DET SECURITY SERVICES UNIT (03) 9639 6286	EMPLOYEE CONDUCT BRANCH (03) 9637 2595 DIOCESAN OFFICE Melbourne (03) 9267 0228 Ballarat (03) 5337 7185 Sale (03) 5622 0600 Sandhurst (03) 5443 2377
AFTER HOURS After hours, weekends, public holidays: 13 1278	STUDENT INCIDENT AND RECOVERY UNIT (03) 9851 3622	INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS VICTORIA (03) 9825 7200

Hyperlink: [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Student Sexual Offending](#)

FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

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 use their safety by:

- separating alleged victims and others involved
- administering first aid
- calling 000 for urgent medical and/or police assistance to respond to the incident
- 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 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 FAMILY OR COMMUNITY

DHHS CHILD PROTECTION

You must report to DHHS Child Protection if a child is considered to be:

- at risk of being harmed from child abuse
- harmed and the harm has had, or is likely to have, a significant effect on the child's safety, stability or development.

VICTORIA POLICE

You must also report 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 leadership team
 - Diocesan education office

WITHIN THE SCHOOL

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:

- School principal and/or leadership team
- Employees, Contact Branch
- DET Security Services Unit.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

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

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

- School principal and/or leadership team
- School principal and/or leadership team
- DET Security Services Unit.
- Young People on 1300 762 976.

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**
 - Employee Conduct Branch
 - Young People on 1300 762 976.

3 CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

Your principal must consult with DHHS Child Protection if the information can be shared with parents/carers. They may advise:

- not to contact the parent/carer (e.g. in circumstances where the parent/carer is alleged to have engaged in child abuse and does not wish for their name to be disclosed)
- to contact the parent/carer and provide agreed information to the parent/carer (preferably on the same day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion)
- how to communicate with the parent/carer (e.g. via email or consideration for their safety).

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 FIRST (the Orange Line)
- are open to receiving support
- DHHS Child Protection
- Victorian Police

4 PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

Your school must provide support for the victim/s and the perpetrator/s. This should include the development of a Student Support Plan in consultation with wellbeing professionals.

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

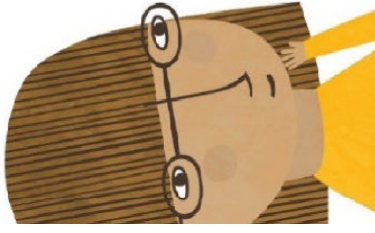
You must follow the Four Critical Actions when you have been notified of a further instance or risk of abuse. This includes reporting new information to authorities.

YOU MUST TAKE ACTION

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

- You must act if you form a suspicion/credible belief, even if you are unsure of the facts. You must act if you receive information from a reasonable belief* that a child has, or is at risk of being abused.
- *A reasonable belief is a deliberately low threshold. This enables authorities to investigate and take action.

It is strongly recommended that you use the Responding to Suspected Child Abuse template to assign clear roles and responsibilities to staff. You make a decision not to report.



Hyperlink: [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse](#)

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