



DOBCEL PROTECT: Identifying and Responding to Student Sexual Offending

Reviewed: September 2020

Ratified: January 2021

Next Review: 2022

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 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 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 take immediate action 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**
- **DHHS 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 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 **DHHS 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.

FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Responding to Student Sexual Offending

PROTECT

THE EDUCATION STATE

VICTORIA
GOVERNMENT

CGCV
CHILD PROTECTION COMMUNITY OF VICTORIA



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 critical actions as soon as you witness an incident, escalate 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 disclosure 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/carer 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*.

INTERNALLY

ALSO report internally to:

- School Principal and/or leadership team (all instances)
- Government Schools: DET Security Services Unit
- Catholic Schools: Diocesan education office

3 CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

Your Principal must consult with Victoria Police or DHHS Child Protection to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers of all impacted students. They may advise:

- not to contact the parents/carer (eg. in circumstances where contacting the parents/carer is likely to adversely affect 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/carer and provide agreed information (this must be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion).

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 1300 664 977
- South Division 1300 655 795
- East Division 1300 360 391
- West Division (Rural) 1800 075 599
- West Division (Metro) 1300 664 977

AFTER HOURS

After hours, weekends, public holidays 13 1278

CHILD FIRST

www.dhhs.vic.gov.au

VICTORIA POLICE

000 or contact your local police station

DET SECURITY SERVICES UNIT

(03) 9589 6266

STUDENT INCIDENT AND RECOVERY UNIT

(03) 9851 3622

EMPLOYEE CONDUCT BRANCH

(03) 9877 2666

DIOCESAN OFFICE

Melbourne (03) 9287 0228

Ballarat (03) 5337 7195

Sale (03) 5622 6600

Sandhurst (03) 5443 2377

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS VICTORIA

(03) 98257200



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

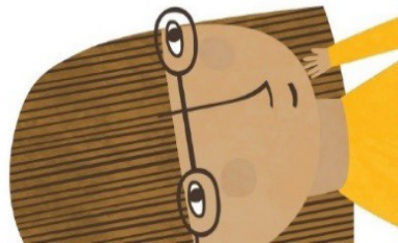
1 RESPONDING TO AN EMERGENCY

If there is no risk of immediate harm go to **Action 2**.

If a child is at immediate risk of harm you **must** ensure their safety by:

- separating alleged victims and others involved
- calling **000 for medical aid** 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 / REFERRING TO SERVICES

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed you **must** report all suspected child abuse to the police. 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 SCHOOL

VICTORIA POLICE
You **must** report all instances of suspected child abuse involving a school principal and/or leadership team volunteer or visitor to Victoria Police.

You **must** also report **internally** to:

- GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**
 - School principal and/or leadership team
 - Employee Conduct Branch
 - DET Security Services Unit.
- CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**
 - School principal and/or leadership team
 - Diocesan education office.

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

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**
 - Commission for Children and Young People on **1300 762 978**.

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 or has been harmed
- likely to be harmed in the future, on the child's safety, stability or development.

VICTORIA POLICE
You **must** also report all instances of suspected child 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 chairperson.

OTHER CONCERNS

If you believe that a child is not subject to abuse, but you still hold **significant concerns** for their wellbeing you **must** refer or seek advice from:

- Child FIRST/The Orange Door (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support)
- DHHS Child Protection
- Victoria Police.

3 CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

Your principal **must** consult with DHHS Child Protection to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers. They may advise:

- not to contact** the parents/carer (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 to be notified)
- to contact** the parents/carer and provide agreed information (this must be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion)
- not to communicate** with parents/carers with consideration for their safety.

4 PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

Your school **must** provide support for the child and family. This should include the development of a **Student Support Plan** in consultation with wellbeing professionals. This is an essential part of your duty of care requirements. Strategies may include development of a support plan for the child and wellbeing professionals and support.

You **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.

YOU MUST TAKE ACTION

You **must** act, by following the Four Critical Actions, as soon as you witness or become aware of suspected child abuse (e.g. if the victim or another person tells you about the abuse), or is at risk of being abused.

*A reasonable belief is a deliberately low threshold. This enables authorities to investigate and 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 or reasonable belief, even if you are unsure if you have witnessed or become aware of suspected child abuse (e.g. if the victim or another person tells you about the abuse), or is at risk of being abused.

It is strongly recommended that you use the **Responding to Suspected Child Abuse template** to help clear your mind and capture your thoughts and comprehensive notes, even if you make a decision not to report.

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PROTECT

THE EDUCATION STATE

VICTORIA Education and Training

CECV



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