

# CHILD SAFE RESPONSE AND MANDATORY REPORTING PROCEDURE

[mentonegirls.vic.edu.au](http://mentonegirls.vic.edu.au)



EST. 1899

MENTONE GIRLS'  
GRAMMAR

Record Number	PRO-CSF-003-4		
Date Reviewed	22 November 2022	Date Approved	15 February 2023
Procedure Owner	Principal	Procedure Approver	School Council
Review frequency	<p>This procedure is reviewed at least every two years or more frequently if there is a major change to the Child Safe Framework. The review will include input from students, parents/guardians and the school community.</p> <p>This procedure is required to be approved by the Governance Risk and Compliance Committee and School Council.</p>		
Scope	This procedure applies to all Schools activities, physical and online school environment, both on and off campus and to School Council, staff, volunteers and contractors.		
Consultation	<p>Consultation on this policy is mandatory.</p> <p>Consultation process is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School Council approves the Child Safety Framework for consultation</li> <li>• Community Consultation via the School Website</li> <li>• Parent Group consultation through newsletter, mConnect communication and parent evenings</li> <li>• Student Representative Groups</li> <li>• Final Council approval</li> </ul>		
Scope determination	Public		
Related Policy and Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Safety Policy</li> <li>• Child Safety Code of Conduct</li> <li>• Complaints Handling and Resolution Policy</li> <li>• Privacy Policy</li> <li>• Ministerial Order No. 1359 – Implementing the Child Safe Standards – Managing the risk of child abuse in schools and school boarding premises</li> <li>• Child Safety and Wellbeing Act 2005 (Vic)</li> <li>• Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic) – Mandatory Reporting</li> <li>• Education and Training Reform Act 2006</li> </ul>		
Policy Management	This policy is administered by the Risk and Compliance Manager.		

## Revision History

#	Date	Revision Description	Approval
PRO-CSF-003	12 July 2022	Draft updated to reflect the changes to the new Child Safe Standards that apply from 1 July 2022	
PRO-CSF-003-1	28 August 2022	Review by RCM post RMC Review	
PRO-CSF-003-2 (Legal)	2 November 2022	Legal review conducted by Steven Troeth, Gadens	

PRO-CSF-003-3	22 November	Final Draft review by Governance Risk and Compliance Committee	
PRO-CFS-003-4	15 February 2023	School Council approval for consultation	School Council

### **Content warning**

This content may contain material that is confronting and disturbing, and which may cause sadness or distress. Further support for survivors of past abuse, violence or childhood trauma is available.

- [Find and Connect Support Services](#) (free call 9am-5pm, Monday-Friday) **1800 161 109**
- [Lifeline 13 11 14](#)
- [CASA \(Victorian Centres Against Sexual Assault\)](#) and [Sexual Assault Crisis Line](#) (free call 5pm - 9am, Monday to Friday and weekends) **1800 806 292**

# Statement of Commitment

---



## Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand this policy, please contact the Head of Senior or Head of Junior School.

*Mentone Girls' Grammar acknowledges the Boon Wurrung/Bunurong People of the South-Eastern Kulin Nations for their connection to land, sea and community, and for their custodianship of the land on which we live, learn and work. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people today.*

Mentone Girls' Grammar (MGG) is a child safe organisation and has zero tolerance for child abuse. MGG is committed to providing a child safe environment for all children which ensures their safety, health and wellbeing. The School will act promptly and sensitively when informed of a concern, an allegation or disclosure of child abuse, neglect, inappropriate behaviour or concern.

## Purpose

These procedures establish simple and accessible protocols for any students, all staff, volunteers, contractors, parents and members of the community to identify different types of harm or neglect, understand their specific role in child safeguarding concerns and report a child safety concern internally to the Child Safety Champions and externally to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (Child Protection), the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP), or the Police, depending on the allegation or disclosure made. These procedures form part of the MGGs Child Safe Framework and should be read in conjunction with the Child Safety Policy and Child Safety Code of Conduct.

These procedures apply to child safety concerns, allegations or disclosures made by or in relation to a child or a young person, staff member, visitors or other persons while connected to the school environment. As long as reports are made in good faith:

- It does not constitute unprofessional conduct or a breach of professional ethics on the part of the reporter
- The reporter cannot be held legally liable in respect of the report

## Child-focused lens

MGG approaches its reporting responsibilities through a child-focused lens, prioritizing the rights of children and young people. The following principles govern the approach:

- A child or young person making a disclosure is always to be believed
- The best interest of children and young people are paramount
- Our complaints handling and reporting systems are accessible and recognize the diverse needs of children and young people, and their families; and
- Complaints are dealt with thoroughly and promptly.

## Accessibility

These procedures are publicly accessible and available on the MGG website. It is also made available to staff, students, volunteers, contractors, parents/carers and the wider School community through the School newsletters, electronic communication,, child safe recruitment and contractor onboarding, the intranet and by request. Age-appropriate reporting procedures for students will be further developed and made available through the pastoral care program.

## What is Child Abuse

Relevant parties must understand the definitions of child abuse and be able to act on this knowledge and report to the relevant authority where required.

Child abuse, including child harm and neglect, are commonly divided into the following sub-categories:

- Sexual offences (eg. sexual assault - touching another person if the touching is sexual and the other person does not consent)
- Physical violence (eg. kicking, scalding, or threatening a child)
- Serious emotional or psychological harm(eg. threatening the child with severe punishment)
- Serious neglect (eg. failing to provide the child with food, shelter)
- Grooming (when a person over the age of 18 years communicates with a child under the age of 16 years, or with a person under whose care the child is, with the intention of facilitating the child's engagement, or involvement, in a sexual offence)
- Family violence (eg. Child exposed to family violence)

## Indicators of Child Abuse

As a school staff member, it is critical to be able to recognise the physical or behavioural signs of child abuse. In many circumstances, they may be the only indication that a child or young person is subject to abuse. Children and young people who have been, or may be, experiencing abuse may show physical signs, behavioral and emotional changes, and parent or care-giver signs. Please refer to Section Indicators of Child Abuse – in detail for further guidance.

## Victorian Child Safe Standards

MGG procedure reflects the eleven Victorian Child Safe Standards in accordance with Ministerial Order No. 1359 – Implementing the Child Safe Standards. Compliance with these standards as required by the Ministerial Order aim to promote the safety of children, prevent child abuse and ensure schools have effective processes in place to respond to and report all allegations of abuse. This procedure aims to proactively mitigate child safety risks by empowering staff, volunteers, contractors and third-party providers to respond appropriately to disclosures and report allegations and suspicions of child abuse to the relevant authorities.

## Record Keeping

All reports of alleged child abuse or harm, or risk thereof, must be recorded in the form of an incident report. Places, times, dates, names, observable behaviours or evidence of harm, details and action taken are to be recorded. Reports will be securely stored on Synergetic in accordance with the Privacy Policy and Records Keeping requirements.

# Response Process for a Child Safe Concern or Incident

Victoria's PROTECT *Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse* (PROTECT [Four Critical Actions](#)) and PROTECT *Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Student Sexual Offending* ([Four Critical Actions: Student Sexual Offending](#)), sets out the four actions to take to respond to child abuse.

Incident Report templates for responding to suspected child abuse and student sexual offending are located in the Child Safe Response and Reporting Toolkit available on mConnect: Policies and Procedures and must be referred to by staff, volunteers and contractors where appropriate.

## Four Critical Actions

Staff, volunteers, contractors and third-party providers must understand the signs of child abuse, child harm and neglect and how to respond to a concern, allegation or a disclosure.

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 or young person 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).

### ACTION 1: Responding to an Emergency (risk of immediate harm)

- I. If a child is at immediate risk of harm, you must ensure their safety by:
  - separating alleged victims and others involved administering first aid if safe to do so
  - 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 maintain the integrity of a potential crime scene and preserve evidence

#### **GUIDANCE: Preserving evidence**

*Where an incident of suspected child abuse occurs at the school, you may need to take action to preserve any items that may amount to evidence of the abuse. You should consider whether any of the following steps are required:*

Environment	Do not clean up the area and preserve the sites where the alleged incidents occurred. Cordon off the relevant area, room or building and take reasonable steps to ensure that no one enters these areas.
Clothing	If sexual or physical abuse is suspected you may also need to ensure that the person who has allegedly committed the abuse and the child who has allegedly been abused remain in their clothing and, if this is not possible, ensure that the clothes are not washed, are handled as little as possible, and stored in a sealable bag.

Other physical items	If there are any other items that may amount to evidence (for example: weapons, bedding, condoms), try and ensure that these things remain untouched.
Potential witnesses	<p>Reasonable precautions must be taken to prevent discussion of the incident between those involved in the alleged incident (including any other children or young person who may have witnessed the incident). If the incident involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• two or more students: a staff member should be allocated to remain with each student involved in separate rooms</li> <li>• a staff member: they should be asked to remain with a member of the school's leadership team and be instructed not to discuss the incident with any staff, students, carers or family members.</li> </ul>

---

## ACTION 2: Report to authorities – YOU MUST ACT

---

Record Keeping Requirement: use the [Responding to Suspected Child Abuse Template](#) to document your response.

You must report all suspicions, incidents, and disclosures of child abuse immediately. Failure to report suspected or known child abuse may constitute a breach of your duty of care towards a student if you fail to take reasonable steps to act and may amount to a criminal offence.

**!** Reporting internally alone does not mean that your mandatory reporting obligations have been met. The staff member who has formed a reasonable belief regarding child abuse or neglect must consider whether they also have a mandatory reporting obligation to report to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Child Protection, or Victoria Police if the child is in immediate risk of harm, regardless of the approval of the Principal. For detailed instructions refer to section: Detailed Obligation of Mandatory Reporting.

### HOW TO REPORT

#### WITHIN THE SCHOOL:

- Any form of suspected child abuse by a person within the school is to be reported to the Victoria Police (call on 000 if there is an urgency or immediate need for police attendance).
- For suspected sexual abuse the Victorian Police will request that you notify the Southern Metropolitan Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Team (SOCIT) in Bayside on 03 8530 5203.
- Child Protection Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Child Protection Crisis Line by telephone on 1300 655 795 (Southern Division) or 13 12 78 (After Hours).
- Seek advice about contacting parents or carers from the Victoria Police.
- Report all instances of suspected child abuse internally to the Child Safe Champion and/or the Principal.
- All instances of suspected child abuse that may amount to 'reportable conduct' must be reported to the Commission for Children and Young People on 1300 782 978.

#### WITHIN FAMILY OR COMMUNITY:

- For immediate concerns about the suspected safety of a child, contact the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Child Protection Crisis Line by telephone on 1300 655 795 (Southern Division) or 13 12 78 (After Hours).
- Consider whether the child is:
  - in need of protection due to 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
  - and if the child's parents or carers have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from the harm.
- Any suspected sexual abuse including grooming is to be reported to the Victoria Police (call on 000 if there is an urgency or immediate need for police attendance).
- Report all instances of suspected child abuse internally to the Child Safe Champion and/or the Principal.

#### ABUSE RELATING TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

- In addition to the above actions, any form of suspected child abuse must be also reported to the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) on (03) 9637 2806 or via email: [vrqa.schools@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:vrqa.schools@edumail.vic.gov.au).



Refer for further guidance on [Reporting Child Abuse](#) and [support resources for victims of sexual assault](#) to the Victoria Police website-Your Safety-Sexual Offences and Child Abuse.

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 Door (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support); DHHS Child Protection; or Victoria Police. For further advice refer to [Responding to other concerns about the wellbeing of a child](#).

---

## Report Student-to-Student Sexual Offending

---

In the context of student-to-student offending, school staff have a duty of care to support all students who are impacted by the abuse – this will include the students who were subjected to the abuse, the students who are alleged to have perpetrated the abuse, and any students who witnessed or were otherwise impacted by the abuse.

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed you must report incidents, disclosures and suspicions of student sexual offending as soon as possible.

### HOW TO REPORT

- Victoria Police (all instances) (call on 000 if there is an urgency or immediate need for police attendance)
- Child Protection Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Child Protection Crisis Line by telephone on 1300 655 795 (Southern Division) or 13 12 78 (After Hours) if you believe that:
  - the victim's parents or 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 18 years, is exhibiting sexually abusive behaviours, and may be in need of therapeutic treatment to address these behaviours
  - the student who is alleged to have engaged in the student sexual offending may be displaying physical and behavioural indicators of being the victim of child abuse.
- Report all instances of suspected child abuse internally to the Child Safe Champion and/or the Principal.

### ABUSE RELATING TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

- In addition to the above actions, any form of suspected child abuse must be reported to the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) on (03) 9637 2806 or via email: [vrqa.schools@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:vrqa.schools@edumail.vic.gov.au).

For more information refer to [Identify and respond to student sexual offending](#).

## Students who are victims of a student sexual offence

In consultation with the Victoria Police and DFFH Child Protection (if appropriate), schools:

- must develop a student support plan to determine and document support strategies for students who are the alleged victims and students impacted by student sexual offending to address their wellbeing
- should (where appropriate) convene a student support group to inform planning
- should (where appropriate) consult with the school psychologist/chaplain and wellbeing professionals to support the student.
- should (where appropriate) make referrals into specialised non-school based supports, including CASA who provide expert support for victims of sexual assault.

## **Students who have engaged in student sexual offending**

In consultation with Victoria Police and or DFFH Child Protection, schools:

- must develop and regularly review a student support plan to establish and implement safety and support strategies, including the return to school strategies
- should (where appropriate) convene a student support group to inform the student support plan
- should (where appropriate) engage with wellbeing professionals (including student support services officers in government schools) to support the student who has engaged in student sexual offending
- should (where appropriate) make referrals into specialised non-school based supports, including Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) who provide specialist clinical mental health treatment and care.

In some cases, children aged over 10 and under 18 years may be referred to Sexually Abusive Behaviour Treatment Services. These services provide treatment for 12 to 24 months to ensure that early intervention services are provided to prevent ongoing and more serious sexual offences in adulthood.

Often this referral will be made by DFFH Child Protection and a young person may be placed on a Therapeutic Treatment Order or a Therapeutic Treatment Placement Order. Children, young people and their families are also able to access treatment programs in a voluntary capacity.

## **Providing support for other impacted children**

It can be stressful for other children involved in any incidents, disclosures or suspicions of child abuse. Principals must ensure that other impacted children are offered and provided appropriate support.

## **What to do if another person has already made a report**

Once you form a reasonable belief that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused, your obligation to report is separate from the obligations or actions of other people. In instances where two staff members form different views about whether or not to make a report, if one staff member continues to hold a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection, then they should make a report.

However, there may be times when two or more school staff members, for example a teacher and a principal, have formed a belief about the same child on the same occasion and based on the same information. In this situation it is sufficient that only one of the staff members make a report. The other person should ensure that the report has been made and that all the grounds for their own belief were included in the report made by the other person. However, if either person becomes aware of new information, they must ensure that this new information is also reported.

---

### Action 3: Contact parents or carers

---

When to notify parents and carers if it is suspected their child is a victim of abuse, and which relevant authorities need to be notified.

In many cases where it is suspected that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused, it is extremely important that their parents or carers are notified as soon as possible, as long as this approach is agreed to by Victoria Police or Department Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) so as not to place the child at further risk or impede an investigation. This enables the parents or carers to take steps to:

- prevent or limit their child's exposure to further abuse
- ensure that their child receives the support that they require.

There are some circumstances where contacting parents and carers may place a child or adult at greater risk. **After** you have formed a suspicion or reasonable belief that a child is subject to abuse, and **before** contacting the parents or carers, your principal (or delegate) must seek advice from [Victoria Police](#) or [DFFH Child Protection](#) (depending on who the report has been made to). They will advise your principal (or delegate) about whether it is appropriate to contact parents or carers at this stage.

#### Advice for communicating with parents

Where advised by Police or DFFH that it is appropriate to contact the parents, the principal and reporting staff member (ideally together) should make sensitive and professional contact with the appropriate parents or carers as soon as possible on the day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion.

During this conversation it is important to:

- remain calm
- be empathetic to feelings
- validate concerns
- provide appropriate details of the incident, disclosure, or suspicion of child abuse
- outline the action the school staff have taken to date, including who the incident, disclosure, or suspicion has been reported to if appropriate (noting that the anonymity of the person who made the report to DFFH Child Protection must be protected if this is their wish)
- if appropriate provide the name and contact phone number of DFFH Child Protection or the police officer who is investigating (this should be provided to the student if they are a mature minor\*)

*\*a student who has sufficient maturity, understanding and intelligence to understand the nature and effects of their particular decision.*

- provide information on whether they are likely to be contacted by DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police (if known or appropriate)
- inform them that the investigation may take some time and ask what further information they would like and how school staff can assist them, refer to: [non-school based support services for children impacted by abuse](#)
- assure them that school wellbeing staff can provide support to their child
- invite the parents or carers to attend a Student Support Group meeting where a Student Support Plan can be prepared to ensure that appropriate support can be provided for their child

## **What to do if a student returns home before DFFH or Victoria Police advice is received**

Ideally you will have received clear advice from Victoria Police or DFFH Child Protection on what information to share with parents or carers before their child returns to their care. In some circumstances, a student may return to the care of their parent or carer before this advice has been received.

In these circumstances you should not share any information:

- that may place the student or any other person at risk (for example: risk of further harm, destruction of evidence, risk of retaliation against an allegation or incident)
- if the student is an adult or mature minor and requests that you do not contact their parents or carers, unless you consider it necessary to inform the parents or carers in order to lessen or prevent a serious risk to the student's safety.

After consideration, the school principal (or delegate) may decide that it is in the best interest of the student to provide the parent or carer with information:

- on a disclosure or an alleged incident (providing only enough information so that the parent or carer can best protect and support their child)
- (if appropriate) that a report has been made to DFFH or Victoria Police and it is likely they will be in contact (depending on who the report has been made to)
- that there are supports available.

Advice and support on contacting parents or carers contact Independent Schools Victoria on 03 9825 7200.

---

## Action 4: Actions that Schools must take to support students

---

Actions that schools must take, where deemed appropriate, to support students who are impacted by child abuse.

Experiences of child abuse, including exposure to family violence, can cause trauma and significantly impact the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. In addition to reporting and referral to relevant authorities, as a school staff member, you play a central role in addressing this trauma and have a duty of care to ensure that the students feel safe and supported at school.

### Collaboration and Planning Support

Providing holistic support to address the trauma and wellbeing issues associated with child abuse (including exposure to family violence) is best achieved through careful planning and working in partnership with wellbeing professionals, parents/carers and educators.

Where appropriate school staff should engage allied health and wellbeing supports and services and/or Respectful Relationships Liaison Officers (in instances of family violence) to meet the wellbeing needs of the student impacted by abuse, including exposure to family violence.

If a student is impacted by suspected abuse, and it is deemed appropriate, school staff must:

- establish regular communication between the student and school psychologist or counsellor.
- establish regular communication between staff and the student's parent, guardian or carer (if this is safe and appropriate) to discuss a student's progress, wellbeing and the effectiveness of planned strategies.

This may be undertaken through convening a Student Support Group (Student Support Groups usually comprise school wellbeing staff, teachers, allied health professionals and where appropriate the student and their parent or carer) to plan ongoing monitoring, support, and follow-up of the student's health and wellbeing.

- develop and implement a Student Support Plan, which documents the planned support strategies and includes timeframes for review. Where possible, these support strategies should be informed by allied health and wellbeing professionals with expertise in addressing child abuse and trauma.

### Referring to external counselling and support organisations

School staff can also refer to the wide range of non-school based support services, which specialise in providing tailored support and advice for children and young people impacted by abuse.

For example, schools may consider referrals to:

- [The Lookout](#) for family violence services
- [Safe Steps](#) for family violence services
- [1800 RESPECT](#)
- [The Centre Against Sexual Assault](#) provide expert support for victims of sexual assault
- [Gatehouse Centre, Royal Children's Hospital](#)
- [Children's Protection Society](#)
- [Australian Childhood Foundation](#)
- [Djirra](#)
- [Child Wise](#)
- [Headspace](#) provide tailored support for children whose mental health is impacted by exposure to abuse

# Providing developmentally and culturally appropriate support

While a student's background should not impact a decision to report suspected abuse, school staff need to be sensitive to a student's individual circumstances when providing support and working with families impacted by abuse.

It is a requirement under the Child Safe Standards that school governing authorities must 'take account of the diversity of all children', including (but not limited to) the needs of:

## Children with disabilities

When supporting a child or young person with a disability who has been impacted by child abuse it is critical to consider their child's:

- chronological age, developmental age and their cognitive functioning in order to tailor developmentally appropriate support strategies
- vulnerability to on-going abuse (children and young people with disabilities disproportionately fall prey to child abuse, in particular child sexual abuse) when considering the need to make a further report or implement risk mitigation strategies.

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People

When supporting a Koorie child or young person who has been impacted by child abuse it is essential that school staff provide culturally appropriate support. The School will seek the support of a specialized Koorie Engagement Support Officer.

## Children and Young People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds

When supporting a child or young person from CALD backgrounds who has been impacted by child abuse it is essential that schools provide culturally appropriate support. However this should not detract from ensuring the child's or young person's safety and wellbeing. Where possible schools should work with relevant cultural support services (ensuring that the confidentiality of the student and family is maintained) and engage an interpreter when communicating with the student's family if needed.

## Students with refugee backgrounds

When working with children and young people from refugee backgrounds who have been impacted by child abuse it is important to recognise that they (and their families) may also be experiencing trauma, dislocation and loss. This trauma may significantly affect family wellbeing and parenting capacity and whilst these issues also require sensitive consideration, they should not detract from ensuring the child's safety and wellbeing (or impact on decisions to report suspected abuse).

School staff should consider contacting services that specialise in providing support to refugees (ensuring that the confidentiality of the student and their family is maintained).

Where possible schools should work with relevant cultural support services (ensuring that the confidentiality of the student and family is maintained) and engage an interpreter when communicating with the student's family if needed.

Schools should also engage an interpreter when communicating with the student's family if needed.

## International students

Principals must ensure appropriate measures are taken for the welfare of international students. This may require additional support given that the child's family may not be present to provide support within the home environment.

---

## Children and young people who are interviewed at school

---

All children and young people (including those who are alleged to have perpetrated abuse) must be independently supported in any interviews conducted by Victoria Police or DFFH Child Protection at school.

Where possible and appropriate the student's parent or carer should be present for these interviews. However, if this is not appropriate or practicable the Principal (or delegate) may be identified as the independent person or support person for the child for the purpose of the interview.

### Police interviews

In the event that Victoria Police schedule an interview with a student at the school, the Principal (or delegate) must advise the student's parent or carer (where advised to be appropriate).

### Police interviews at school where the student is the alleged victim or witness

The information below includes critical detail on when and how police interviews are conducted at school and what role the Principal (or delegate) should play if they are nominated as the support person.

- Police should only interview students at school as a matter of urgency or necessity.
- A request must be made to the Principal (or delegate) who must be advised of the reason for the interview and the reason why the interview must be conducted at the school.
- The student's parent or carer should be present where it is practical and appropriate to make these arrangements. If the parent or carer is not able to be present, an independent person must be present during the interview (the role of the independent person is to ensure the student understands what is happening and to provide support).
- Principals (or delegate) may if necessary, act as an independent person where the student is a victim, unless they believe it will place them in a conflict of interest to do so.
- As an independent person, school staff must refrain from providing their opinions or accounts for events during interviews.

### Police interviews at school where a student has allegedly abused another child

If the police need to speak with a student who has allegedly abused another student, child or young person this should preferably be done in the presence of the parent or carer, or another independent person that is not a school staff member.

### DFFH Child Protection interviews at school

DFFH Child Protection may conduct interviews of students at Victorian schools without parental knowledge or consent of the parent or carer (although this will only occur in exceptional circumstances and if it is in the student's best interests to proceed in this manner).

The information below includes critical detail on when and how DFFH Child Protection interviews are conducted at school and what role the Principal (or delegate) should play if they are nominated as the support person.

- DFFH Child Protection will notify the school staff of any intention to interview a student at the school. This may occur regardless of whether the school staff member is the source of the report to DFFH Child Protection.
- When DFFH Child Protection practitioners arrive at the school, the school Principal or a Child Safety

Champion should check their identification and Working with Children clearance.

- Students should be advised of their right to have a supportive adult present during interviews. If the student is too young to understand the significance, a supportive adult should be provided even though they may not have consented or requested this to occur.
- A staff member may be identified as a support person for the student during the interview. Prior to the commencement of the interview, the DFFH Child Protection practitioner should always authorise the staff member of the school to receive information regarding DFFH Child Protection's investigation. This could be conducted verbally or in writing using the relevant DFFH Child Protection proforma.
- As an independent person, school staff must refrain from providing their opinions or accounts for events during interviews.

### **Providing support for impacted school staff members**

It can also be stressful for staff involved in any incidents, disclosures or suspicions of child abuse including family violence. It is important to remember that staff members may also have experienced or be experiencing family violence or abuse in their own lives. Principals must support impacted staff members to access necessary support.

### **Responding to complaints or concerns**

There may be concerns or complaints about the school staff's management of an incident, in particular by parents and carers. This is a very stressful time for parents and carers, and concerns that they do not believe have been dealt with fairly may quickly escalate. As a first step school staff must consider whether the complaint raises any concerns about unreported abuse or risk of abuse.



# Reporting and legal obligations relating to suspicions, disclosures, or incidents of child abuse

MGG is required to comply with the Child Safe Standards and Ministerial Order 1359 to create and maintain a child safe organisation where children and young people are protected from abuse.

Summary Table 1: Reporting obligations summary

Legislation (VIC)	When to report	Mandated reporters	Who is a child or a young person
Children, Youth and Families Act 2005	<p>A mandated reporter must make a report to DFFH Child Protection.</p> <p>A voluntary reported may make a report to a protective intervener such as DFFS Child Protection or the Commission for Children and Young People</p>	<p>Mandatory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Principal</li> <li>• Registered teachers and early childhood teachers</li> <li>• Registered Nurses</li> <li>• Registered Psychologists</li> <li>• School counsellor</li> <li>• Persons in Religious Ministry</li> <li>• Early Childhood Workers</li> </ul> <p>Voluntary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any person</li> </ul>	A person under 17 years old or a person under 18 years old if a protection order applies to them
Child Safety and Wellbeing Act 2005	The Principal must make a report to the Commission for Children and Young People if they become aware of a reportable allegation against a staff member, volunteer or contractor.	The head of entity that is affected by the Reportable Conduct Scheme	A person under 18 years old
Crimes Act 1958	Any adult must make a report to the police if they form a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria against a child by another person of over the age of 18 years.	Any person 18 years or older	A person under 16 years old

# Detailed Obligation of Mandatory Reporting

## Penalty 10 penalty units

*1 penalty unit is \$184.92 as of 21 November 2022*

Mandatory Reporters must make a report to Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (Child Protection) if:

- in the course of their professional work or carrying out duties of their office, position or employment, they form a belief (on each occasion) on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection because:
  - the child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm as a result of physical injury or sexual abuse; and
  - the child's parents have not protected or are unlikely to protect the child from the harm.

It may be a criminal offence not to report in these circumstances.

At MGG the following people are Mandatory Reporters:

- The Principal
- Registered teachers and early childhood teachers
- Registered Nurses
- Registered Psychologists
- School counsellor
- Persons in Religious Ministry
- Early Childhood Workers

A Mandatory Reporter must make a report even if you have discussed the matter with one of the Child Safety Champions or the Principal and they do not share your belief that a report must be made.

A "child" is a person under 17 (or under 18 if subject to a protection order) (but note that the School has a duty of care to all children and encourages people to report all concerns)

### Discretion to Report: Reporting by Non-Mandated Reporters

- Any person who believes on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection may report to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) or the Police that belief and the reasonable grounds for that belief.
- All School Staff, Volunteers or Contractors who have child safety concerns about a student should notify a School Child Safety Officer as soon as possible to discuss their concerns.

### What Happens After a Report is Made

- After receiving a report, Child Protection may seek further information, usually from professionals who may also be involved with the child or family, to determine whether further action is required.
- If the matter progresses to investigation, Child Protection officers will observe and speak with the child or young person and their parents. They may also speak with relevant professionals, information holders and other significant people in the child's life who can inform the investigation or provide information to assist Child Protection to assess if the child is in need of protection. In circumstances involving physical and sexual abuse and serious neglect, investigations may be conducted jointly with Victoria Police.

- If the matter does not progress to investigation, Child Protection may provide advice to the Mandatory Reporter, refer the family to support services in the community (such as Child FIRST or The Orange Door), or they may decide to take no further action.
- In most cases, Child Protection will inform the reporter of the outcome of the report.

## The Obligation to Report a Sexual Offence (Failure to Disclose)

### Maximum Penalty 3 Years Imprisonment

Under section 327 of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) (Crimes Act), including students of or over the age of 18 years (whether in Victoria or elsewhere) who has information that leads the person to form a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria against a child under the age of 16 years by another person of or over the age of 18 years must disclose that information to Victoria Police as soon as it is practicable to do so, unless the person has a reasonable excuse for not doing so. Failure to make a report without reasonable excuse is an offence and carries a maximum penalty of a prison term.

This obligation applies to anyone aged 18 years or over, including all non-teaching staff, contractors, volunteers, and students aged 18 and over. The legislation also applies to teaching staff if not already covered by the mandatory reporting obligation.

## The Obligation to Report a Sexual Offence (Failure to Protect)

### Maximum Penalty 5 Years Imprisonment

Under the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) (Crimes Act) a person commits an offence if:

- the person occupies a position within or in relation to a relevant organisation; and
- there is a substantial risk that a child under the care, supervision or authority of the organisation will become a victim of a sexual offence committed by an adult associated with the organisation; and
- the person knows that the risk exists; and
- by reason of their position, the person has the power or responsibility to reduce or remove that risk; and
- the person negligently fails to reduce or remove that risk.

This criminal offence is commonly known as “Failure to Protect”, although its full title is “Failure by a person in authority to protect a child from a sexual offence”.

The Failure to Protect offence means that action must be taken:

- by any Staff, Volunteer or Contractor who has to power or responsibility to do so,
- to protect students aged under 16,
- from a known substantial risk of the student becoming the victim of a sexual offence by an adult staff member, Volunteer or Contractor at the School.

# Grooming Offence under the Crimes Act 1958

## Maximum Penalty 10 Years Imprisonment

Grooming concerns communications with a child under the age of 16, or with a person under whose care, supervision or authority the child is, with the intention of facilitating the child's engagement or involvement in a sexual offence.

Therefore, grooming includes behaviours that manipulate and control a child, their family and other support networks, or institutions with the intent of gaining access to the child, obtaining the child's compliance, maintaining the child's silence and avoiding discovery of the intention to engage in sexual abuse of the child. It also includes behaviour aimed at a person with care, supervision or authority for a child, to make it easier to procure the child for sexual abuse or to ensure that, if the child does disclose, that the person does not believe the child.

Grooming does not necessarily involve any sexual activity or even discussion of sexual activity. Grooming is also helpfully described as: 'the use of a variety of manipulative and controlling techniques with a vulnerable subject in a range of interpersonal and social settings in order to establish trust or normalise sexually harmful behaviour with the overall aim of facilitating exploitation and/or prohibiting disclosure of the harmful behaviour'.

Grooming behaviour towards children often involves a graduation from attention giving and non-sexual touching to increasingly more intimate and intrusive behaviour. Grooming usually involves a perpetrator establishing a trusting relationship with a child or young person and those associated with the child or young person's care and wellbeing, to create an environment in which sexual abuse can occur.

Grooming behaviours are considered:

- conduct that could lead to a reasonable belief that the child is likely to suffer sexual abuse, which must be reported under the Child, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic) (refer to Mandatory Reporting to Child Protection)
- an offence under section 49M of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) that must be reported to Police under section 327 of the Crimes Act (refer to Reporting to Police) and from which persons at the School, who have the authority to do so, must protect students (refer to Duty to Protect/Failure to Protect)
- sexual misconduct which must be reported to the Commission for Children and Young People under the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) (refer to Reportable Conduct) a breach of the Child Safe Codes of Conduct.
- Grooming itself is a criminal offence as set out in the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)

# Reportable Conduct Scheme

It is an offence to fail to notify and update the CCYP about reportable allegations within the required timeframes noted below.

Under Schedules 3-5 of the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 and the Child Wellbeing and Safety Regulations 2017, the Principal must notify the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) within 3 business days of becoming aware of a reportable allegation against any staff member, volunteer, contractor or Minister of Religion of the School.

## HOW TO REPORT

The Scheme requires the Principal to:

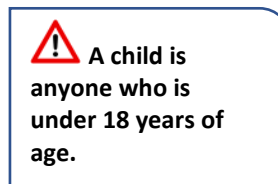
- Make a Mandatory Reportable Conduct Scheme notification using an online webform. [Click here to go directly to the secure webform](#)
- For assistance or guidance contact CCYP via an [email](#) or call 1300 78 29 78.
- Mandatory Notification Guidance is available [here](#).
- Public Notification Guidance is available [here](#).

Further guidance about the [Reportable Conduct Scheme](#) is available on the CCYP website.

In some instances, such as an allegation of a sexual offence, a report should also be made to Victoria Policy.

Reportable conduct is:

- sexual offences (against, with or in the presence of, a child)
- sexual misconduct (against, with or in the presence of, a child)
- physical violence (against, with or in the presence of, a child)
- behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm
- significant neglect.



Section 16M requires the head of an organisation to initially notify the Commission of a reportable allegation within three business days and update the Commission of progress within 30 calendar days. They must also investigate the reportable allegation and provide the findings of the investigation to the Commission. The Commission will seek the following information at various milestones.

Three business day notification	30 calendar day update	Advice on investigation	Outcomes of investigation	Additional documents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name of the worker or volunteer</li> <li>• Date of birth</li> <li>• Police report</li> <li>• Organisation contact details</li> <li>• Head of organisation's name</li> <li>• Initial advice on the nature of the allegation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Details of the allegation</li> <li>• Details of your response to the allegation</li> <li>• Details about any disciplinary or other action proposed</li> <li>• Any written response from the worker or volunteer about the allegation and the proposed disciplinary or other</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name of investigator</li> <li>• Contact details</li> <li>• <b>As soon as practicable</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copy of findings and reasons for the findings</li> <li>• Details about any disciplinary or other action proposed</li> <li>• Reasons for taking or not taking action</li> <li>• <b>As soon as practicable</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Commission may request further documents from the head of the organisation</li> </ul>

# Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM)

CISS enables authorised organisations and services to share information to promote the wellbeing or safety of children. FVISS enables authorised organisations and services to share information to facilitate assessment and management of family violence risk to children and adults. MARAM sets out the responsibilities of different workforces in identifying, assessing and managing family violence risk across the family violence and broader service system. MARAM will guide information sharing under both information sharing schemes wherever family violence is present.

Information can only be shared under the reforms by organisations prescribed as Information Sharing Entities (ISEs). Mentone Girls Grammar is identified as an ISE.

To check if the organisation is an ISE click here: [who can share information under the reforms](#).

## Information Sharing under Part 6A of the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005

The Principal is the School's authorised representative for the purposes of sharing Child Information with, or requesting Child Information from, other ISEs on behalf of MGG.

Despite laws prohibiting or restricting the disclosure of personal information, organisations and services prescribed as an "information sharing entity" (ISE), including non-government schools, must share confidential information relating to the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person (Child Information) with other ISEs:

- when requested to do so by the ISE under Part 6A of the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) (CWS Act); and/or
- to fulfil Reportable Conduct obligations and Mandatory Reporting/Reporting to Police obligations.

Part 6A of the CWS Act also permits ISEs to voluntarily disclose to other ISEs confidential information about any person, for the purpose of promoting the wellbeing or safety of a child or group of children.

It also permits ISEs to disclose confidential information to a child, or to a parent or carer of the child, for the purpose of managing a risk to the child's safety.

The [Child Information Sharing Ministerial Guidelines](#) set out how MGG must handle Child Information and apply the legislative principles of the CISS.

## Consent to Information Sharing under the Child Information Sharing Scheme

The School can share Child Information with, or seek Child Information from, another ISE under Part 6A of the CWS Act without the consent of the child or their family. However, it is MGG's policy that:

- wherever appropriate, safe and reasonable to do so, informed consent to the proposed information sharing is sought from the child or young person and/or their parents/carers
- where it is not possible to obtain informed consent, the child's and/or their parents/carers views will

be sought prior to the proposed information sharing, provided that it is appropriate, safe and reasonable to do so

- at enrolment, parents/carers are informed that Child Information about students may be, or is, provided to other organisations.

## **Information Sharing Under Part 5A of the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic)**

Despite laws prohibiting or restricting the disclosure of personal information, under the FVIS Scheme ISEs must share confidential information about a victim survivor, perpetrator/alleged perpetrator of family violence or a linked person, that is relevant to assessing or managing a family violence risk, (FV Information) with other ISEs:

- when requested to do so by an ISE that is a Risk Assessment Entity (RAE), for family violence assessment purposes
- when requested to do so by another ISE, for family violence protection purposes

Part 5A of the FVP Act also permits ISEs to voluntarily disclose to other ISEs FV Information about a victim survivor, perpetrator/alleged perpetrator or linked person, for the same purposes. It also permits ISEs to disclose a perpetrator's FV Information to a victim survivor (or, if the victim survivor is a child, to their parent provided they are not a perpetrator) for the purpose of managing a risk to the victim survivor's safety.

The [Family Violence Information Sharing Ministerial Guidelines](#) (FV Ministerial Guidelines) set out how MGG must handle FV Information and how the School must apply the legislative principles of the FVISS.

# Indicators of Child Abuse – in detail

You may find yourself in a situation where you are the best-placed or only adult in a position to identify and respond to suspected abuse. When identifying child abuse, it is critical to remember that:

- some instances of child abuse will fall across multiple categories (for instance, family violence may involve physical, sexual, or emotional child abuse)
- the trauma associated with child abuse can significantly impact the well-being and development of a child
- all concerns about the safety and wellbeing of a child, or the conduct of a staff member, contractor or volunteer must be acted upon as soon as possible.

If physical or behavioural indicators lead you to suspect that a child or young persons has or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse, regardless of the type of abuse, you must respond as soon as practicable by following the Four Critical Actions.

## Types of child abuse:

### Physical child abuse

Physical child abuse can consist of any non-accidental infliction of physical violence on a child or young person by any other person. Examples of physical abuse may include beating, shaking or burning, assault with implements and female genital mutilation.

#### Physical indicators of physical child abuse include (but are not limited to):

- bruises or welts on facial areas and other areas of the body including back, bottom, legs, arms, or inner thighs
- bruises or welts in unusual configurations
- bruises or welts that look like the object used to make the injury (for example fingerprints, handprints, buckles, iron, or teeth)
- burns from boiling water, oil, or flames
- burns that show the shape of the object used to make them (for example, iron, grill, or a cigarette)
- fractures of the skull, jaw, nose, or limbs - especially those not consistent with the explanation offered, or the type of injury not possible at the child's age of development
- cuts and grazes to the mouth, lips, gums, eye area, ears, or external genitalia
- bald patches where hair has been pulled out
- multiple injuries - old and new
- effects of poisoning
- internal injuries.

#### Behavioural indicators of physical child abuse include (but are not limited to):

- disclosure of an injury inflicted by someone else (parent, carer, or guardian)
- an inconsistent or unlikely explanation, or inability to remember the cause of injury
- unusual fear of physical contact with adults
- aggressive behaviour



- disproportionate reaction to events
- wearing clothes unsuitable for weather conditions to hide injuries
- wariness or fear of a parent, carer, or guardian
- reluctance to go home
- no reaction or little emotion displayed when being hurt or threatened
- habitual absences from school without reasonable explanation
- overly compliant, shy, withdrawn, passive, or uncommunicative
- unusually nervous, hyperactive, aggressive, disruptive, or destructive to self or others
- poor sleeping patterns, fear of the dark, nightmares, or regressive behaviour (for example, bed-wetting)
- drug or alcohol misuse, suicidal thoughts, or self-harm.

Please note that physical harm may also be caused by student fights or bullying. Please refer to Bullying and Harassment Policy for further guidance. Strategies for teachers to address bullying is available on the [Bully Stoppers](#) website.

## Child sexual abuse

Follow the Four Critical Actions if you:

- feel uncomfortable about the way an adult interacts with one or more children
- reasonably suspect that the adult may be engaging in sexual abuse of one or more children
- reasonably suspect that the adult is grooming the child or children to engage in sexual activity
- reasonably believe that the adult is at risk of engaging in sexual activity with one or more children.

Child sexual abuse is when a person uses power or authority over a child to involve them in sexual activity and can include a wide range of sexual activity including:

- fondling the child's genitals
- oral sex
- vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or another object
- exposure of the child to pornography

Child sexual abuse may not always include physical sexual contact and can also include non-contact offences, such as:

- talking to a child in a sexually explicit way
- sending sexual messages or emails to a child
- exposing a sexual body part to a child
- forcing a child to watch a sexual act (including showing pornography to a child)
- having a child pose or perform in a sexual manner (including child sexual exploitation)

Child sexual abuse does not always involve force. In some circumstances, a child may be manipulated into believing that they have brought the abuse on themselves, or that the abuse is an expression of love, through a process of grooming.

## **Child sexual exploitation**

Child sexual exploitation is also a form of sexual abuse where offenders use their power - physical, financial, or emotional - over a child to abuse them sexually or emotionally.

It often involves situations and relationships where young people receive something (such as food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money etc.) in return for participating in sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur in person or online, and sometimes the child or young person may not even realise they are a victim.

## **Children and young people most at risk of sexual abuse**

Any child or young person can be a victim of sexual abuse, however, those who are vulnerable, isolated, or have a disability are much more likely to become victims and are disproportionately abused. Advice on identifying behaviour indicators for perpetrators of child sexual abuse is provided below.

### **Physical indicators of sexual abuse include (but are not limited to):**

- injury to the genital or rectal area (for example bruising, bleeding, discharge, inflammation or infection)
- injury to areas of the body such as breasts, buttocks or upper thighs
- discomfort in urinating or defecating
- presence of foreign bodies in the vagina or rectum
- sexually-transmitted diseases
- frequent urinary tract infections
- pregnancy, especially in very young adolescents
- anxiety-related illnesses (for example anorexia or bulimia)

### **Behavioural indicators of sexual abuse include (but are not limited to):**

- disclosure of sexual abuse, either directly (from the alleged victim) or indirectly (by a third person or allusion)
- persistent and age-inappropriate sexual activity (for example excessive masturbation or rubbing genitals against adults)
- drawings or descriptions in stories that are sexually explicit and not age-appropriate
- fear of home, specific places, or particular adults
- poor or deteriorating relationships with adults and peers
- poor self-care or personal hygiene
- complaining of headaches, stomach pains or nausea without physiological basis
- sleeping difficulties
- regressive behaviour (for example bed-wetting or speech loss)
- depression, self-harm, drug or alcohol abuse, or attempted suicide
- sudden decline in academic performance, poor memory or concentration
- engaging in sex work or sexual risk-taking behaviour
- wearing layers of clothing to hide injuries and bruises

## Identifying perpetrators of child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse is most commonly perpetrated by someone who is known to and trusted by the child or young person, and often someone highly trusted within their families, communities, schools or other institutions.

Perpetrators can include, but are not limited to:

- a family member (this is known as intrafamily abuse and can include sibling abuse)
- a school staff member, coach, or another carer
- a peer or child 10 years or over\*
- a family friend or stranger
- any person via a forced marriage (where a student is subject to marriage without their consent, arranged for by their immediate or extended family - this constitutes a criminal offence and must be reported)

\*Unwanted sexual behaviour toward a student by a person 10 years or over can constitute a sexual offence and is referred to as student-to-student sexual offending.

Please note that a child who is under 10 years of age is not considered capable of committing an offence. Any suspected sexual behaviours by children under 10 are referred to as [problem sexual behaviour](#).

## Behavioural indicators for perpetrators of child sexual abuse

Behavioural indicators for perpetrators of child sexual abuse include (but are not limited to):

Family member (adult)

- attempts by one parent to alienate their child or young person from the other parent
- the overprotective or volatile relationship between the child or young person and one of their parents or family members
- reluctance by the child or young person to be alone with one of their parents or family members.

Family member (sibling)

- the child or young person and a sibling behaving like they are in an intimate relationship
- reluctance by the child or young person to be alone with a sibling
- embarrassment by siblings if they are found alone together.

School staff member, coach, or another carer

- touching a student inappropriately
- bringing up sexual material or personal disclosures into conversations with a student
- inappropriately contacting a student (for example calls, emails, texts, or social media)
- obvious or inappropriate preferential treatment of the student (making them feel 'special')
- giving of gifts to a student
- having inappropriate social boundaries (for example: telling the potential victim about their problems)
- offering to drive a student to or from school
- inviting themselves over to their homes, or calling them at night
- befriending the parents themselves and making visits to their home
- undermining the child's reputation, so that the child won't be believed.

## Grooming

Grooming is a criminal offence. It occurs when an adult engages in predatory conduct to prepare a child for sexual abuse at a later time.

Sometimes it is hard to see when someone is being groomed until after they have been sexually abused because some grooming behaviour can look like 'normal' caring behaviour. For example:

- giving gifts or special attention to a child or young person, their parent, or carer (this can make a child or young person feel special or indebted to an adult)
- controlling a child or young person through threats, force, or use of authority (this can make a child or young person fearful to report unwanted behaviour)
- making close physical contacts sexual, such as inappropriate tickling or wrestling
- openly or pretending to accidentally expose the victim to nudity, sexual material or acts (this in itself is classified as child sexual abuse but can also be a precursor to physical sexual assault).

## Online grooming

Grooming includes online grooming. It occurs when an adult uses electronic communication (including social media) in a predatory fashion to try to lower a child's or young person's inhibitions or heighten their curiosity regarding sex, to eventually meet them in person for sexual activity. This can include online chats, sexting, and other interactions.

Online grooming can also precede online child exploitation, a form of child exploitation where adults use the internet or mobile to communicate sexual imagery with or of a child or young person (for instance, via a webcam).

## **Behavioural indicators that a child or young person may be subject to grooming include (but are not limited to):**

- developing an unusually close connection with an older person
- displaying mood changes (such as hyperactive, secretive, hostile, aggressive, impatient, resentful, anxious, withdrawn, or depressed)
- using street or different language, copying the way the new 'friend' may speak, talking about the new 'friend' who does not belong to his or her normal social circle
- possessing jewellery, clothing or expensive items given by the 'friend'
- possessing large amounts of money which he or she cannot account for
- using a new mobile phone (given by the 'friend') excessively to make calls, videos, or send text messages
- being excessively secretive about their use of communications technologies, including social media
- frequently staying out overnight, especially if the relationship is with an older person
- being dishonest about where they've been and who they've been with
- using drugs (physical evidence can include spoons, silver foil, 'tabs', or 'rocks')
- assuming a new name and owning a false ID, stolen passport, or driver's license provided by the 'friend' to avoid detection
- being picked up in a car by the 'friend' from home, school, or 'down the street'.

## Family violence

The Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic) defines family violence as behaviour towards a family member where the behaviour:

- is physically or sexually abusive
- is emotionally or psychologically abusive
- is economically abusive
- is threatening or coercive
- in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person.

A child or young person can be the victim of any of these behaviours. Family violence also includes behaviour that causes a child or young person to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of any of these behaviours.

A child or young person might be a victim of family violence in the following ways:

- being hit, yelled at, or otherwise directly abused
- being injured
- being sexually abused
- experiencing fear for self
- experiencing fear for another person, a pet, or belongings
- seeing, hearing, or otherwise sensing violence directed against another person
- seeing, hearing, or otherwise sensing the aftermath of violence (such as broken furniture, smashed crockery, or an atmosphere of tension)
- knowing or sensing that a family member is in fear
- being told to do something (such as to be quiet or to 'behave') to prevent violence
- being blamed for not preventing violence
- attempting to prevent or minimise violence
- attempting to mediate between the perpetrator and another family member
- being threatened or co-opted by the perpetrator into using violent behaviour against another family member
- being co-opted into supporting the perpetrator or taking their side
- being isolated or socially marginalised in ways that are directly attributable to the perpetrator's controlling behaviours.

Unfortunately, the incidence of family violence is high. Family violence is one of the most significant and serious issues facing our communities, with a devastating impact on the health and wellbeing of many Victorians.

Family violence is predominantly (although not always) perpetrated by men against women and children. Children and young people most commonly experience family violence through a partner or ex-partner of the mother. A child (or children) may also be the target of the behaviour (including a direct or indirect attack on the mother-child relationship) or may witness the behaviours, or the effects of the behaviours.

## **Family violence can have devastating impacts on children**

Experiences of family violence create significant risks to a child's or young person's social, emotional, psychological and physical health and wellbeing. The longer a child or young person experiences family violence, the greater the impact can be.

Action must be taken to protect the child or young person and to limit their trauma and support their recovery. As a school staff member, you may be in the best position to identify that a student may be experiencing family violence and to take steps to protect them by following the Four Critical Actions.

## **Identifying family violence**

Family violence can be difficult to identify. Victims of family violence, including children and young people, often become very adept at hiding their distress as a coping and safety strategy.

The following sections outline some of the key physical and behavioural indicators of family violence in children. These indicators are drawn from the Department of Families, Fairness, and Housing (DFFH) [family violence multi-agency risk assessment and management framework](#), updated in response to recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. Further information about the Framework can be found here: [Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework](#).

### **Physical indicators of family violence include (but are not limited to):**

- speech disorders
- delays in physical development
- failure to thrive (without an organic cause)
- bruises, cuts, or welts on facial areas, and other parts of the body including back, bottom, legs, arms or inner thighs
- any bruises or welts (old or new) in unusual configurations
- any bruises or welts that look like the object used to make the injury (such as fingerprints, handprints, buckles, iron, or teeth)
- fractured bones, especially in an infant where a fracture is unlikely to have occurred accidentally
- poisoning
- internal injuries

### **Behavioural indicators of family violence include (but are not limited to):**

- violent or aggressive behaviour and language
- depression, anxiety, or suicidal thoughts
- appearing nervous and withdrawn - including wariness or distrust of adults
- difficulty adjusting to change
- psychosomatic illness
- bedwetting or sleeping disorders
- 'acting out', such as cruelty to animals
- extremely demanding, attention-seeking behaviour
- participating in dangerous risk-taking behaviours to impress peers
- overly compliant, shy, withdrawn, passive, and uncommunicative behaviour

- taking on a caretaker role prematurely, or trying to protect other family members
- embarrassment about family
- demonstrated fear of parents, carers, or guardians, and of going home
- disengagement from school (absenteeism, lateness, school refusal) or poor academic outcomes
- parent-child conflict
- wearing long-sleeved clothes on hot days in an attempt to hide bruising or another injury
- becoming fearful when other children cry or shout
- being excessively friendly to strangers.

For older children and young people indicators can also include:

- moving away or running away from home
- entering a relationship early to escape the family home
- entering into other violent or unsafe relationships
- involvement in risk-taking or unlawful activity
- alcohol and substance misuse

### **Identifying family violence in parents and carers**

As a school staff member, you will likely have contact with a student's parent or carer. Through interactions with parents and carers, you may identify signs, or receive a disclosure that a student is experiencing family violence. Noting that if a parent is experiencing family violence, it is highly likely that their child is also impacted.

### **Key indicators that a family member is experiencing violence include:**

- nervous, ashamed or evasive behaviour
- describing their partner as controlling or prone to anger
- appearing to be uncomfortable or anxious in the presence of their partner
- being accompanied by their partner, who does most of the talking
- having physical signs of violence, such as bruising
- giving an unconvincing explanation of injuries that they (or their child) have sustained
- suffering anxiety, panic attacks, stress, or depression.

Some alleged perpetrators of family violence may also be subject to court orders, including family violence intervention orders.

More information is available on the Department of Families, Fairness, and Housing (DFFH) website: [Family violence](#)

## Emotional child abuse

Emotional child abuse occurs when a child or young person is repeatedly rejected, isolated, or frightened by threats, or by witnessing family violence. It also includes hostility, derogatory name-calling and put-downs, and persistent coldness from a person, to the extent that the child or young person suffers, or is likely to suffer, emotional or psychological harm to their physical or developmental health. Emotional abuse may occur with or without other forms of abuse.

### Physical indicators of emotional abuse include (but are not limited to):

- speech disorders such as language delay, stuttering, or selectively being mute (only speaking with certain people or in certain situations)
- delays in emotional, mental, or physical development.

### Behavioural indicators of emotional abuse include (but are not limited to):

- overly compliant, passive, and undemanding behaviour
- extremely demanding, aggressive, and attention-seeking behaviour or anti-social and destructive behaviour
- low tolerance or frustration
- poor self-image and low self-esteem
- unexplained mood swings, depression, self-harm, or suicidal thoughts
- behaviours that are not age-appropriate (for instance overly adult or overly infantile)
- fear of failure, overly high standards, and excessive neatness
- poor social and interpersonal skills
- violent drawings or writing
- lack of positive social contact with other children

## Neglect

Neglect includes a failure to provide the child or young person with an adequate standard of nutrition, medical care, clothing, shelter, or supervision to the extent that the health or physical development of the child is significantly impaired or placed at serious risk.

In some circumstances the neglect of a child or young person:

- can place the child's immediate safety and development at serious risk
- may not immediately compromise the safety of the child, but is likely to result in longer-term cumulative harm.

### Physical indicators of neglect include (but are not limited to):

- appearing consistently dirty and unwashed
- being consistently inappropriately dressed for weather conditions
- being at risk of injury or harm due to consistent lack of adequate supervision from parents
- being consistently hungry, tired, and listless
- having unattended health problems and lack of routine medical care
- having inadequate shelter and unsafe or unsanitary conditions



### **Behavioural indicators of neglect include (but are not limited to):**

- gorging when food is available or inability to eat when extremely hungry
- begging for or stealing food
- appearing withdrawn, listless, pale, and weak
- aggressive behaviour or irritability
- involvement in criminal activity
- little positive interaction with a parent, carer, or guardian
- poor socialising habits
- excessive friendliness towards strangers
- indiscriminate acts of affection
- poor, irregular, or non-attendance at school
- staying at school for long hours and refusing or being reluctant to go home
- self-destructive behaviour
- taking on an adult role of caring for parents

### **Sexual behaviour in children under 10 Years**

#### **Student sexual offending**

Student sexual offending refers to sexual behaviour that is led by a student 10 years and over, which may amount to a sexual offence. If you suspect a student of sexual offending, refer to [Identifying and responding to Student Sexual Offending](#).

#### **The problem of sexual behaviour in children under 10**

Most children and young people are likely to engage in some level of age-appropriate sexual behaviour as part of their development. Sexual behaviour can present itself along a broad continuum, with research suggesting that only a small number of children and young people develop [problem sexual behaviour](#).