



### **Help for non-English speakers**

If you need help to understand the information in this policy, please contact the school on 98260711 or at [mhs@mhs.vic.edu.au](mailto:mhs@mhs.vic.edu.au).

The purpose of this policy is to outline the procedures our school has in place to respond to complaints or concerns relating to child abuse and to ensure that all staff and members of our school community understand and address concerns relating to child abuse made by or in relation to a child, student, school staff, volunteers, contractors, service providers, visitors or any other person while connected to the school (physical and online).

### **Child abuse**

Child abuse includes:

- physical violence inflicted on a child
- sexual offences committed against a child
- grooming of a child by an adult
- family violence committed against or in the presence of a child
- serious emotional or psychological harm to a child
- serious neglect of a child.

The definition of child abuse is broad and can include student to student incidents and concerns,

Melbourne High School understands the important role our school plays in protecting children from abuse. We have a range of policies and measures in place to prevent child abuse from occurring at our school or during school activities.

### Information for students

All students should feel safe to speak to any staff member to raise any concerns about their safety or any other concerns that they have.

If a student does not know who to approach at Melbourne High School, they should start with their Form Teacher or a member of the Wellbeing Team [wellbeing@mhs.vic.edu.au](mailto:wellbeing@mhs.vic.edu.au).

### Identifying child abuse

To ensure we can respond in the best interests of students and chil.44-2.8 (o)-0.7 (w)]Tpia-.447 07pns a-.447 07p4 ( a)



For further guidance, refer to [PROTECT Contacting parents and carers](#)

**4. Ongoing protection and support**  
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if they are concerned that the school has not taken reasonable steps to prevent or reduce the risk, raise these concerns with the principal in the first instance, and escalate to the regional office if they remain unsatisfied.

report the matter to the relevant authorities where they are unable to confirm that the information has been reported by another staff member

Staff must refer to Appendix A for further information on their obligations relating to reporting to authorities.

This policy will be communicated to our school community in the following ways:

Available publicly on our school's website (or insert other online parent, carer, student communication method)

Included in staff induction processes and annual staff training

Included in volunteer induction processes and training for relevant volunteers

Discussed an annual staff briefings or meetings

Included in staff handbook or manual

Hard copy available from schmo -11.685 12 (74) p d (14) 2c 4 (014 13 50.0 (a) 1ms 2 (84) 9 (a) 5 (a) 10 52 a) 3.2 (

Next scheduled review date	August 2024
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The following information outlines the various legal obligations relating to the reporting of child abuse to relevant authorities.

It is important to note that the procedures outlined in the above policy ensure compliance with the below reporting obligations, and also include additional steps to ensure compliance with Department policy and our school's duty of care obligations.

### **Mandatory reporting to Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Child Protection**

The following individuals are mandatory reporters under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic):

- registered teachers and early childhood teachers (including principals and school staff who have been granted permission to teach by the VIT)
- school counsellors including staff who provide direct support to students for mental, emotional or psychological wellbeing, including (but not limited to) school health and wellbeing staff, primary welfare coordinators, student wellbeing coordinators, mental health practitioners, chaplains, and Student Support Services staff
- nurses
- registered psychologists
- police officers
- registered medical practitioners
- out of home care workers (excluding voluntary foster and kinship carers)
- early childhood workers
- youth justice workers
- people in religious ministry
- midwives

All mandatory reporters must make a report to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Child Protection as soon as practicable if, during the course of carrying out their professional roles and responsibilities, they form a belief on reasonable grounds that:

- a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical abuse and/ or sexual abuse; and
- the child's parents or carers have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from harm of that type.

A mandatory reporter who fails to comply with this legal obligation may be committing a criminal offence. It is important for all staff at Melbourne High School to be aware that they are legally obliged to make a mandatory report on each occasion that they form a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection and they must make a mandatory report even if the principal or any other mandatory reporter does not share their belief that a report is necessary.

If charged with not making a mandatory report, it may be a defence for the person charged to prove that they honestly and reasonably believed that all of the reasonable grounds for their belief had been the subject of a report to child protection made by another person.

The identity of a person who reports any protective concerns to DFFH Child Protection is protected by law. It is an offence for a person, other than the person who made the report, to disclose the name of the person who made a report or any information that is likely to lead to their identification.

At our school, all mandated school staff must undertake the *Mandatory Reporting and Other Obligations eLearning Module* annually. We also encourage all other staff to undertake this module, even where they are not mandatory reporters.

The policy of the Department of Education and Training (DET) requires **all staff** who form a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection to discuss their concerns with the school leadership team and to report their concerns to DFFH and in some circumstances to Victoria Police, or to ensure that all the information relevant to the report has been made by another school staff member.

Any person can make a report to DFFH Child Protection (131 278 – 24 hour service) if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection even if they are not a mandatory reporter listed above.

At Melbourne High School we also encourage staff to make a referral to Child FIRST (05 1740 0205) or 4.3 ((b)2



Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults (ie persons aged 18 years and over), not just professionals who work with children, have a legal obligation to report to Victoria Police, as soon as practicable, where they form a 'reasonable belief' that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under the age of 16 in Victoria.

Failure to disclose information to Victoria Police (by calling 000, local police station or the Police Assistance Line 131 444) as soon as practicable may amount to a criminal offence unless a person has a 'reasonable excuse' or exemption from doing so.

"Reasonable belief" is not the same as having proof. A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable

## Important information for staff

### *When managing a disclosure relating to child abuse you should:*

- listen to the student and allow them to speak
  - stay calm and use a neutral tone with no urgency and where possible use the child's language and vocabulary (you do not want to frighten the child or interrupt the child)
  - be gentle, patient and non-judgmental throughout
  - highlight to the student it was important for them to tell you about what has happened
  - assure them that they are not to blame for what has occurred
  - do not ask leading questions, for example gently ask, "What happened next?" rather than "Why?"
  - be patient and allow the child to talk at their own pace and in their own words
  - do not pressure the child into telling you more than they want to, they will be asked a lot of questions by other professionals, and it is important not to force them to retell what has occurred multiple times
  - reassure the child that you believe them and that disclosing the matter was important for them to do
  - use verbal facilitators such as, "I see", restate the child's previous statement, and use non-suggestive words of encouragement, designed to keep the child talking in an open-ended way ("what happened next?")
  - tell the child in age appropriate language you are required to report to the relevant authority to help stop the abuse, and explain the role of these authorities if appropriate (for a young child this may be as simple as saying "I will need to talk to people to work out what to do next to help you")
- Take prompt action in relation to following the procedures outlined below.

### *When managing a disclosure you should AVOID:*

- displaying expressions of panic or shock
- asking questions that are investigative and potentially invasive (this may make the child feel uncomfortable and may cause the child to withdraw)
- going over the information repeatedly (you are only gathering information to help you form a belief on reasonable grounds that you need to make a report to the relevant authority)
- making any comments that would lead the student to believe that what has happened is their fault
- making any promises you will keep the information the student provided confidential
- making promises to the child about what will occur next or that things will be different given the process can be unpredictable and different for each child depending on their circumstances (instead reassure them that you and others will do your best to help).