

Child Safety – How to respond to children and parents when an allegation of child abuse is made:

If the child is in immediate danger call 000
At all times make sure the child is safe first

You MUST comply with - Child Abuse – Four Critical Actions CS3

This resource is designed to provide guidance on what to do if a child discloses an incident of abuse, or if a parent/carer raises a concern or allegation of abuse which may have taken place within the school environments (including all on-site locations and all other locations such as school camps, sporting events, excursions, competitions, and other events, as well as bus travel, and online school environments) both during and outside of school hours.

If a child discloses an incident of abuse to you:

- Try and separate them from the other children discreetly and listen to them carefully.
- Let the child use their own words to explain what has occurred.
- Reassure the child that you take what they are saying seriously, and it is not their fault and that they are doing the right thing.
- Explain to them that this information may need to be shared with others, such as their parent/carer, specific people at this school such as the Principal, or the police.
- Do not make promises to the child such as promising not to tell anyone about the incident, except that you will do your best to keep them safe.
- Do not leave the child in a distressed state. If they seem at ease in your company stay with them.
- Provide them with a **Child Safety Incident Report CS/1** form to complete, or complete it together, if you think the child is able to do this.
- **For reports to DHHS or the police complete the form DHHS Child Protection/Police/Child FIRST CS/2** will need to be completed prior to making a report. **Call 000 if the child is in immediate danger.**
- As soon as possible after the disclosure, record the information using the child's own words and report the disclosure to the Principal, and where appropriate to police or child protection. Ensure the disclosure is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely.

If a parent/carers says their child has been abused or raises a concern:

- Remain calm
 - Be empathetic to feelings and validate concerns
 - Explain that the school has processes to ensure all abuse allegations are taken very seriously.
 - Ask about the wellbeing of the child.
 - Allow the parent/carer to talk through the incident in their own words.
 - Advise the parent/carer that you will take notes during the discussion to capture all details.
 - Explain to them the information may need to be repeated to authorities or others, including the school Principal and when appropriate, the police or child protection.
 - Do not make promises at this early stage, except that you will do your best to keep the child safe.
 - Inform them that the investigation may take some time and ask what further information they would like and how school staff can assist them.
 - Provide them with a **Child Safety Incident Report form CS1** to complete, or complete it together.
- If a report is to be made you need to complete DHHS Child Protection/Police/Child FIRST CS/2**
- Ask them what action they would like to take and advise them of what the immediate next steps will be.
 - Assure them that school wellbeing staff can provide support to the child. Victorian Government school staff can make referrals to Student Support Services or other wellbeing staff based at the school
 - Ensure the report is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely.

You need to be aware that some people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds may face barriers in reporting allegations of abuse. For example, people from some cultures may experience anxiety when talking with police, and communicating in English may be a barrier for some. You need to be sensitive to these issues and meet people's needs where possible, such as having an interpreter present (who could be a friend or family member).

If an allegation of abuse involves an Aboriginal child, you will need to ensure a culturally appropriate response. A way to help ensure this, could include engaging with parents of Aboriginal children, local Aboriginal communities or an Aboriginal community controlled organisation to review policies and procedures.

Some children with a disability may experience barriers disclosing an incident. For example, children with hearing or cognitive impairments may need support to help them explain the incident, including through sign language interpreters.

Make reports using:

Child Safety Incident Report CS1 for allegations concern or breaches of the Child Safety Code of Conduct

and/or

DHHS Child Protection/Police/Child FIRST Report CS2 for reporting incidents, disclosures or suspicions of child abuse. This form may also be used for reports to Child First.

Legal Obligations:

While the child safe standards focus on organisations, every adult who reasonably believes that a child has been abused, whether in their organisation or not, has an obligation to report that belief to authorities.

The **failure to disclose** criminal offence requires all adults (aged 18 and over) who hold a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria by an adult against a child under 16 to disclose that information to police (unless they have a reasonable excuse not to, for example because they fear for their safety or the safety of another).

While failure to disclose covers child sexual abuse, all adults should report other forms of child abuse to authorities. Failure to disclose does not change mandatory reporting responsibilities.

Mandatory reporters (doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers (including early childhood teachers), Principals and police) must report to child protection if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

More information about [failure to disclose](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence) is available on the Department of Justice and Regulation website <www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence>

More information about [mandatory reporting](http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/intake/mandatory-reporting) is available in the *Child protection manual* <www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/intake/mandatory-reporting>.

See the Department of Health and Human Services website for information about [how to make a report to child protection](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/guide-to-making-a-report-to-child-protection-or-child-first) <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/guide-to-making-a-report-to-child-protection-or-child-first>.

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