

Contact Details and More Information

Support roles within the Department

Within the Department of Education and Training, there are a number of supports available to Victorian government schools responding to incidents, disclosures or suspicions of child abuse, including:

Security Services Unit (SSU)

The Security Services Unit provides a 24-hour communications centre for schools and Departmental staff to report a range of incidents. On receiving notification of an incident involving child abuse the Security Services Unit immediately alerts the Student Incident and Recovery Unit (SIRU) and relevant staff within the Central and Regional Office.

Regional Offices

Principals of Victorian government schools are required to maintain on-going contact with their Regional Office throughout any incidents, disclosures or suspicions of child abuse.

Each region has an emergency management contact/s. These officers can provide initial advice and support to Victorian government schools during and after incidents, and assists schools to minimise the effects of trauma and enhance recovery.

Student Incident and Recovery Unit (SIRU)

The Student Incident and Recovery Unit (SIRU) works with Victorian Government schools following incidents of a sexual nature to ensure appropriate advice and supports are in place that prioritise the health and wellbeing of the children involved. The SIRU is notified by the Security Services Unit as soon as an incident involving sexual abuse (or problem sexual behaviour) is reported.

The SIRU will:

- Provide timely and appropriate advice to Victorian Government schools
- Support regions and Victorian Government schools to respond to critical incidents of a sexual nature
- Advise Victorian Government schools to meet their legal obligations and duty of care responsibilities
- Assist Principals and senior school staff from Victorian Government schools to manage incidents of a sexual nature in a manner that ensures adverse impact on the school community is minimised
- Monitor the progress of school management of such incidents
- Provide advice on appropriate response measures, such as counselling and management strategies to support those involved in allegations of sexual offending or problem sexual behaviour
- Provide advice on the provision of a suitable level of support to school staff and members of the school community on whom the incident has impacted

The SIRU works closely with other key agencies, such as Victoria Police SOCIT and the DHHS, and with organisations such as the Centre against Sexual Assault (CASA) to support student wellbeing in Victorian Government schools.

Student Support Services

The role of the Student Support Services (SSS) is to provide support to Victorian Government schools including:

- Establishing a relationship with students and possibly their families
- Providing a supportive, calm approach and acknowledging the issues raised
- Clarifying the needs of the child
- Evaluating the child's present strengths and resources
- Evaluating possible ways of accommodating the child's identified needs, such as referral for specialist counselling and school-based supports
- Documenting information and actions
- Identifying the process for follow up and review
- Ascertaining which intervention programs are most appropriate in meeting an individual child's needs
- Working with the school staff on the appropriate strategies and supports needed for individual children

Employee Conduct Branch

The Employee Conduct Branch is responsible for the implementation of policy and the provision of advice on complaint resolution procedures, unsatisfactory performance, serious misconduct (which would include allegations of child abuse), equal opportunity complaints, managing appeals against disciplinary action, criminal records checks and police liaison, as it relates to Victorian Government school and DET employees.

The branch also manages discipline matters involving members of the teaching service (including Principal Class Officers), Student Support Services and public servants. A key role of the branch is to support Principals or designated officers in their management of processes, and provide advice to them concerning legislative and procedural frameworks.

The Employee Conduct Branch must be contacted on all issues of alleged serious misconduct including allegations of child abuse and grooming which involve a staff member employed by the Department. This includes teachers and Principals.

Legal Division

The Department's Legal Division provides specific advice to government school Principals in relation to incidents, disclosures and suspicions of child abuse.

Communications Division

The Department's Communications Division manages all Departmental media liaison, and can support Principals of Victorian government schools in responding to media enquiries relating to incidents, disclosures and suspicions of child abuse.

Roles of Other Relevant Authorities

DHHS Child Protection

Under the *Children Youth and Families Act 2005* the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has a responsibility to provide child protection services for all children and young people under the age of 17 years, or where a protection order is in place, for children under the age of 18.

The main functions of DHHS Child Protection are to:

- Receive reports from people who believe that a child is in need of protection or have significant concerns about the wellbeing of a child
- Provide consultation and advice to people making reports
- Investigate matters where it is believed that a child is at risk of significant harm
- Refer children and families to services that assist in providing for the ongoing safety and wellbeing of children.

DHHS Child Protection will also intervene and bring cases before the Children's Court if a child's safety cannot be managed without intervention. DHHS Child Protection has a responsibility to provide adequate supervision, care and protection for children in accordance with orders granted by the Children's Court.

Child FIRST

Child and Family Information, Referral and Support Teams (Child FIRST) were introduced to give families an opportunity to obtain family services earlier at their own request or following a referral from others, including school staff.

Child FIRST is staffed by family services practitioners who are experienced in assessing the needs of vulnerable children and their families. Child FIRST teams work closely with community-based DHHS Child Protection workers.

The role of Child FIRST includes:

- Providing a point of entry to a local network of family services
- Receiving reports about vulnerable children where there are significant concerns about their wellbeing
- Undertaking an initial identification and assessment of the risks to the child and the child's needs in consultation with DHHS Child Protection and other services
- Identifying appropriate service responses for families.

Victoria Police

Both DHHS and Victoria Police have statutory responsibilities under the *Children Youth and Families Act 2005* in relation to the protection of children. DHHS Child Protection is the lead agency responsible for the care and protection of children, while Victoria Police is responsible for criminal investigations into alleged child abuse.

Members of Victoria Police are protective interveners and mandatory reporters under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*. The predominant role of police in child abuse incidents is to detect and investigate alleged child physical and sexual abuse and to initiate legal proceedings where appropriate, against the alleged offender/s.

The key responsibilities of Victoria Police in relation to child abuse are to:

- Ensure all police members are aware of relevant legislation and their responsibilities
- Ensure all police accept and carry out their responsibilities under the Act
- Conduct all investigations on the basis that the safety and welfare of the child are paramount
- Plan investigations in collaboration with other, relevant agencies
- Work with other agencies in accordance with agreed work practices
- Provide information to other, relevant agencies
- Provide training for staff, and, jointly, with relevant agencies.

Victoria Police Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Teams (SOCIT) have been established to ensure that appropriately trained and qualified police officers are available to respond to and investigate allegations of child abuse and sexual offences.

Counselling/Support Organisations

The Centre Against Sexual Assault

There are 15 Centres Against Sexual Assault, who work to ensure that women, children and men who are victim/survivors of sexual offending have access to comprehensive and timely support and intervention to address their needs.

<http://www.casa.org.au/> Phone: 1800 806 292

Gatehouse Centre, Royal Children's Hospital

Provides support and assistance to children and young people affected by sexual offending or problem sexual behaviours

http://ww2.rch.org.au/gatehouse/index.cfm?doc_id=1151

Children's Protection Society

Provide advice and support to children and families to help them break out of the cycle of abuse, neglect, poverty and disadvantage through a creative portfolio of programs, resources and services.

<http://www.cps.org.au/> Phone: (03) 9450 0900

Australian Childhood Foundation

Provide recognised programs that counsel and support children to recovery, help professionals who work with children to better support at risk children and raise awareness of the causes and consequences of abuse. <http://www.childhood.org.au/home/> Phone: 1800 176 453

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Limited provides legal advice and representation for the Koorie community

<http://www.vals.org.au> Phone: (03) 9322 3555 or country toll free on 1800 015 188

Child Wise

Child Wise is Australia's leading international child protection charity committed to the prevention and reduction of sexual abuse and exploitation of children around the world.

<http://www.childwise.org.au/> Phone: (03) 9695 8900

Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services

Provides assistance to victims of family violence and sexual offending and to work with families and communities affected by violence.

<http://www.fvpls.org/>

headspace

headspace is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation providing early intervention mental health services to 12-25 year olds, along with assistance in promoting young peoples' wellbeing. This covers four core areas: mental health, physical health, work and study support and alcohol and other drug services. Information and services for young people, their families and friends as well as health professionals can be accessed through this website, headspace centres, online counselling service eheadspace, and postvention suicide support program headspace School Support.

<http://headspace.org.au/>

Contact Information:

24 Hour Services:

- Victoria Police - 000
- Department of Health and Human Services Child Protection - 131 278
- Department of Education and Training Security Services Unit - (03) 9589 6266

Department of Education and Training:

- Security Services Unit - (03) 9589 6266
- Student Incident and Recovery Unit - (03) 9637 2934 or (03) 9637 2487
- Legal Division - (03) 9637 3146
- Employee Assistance Program - 1300 361 008
- Employee Health - (03) 9637 2395
- Employee Conduct Branch - (03) 9637 2595
- Privacy Unit - (03) 9637 3601
- International Division - (03) 9651 3976
- Communications Division - (03) 9637 2871

Department of Health and Human Services Child Protection:

Eastern suburban LGAs Booroondara, Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, MonashWhitehorse, Yarra Ranges PH: 1300 360 391