ST. MARY’S SCHOOL

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“Let your light shine”

# **Child Safe Reporting and Responding Policy**

**Reviewed: Term 2 2020**

**Ratified by School Board: TBA**

**NEXT REVIEW 2022**

**Commitment to Child Safety**

All students enrolled, and any child visiting, have the right to feel safe and be safe in all school environments and outside of school hours. The wellbeing of children in our care will always be our first priority and we have zero tolerance to child abuse. We aim to create a child safe and child friendly environment where children feel safe and are free to enjoy life to the full without any concern for their safety.

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**Basic Beliefs:**

* That our school community nurtures the development of the whole child.
* Providing programs and support that meet the individual needs of all students (social, emotional, educational, psychological, spiritual, physical and behavioural).
* At St. Mary’s we believe the dignity of the human person, who is created in the image and likeness of God, is the foundation of Catholic Social Teaching. This Catholic anthropology leads us to give all people, but especially children, young people and the most vulnerable, the highest respect. In this context, our school will endeavor to provide a safe, supportive and secure environment that promotes respect and care and values diversity. We acknowledge that the mental, physical, spiritual and emotional wellbeing of children and young people are essential preconditions for successful learning.
* At St. Mary’s we believe a safe environment is required to protect children and young people from harm and to prevent staff from abusing their position of authority and trust.
* We accept that the child and young person's ongoing safety and wellbeing must be the primary focus of all decision making.
* We believe School leaders and staff must be fully self-aware of, and comply with, their professional obligations and responsibilities.
* Our commitment to protecting children is embedded in our schools culture and responsibility for taking action is understood and accepted at all levels of the organisation.
* As stated in our Mandatory Reporting Policy that we consider protecting children and young people against sexual abuse is a community wide responsibility, schools have particular moral and legal responsibilities to ensure children and young people are safe in their care and to actively and intentionally work to eliminate all forms of abusive behaviours towards children. There are also particular moral and legal obligations for those in authority to prevent, reduce and minimize child abuse and exploitation in all forms.

**Organisation**

* Mandatory reporters, who believe on reasonable grounds that a child or young person is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse, must report their concerns to Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Child Protection.

Mandatory reporters,

* who form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child or young person is in need of protection, should report their concerns to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police.
* If a child is displaying sexually abusive behaviours and is in need of therapeutic treatment should report their concerns to DHHS Child Protection.
* If staff have significant concerns for the wellbeing of a child or young person they should report their concerns to DHHS Child Protection or Child FIRST.
* In cases where staff have concerns about a child or young person, they should also discuss their concerns with the principal or a member of the school leadership team.
* The Principal, Deputy Principal and Pastoral Wellbeing Leader are the staff responsible for Child Safety including responding to and assisting or supporting staff who need to report allegations of suspected child abuse.

**Reporting criminal child sexual abuse - failure to disclose offence**

*Any staff member who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria by an adult against a child under 16 must disclose that information to police. Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence, except in limited circumstances such as where the information has already been reported to DHHS Child Protection*. **(Refer Failure to Disclose Policy)**

**Duty of Care** – (**Refer Duty of Care Policy**)

School staff have a duty of care to protect the safety, health and wellbeing of children in their care. If a staff member has concerns about the safety, health and wellbeing of children in their care they should take immediate action.

A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds. For example, a 'reasonable belief' might be formed if:

* a child states that they have been physically or sexually abused
* a child states that they know someone who has been physically or sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves)
* someone who knows a child states that the child has been physically or sexually abused
* professional observations of the child's behaviour or development leads a professional to form a belief that the child has been physically or sexually abused or is likely to be abused
* signs of abuse lead to a belief that the child has been physically or sexually abused.

**Types of child abuse and indicators of harm:**

Child abuse can have a significant effect on a child's physical or emotional health, development and wellbeing.

Types of child abuse include:

* physical abuse
* sexual abuse
* emotional abuse
* neglect
* medical neglect
* family violence
* human trafficking (including forced marriage)
* sexual exploitation (including pornography and prostitution).

A report should be made to DHHS Child Protection in circumstances where, for example:

* the child is engaging in risk-taking behaviour
* female genital mutilation has occurred, or there is a risk of it occurring
* there is a risk to an unborn child
* a child states that they know someone who has been physically or sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves)
* someone who knows a child states that the child has been physically or sexually abused
* professional observations of the child's behaviour or development leads a professional to form a belief that the child has been physically or sexually abused or is likely to be abused

**Making a Report**

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| * When the information leads to an “**informed opinion**” that the child is at risk the following process is implemented:   1. The Principal will seek further advice from the teacher who reported the incident.   2. Staff member in consultation with Principal / Vice Principal will conduct a Mandatory Report immediately.   *The Principal / Vice Principal will support the staff member during the reporting process but it is the responsibility of the informed staff member to make the report*.   * 1. The staff member will contact Child First (Department of Human Services). The staff member who reports the incident will document the contents of the telephone conversation. The Principal and the Staff member will check documentation together to ensure the accuracy of the conversation.   2. The Staff member will be available to speak with the Child Protection Case worker if requested.   3. Follow up documentation to be kept and placed in the Welfare file with the Principal. * The Principal or nominated person is to work with staff member at the conclusion of the report to ensure that the he/she is clear on how to respond to inquires from parents and/or colleagues. |  |  |
| **Related documentation**  This policy should be read in conjunction with the other policies and procedures of St. Mary’s School concerned with Child Safety and Pastoral Wellbeing:   * (Include the following , together with any other relevant school policies) * Charter of Sandhurst School Improvement (CoSSI) * Child Protection and Safety Policy * Child Protection – Failure to Protect Policy * Child Protection – Failure to Disclose Policy * Child Protection – Grooming Policy * Child Protection – Mandatory Reporting * Duty of Care Statement * Child Protection – Working With Children Policy * Catholic Education Sandhurst Information for Schools – Child Safe Organisations   **Resources**   * Children, Youth and Families Act (Vic) 2005   DEECD and DHS 2010, Protecting the Safety and Wellbeing of Children and Young People, A joint protocol of the Department of Human Services Child Protection, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Licensed Children’s Services and Victorian Schools.  **2) Support:**  Principal, Deputy Principal & Pastoral Wellbeing Leader  **Evaluation: Expectations and Procedures**  Child First will control procedure following the incident report |  |  |
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