

# FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

## Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

PROTECT



### YOU MUST TAKE ACTION

As a school staff member, you play a **critical role** in protecting children in your care.

- You **must** act, by following the 4 critical actions, as soon as you witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a reasonable belief that a child 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).
- You **must** use the *Responding to Suspected Child Abuse* template to keep clear and comprehensive notes.

\* A reasonable belief is a deliberately low threshold. This enables authorities to investigate and take action.

### 1 RESPONDING TO AN EMERGENCY

If there is no risk of immediate harm go to **Action 2**.

If a child is at immediate risk of harm you **must** ensure their safety by:

- separating alleged victims and others involved
- administering first aid
- 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 you may also need to maintain the integrity of the potential crime scene and preserve evidence.

### 2 REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed you **must** report all incidents, suspicions and disclosures of child abuse as soon as possible. Failure to report physical and sexual child abuse may amount to a criminal offence.

Q: Where does the source of suspected abuse come from?

#### WITHIN THE SCHOOL

##### VICTORIA POLICE

You **must** report all instances of suspected child abuse involving a school staff member, contractor or volunteer to Victoria Police.

You **must also** report internally to:

##### GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

- School Principal and/or leadership team
- Employee Conduct Branch
- DET Security Services Unit

##### CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

- School Principal and/or leadership team
- Diocesan education office

##### INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

- School Principal and/or school chairperson

For suspected student sexual assault, please follow the *Four Critical Actions: Student Sexual Offending*.

#### WITHIN THE FAMILY OR COMMUNITY

##### DHHS CHILD PROTECTION

You **must** report to DHHS Child Protection if a child is considered to be:

- in need of protection from 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.

##### VICTORIA POLICE

You **must also** report all instances of suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police.

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 (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support), or to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police.

### 3 CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

Your Principal **must** consult with DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers. They may advise:

- not to contact** the parents/carer (e.g. in circumstances where the parents are alleged to have engaged in the abuse, or the child is a mature minor and does not wish for their parent/carer to be contacted)
- to contact** the parents/carers and provide agreed information (this must be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion).

### 4 PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

Your school **must** provide support for children impacted by abuse. This should include the development of a *Student Support Plan* in consultation with wellbeing professionals. This is an essential part of your duty of care requirements.

Strategies may include development of a safety plan, direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals.

You **must** follow the *Four Critical Actions* every time you become aware of a further instance or risk of abuse. This includes reporting new information to authorities.

### CONTACT

#### DHHS CHILD PROTECTION AREA

North Division **1300 664 9777**

South Division **1300 655 795**

East Division **1300 360 391**

West Division (Rural) **1800 075 599**

West Division (Metro) **1300 664 9777**

#### AFTER HOURS

After hours, weekends, public holidays **13 12 78**

#### CHILD FIRST

www.dhs.vic.gov.au

#### VICTORIA POLICE

**000** or your local police station

#### DET SECURITY SERVICES UNIT

(03) 9589 6266

#### STUDENT INCIDENT AND RECOVERY UNIT

(03) 9637 2934

#### EMPLOYEE CONDUCT BRANCH

(03) 9637 2595

#### DIOCESAN OFFICE

Melbourne (03) 9267 0228

Ballarat (03) 5337 7135

Sale (03) 5622 6600

Sandhurst (03) 5443 2377

#### INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS VICTORIA

(03) 9825 7200

