

What to do when an allegation of child abuse is made?

The child safe standards require organisations that provide services for children to have processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse.

At Tecoma Primary School we have a Child Safety Policy and a Child Safety Code of Conduct in place to ensure all staff know their obligation and the legal requirements of keeping children safe at our school.

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.

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 with their parent/carer, specific people in your school (such as Principal/Assistant 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.
- Complete the *PROTECT Recording your Actions: Responding to Suspected Child Abuse* form available at: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/childprotection/Pages/report.aspx>
- As soon as possible after the disclosure, record the information using the child's words and report the disclosure to your Principal/Assistant Principal, police or child protection (DHS).
- Principal/Assistant Principal to provide support to the staff member involved in the disclosure
- Ensure the disclosure is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely.
All records need to be stored in the confidential file in the Assistant Principal's office.

If a parent/carer says their child has been abused in your school or raises a concern:

- 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. These notes will be attached to the report if necessary, and therefore destroyed if not needed.
- Explain to them the information may need to be repeated to authorities or others, such as the school's Principal/Assistant Principal, the police or child protection (DHS).
- Do not make promises at this early stage, except that you will do your best to keep the child safe.
- Provide them with an incident report form to complete, or complete it together, using the *PROTECT Recording your Actions: Responding to Suspected Child Abuse* form available at <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/childprotection/Pages/report.aspx>
- Ask them what action they would like to take and advise them of what the immediate next steps will be.
- 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 organisations 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.

If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse phone 000.

Legal responsibilities

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 only 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.

The **failure to protect** criminal offence (commenced on 1 July 2015) applies where there is a substantial risk that a child under the age of 16 under the care, supervision or authority of a relevant organisation will become a victim of a sexual offence committed by an adult associated with that organisation. A person in a position of authority in the organisation will commit the offence if they know of the risk of abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently failed to do so.