

Child Protection Guidelines

Introduction

St George Preca Primary School recognises its role in the prevention of child abuse and takes responsibility for implementing child protection practices. 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 a member of the Leadership team immediately.

In cases where staff members have concerns about a child or young person, they should discuss their concerns with the principal or a member of the school leadership team.

Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to enable staff to identify the indicators of a child or young person who may be in need of protection & to enable them to make a report of a child or young person who may be in need of protection.

Scope

Applies to all full-time & part time staff, casual relief teachers and students at St George Preca Primary School under their care.

Child Protection

St George Preca Primary School is committed to:

- » Being a place where children are safe and feel safe
- » Allocating resources for child protection education and programs
- » Developing practices and procedures that support child protection
- » Developing and providing protection and abuse prevention curriculum for students.

Staff at St George Preca Primary School are educated in the area of child protection and mandatory notification. As legal mandators, staff members at St George Preca Primary School will report any suspicion of child abuse or neglect.

Mandatory reporters must make a report as soon as practicable if, in the course of practising their profession or carrying out their duties, they form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child or young person is in need of protection, as a result of physical injury or sexual abuse, and the child's parents are unable or unwilling to protect the child.

The Leadership Team are committed to:

- » Providing a safe school environment that ensures children are protected
- » Ensuring school personnel understand the definitions of child abuse and neglect and carry out their legal obligations, responsibilities and correct procedures when notifying suspicion of child abuse and neglect
- » Supporting school personnel directly involved with the handling of disclosure and notification
- » Ensuring that policies and organizational procedures provide children with a safe school environment. This will be done in consultation with the Education Department.
- » Promoting models of behaviour between school personnel and children, based on mutual respect and consideration
- » Ensuring that student management practices respect the dignity of children
- » Providing training and development for all involved in child protection
- » Providing training and development for all involved in abuse prevention curriculum

- » Initiating and supporting the implementation of child protection and abuse prevention curriculum at the classroom level to ensure that all children have access to these programs throughout their school years.

Staff members at St George Preca Primary School are committed to:

- » Treating children with dignity and respect, to act with propriety, provide a 'duty of care' and protect children under their supervision
- » Notifying the Leadership Team if, in the course of their work, they suspect on reasonable grounds that a child has been or is being abused or neglected
- » Providing a physically and psychologically safe environment for children
- » Participating in training and development opportunities which provide knowledge and skills in mandatory notification
- » Teaching children skills which will empower them to achieve and maintain personal safety
- » Assisting children to develop positive, responsible and caring attitudes and behaviours which recognise the rights of all people to be safe and free from both harassment and abuse.

Definitions

The following definitions are provided to assist St George Preca Primary School staff identify the indicators of a child or young person who may be in need of protection & to enable them to make a report of a child or young person who may be in need of protection.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse consists of any non-accidental form of injury or serious physical harm inflicted on a child or young person by another person. Physical abuse does not mean reasonable discipline, though it may result from excessive or inappropriate discipline. Physical abuse can include beating, shaking, burning and assault with implements.

Sexual abuse

A child is sexually abused when any person uses their authority or power over a child or young person to engage in sexual activity. Child sexual abuse involves a wide range of sexual activity and may include fondling genitals; masturbation; oral sex; vaginal or anal penetration by finger, penis or any other object; voyeurism and exhibitionism. It can also include exploitation through pornography or prostitution.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse occurs when a child or young person is repeatedly rejected, isolated or frightened by threats or by witnessing family violence. It also includes hostility, derogatory name-calling and putdowns, or persistent coldness from a person, to the extent that the behaviour of the child or young person is disturbed or their emotional development is at serious risk of being impaired.

Psychological or emotional abuse may occur with or without other forms of abuse. The child or young person may develop personality or behavioural disorders, or become filled with self-doubt and internalised rage, unable to form sustained and intimate relationships. There are few physical indicators, although emotional abuse may cause delays in emotional, mental or even physical development.

Neglect

Neglect includes a failure to provide the child or young person with an adequate standard of nutrition, medical care, clothing, shelter or supervision to the extent that the health or development of the child is significantly impaired or placed at serious risk. A child is neglected if they are left uncared for over long periods of time or abandoned. The two types of neglect are further defined below.

Serious neglect

Serious neglect includes situations where a parent consistently fails to meet the child's basic needs for food, shelter, hygiene or adequate supervision to the extent that the consequences for the child are severe. For example:

- » The child's home environment is filthy or hazardous in the extreme and poses a threat to the child's immediate safety or development and is characterised by the presence of animal or human faeces or urine, decomposing food, syringes or other dangerous paraphernalia
- » The child is provided with consistently insufficient or inadequate food or nourishment for healthy development
- » The child has a serious medical condition for which the parent has consistently failed to obtain treatment or dispense prescribed medication
- » The parent consistently leaves the child unattended, or exposed to or in the care of strangers who may harm the child.

Medical neglect

Neglect of medical care refers to a situation in which a parent's refusal of, or failure to seek, treatment or to agree to a certain medical procedure leads to an unacceptable deprivation of the child's basic rights to life or health.

Family violence

Family violence is defined as violence (either actual or threatened) that occurs within a family, including physical, verbal, emotional, psychological, sexual, financial and social abuse. When there are strong indicators that incidents of family violence are placing children at significant risk or danger, Child Protection must be informed. Family violence is a criminal offence and can be liable for prosecution.

Duty of care

Staff members 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 it is important to take immediate action.

In the case of a child who may be in need of protection or therapeutic treatment, or where there are significant concerns about the wellbeing of a child, school staff can discharge this duty of care by taking action which includes the following:

- » Reporting their concerns to the DHS Child Protection or another appropriate agency (as identified above)
- » Notifying the principal or a member of the school leadership team of their concerns and the reasons for those concerns.

Making a Report

When making a report staff members must ensure the following:

Staff members should keep comprehensive notes that are dated and include the following information:

- » Description of the concerns (e.g. physical injuries, student behaviour)
- » Source of those concerns (e.g. observation, report from child or another person)
- » Actions taken as a result of the concerns (e.g. consultation with principal, report to DHS Child Protection etc).

Staff members should discuss any concerns about the safety and wellbeing of students with the principal or a member of the school leadership team. The individual staff member should then make their own assessment about whether they must or may make a report about the child or young person.

Member of the Leadership Team should gather the relevant information necessary to make the report. This should include the following information:

- » Full name, date of birth, and residential address of the child or young person
- » Details of the concerns and the reasons for those concerns
- » The individual staff member's involvement with the child and young person
- » Details of any other agencies who may be involved with the child or young person.

Upon making a report to the relevant agencies written record of the report which includes the following information must be taken and kept:

- » The date and time of the report and a summary of what was reported
- » The name and position of:
 - The person who made the report
 - The person who received the report.

Notify the Victoria Police if there is concern that a criminal offence may have been committed.

Potential consequences of making a report

The following consequences must be considered upon making a report:

Confidentiality: The identity of a reporter must remain confidential unless:

- » The reporter chooses to inform the child, young person or parent of the report.
- » The reporter consents in writing to their identity being disclosed.
- » A Court or Tribunal decides that it is necessary for the identity of the reporter to be disclosed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child.
- » A Court or Tribunal decides that, in the interests of justice, the reporter is required to provide evidence.

Professional Protection: If a report is made in good faith:

- » It does not constitute unprofessional conduct or a breach of professional ethics on the part of the reporter.
- » The reporter cannot be held legally liable in respect of the report

Interviews:

- » DHS Child Protection and/or Victoria Police may conduct interviews of children and young people at the school without the parent's knowledge or consent.

- » Interviewing children and young people at school should only occur in exceptional circumstances and if it is in the best interests of the child to proceed in this manner.
- » DHS Child Protection and/or Victoria Police will notify the principal or a member of the leadership team of their intention to interview the child or young person on the school premises.

- » When DHS Child Protection practitioners/Victoria Police officers come to the school premises, the principal or a member of the leadership team should request to see identification before permitting them to have access to the child or young person.
- » When a child or young person is being interviewed by DHS Child Protection and/or Victoria Police, school staff must arrange to have a supportive adult present with the child or young person.

Support for the child or young person: The roles and responsibilities of staff members in supporting children who are involved with DHS Child Protection may include the following:

- » Acting as a support person for the child or young person.
- » Attending DHS Child Protection case planning meetings.
- » Observing and monitoring the child's behaviour.
- » Liaising with professionals.

Requests for Information: DHS Child Protection and/or Child FIRST and/or Victoria Police may request information about the child or family for the purpose of investigating a report and assessing the risk to the child or young person.

In certain circumstances, DHS Child Protection can also direct school staff and Department staff to provide information or documents about the protection or development of the child. Such directions should be in writing and only be made by authorised persons within DHS Child Protection.

Witness Summons: If DHS Child Protection makes a Protection Application in the Children's Court of Victoria, any party to the application may be issued with a Witness Summons to produce documents and/or to give evidence in the proceedings.