

Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand the information in this policy, please contact the school Social Worker on 9097 2000



PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to outline the procedures our school has in place to respond to complaints or concerns relating to child abuse and to ensure that all staff and members of our school community understand and follow the various legal obligations that apply to the reporting of child abuse to relevant authorities.

SCOPE

This policy applies to complaints and concerns relating to child abuse made by or in relation to a child or student, school staff, volunteers, contractors, service providers, visitors or any other person while connected to the school (physical and online).

DEFINITIONS

Child abuse

Child abuse includes:

- physical violence inflicted on a child
- sexual offences committed against a child
- grooming of a child by an adult
- family violence committed against or in the presence of a child
- serious emotional or psychological harm to a child
- serious neglect of a child.

Sexual Offences	A sexual offence occurs when a person involves a child in sexual activity or deliberately puts the child in the presence of sexual behaviours that are exploitative or inappropriate to the child’s age or development. Sexual offences are governed by the <i>Crimes Act 1958</i> (Vic.) Sexual abuse can involve a wide range of sexual activity and may include fondling, masturbation, oral sex, voyeurism, and exhibitionism. It can also include exploitation through pornography or prostitution.
Grooming	Grooming refers to predatory conduct undertaken by an adult (18 years or over) to prepare a child for sexual activity at a later time. It is a sexual offence under section 49M of the <i>Crimes Act 1958</i> (Vic.) carrying a maximum 10-year term of imprisonment. Under section 49M the adult’s words or conduct must be intended to facilitate the child engaging or being involved in the commission of or attempt to commit a sexual offence by the adult or another adult
Physical Violence	Physical violence occurs when a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm from a non-accidental injury or injuries inflicted by another person. Physical violence can be inflicted in many ways including beating, shaking, burning, or using weapons (such as belts and paddles)
Serious emotional or psychological harm	Serious emotional or psychological abuse may occur when a child is repeatedly rejected, isolated, or frightened by threats or the witnessing of family violence. It also includes hostility derogatory name calling and put-downs, or persistent coldness from a person to the extent where the behaviour of the child is being disturbed or their emotional development is at serious risk of being impaired. Serious emotional or psychological harm could result from conduct that exploits a child without necessarily being criminal, such as encouraging a child to engage in inappropriate or risky

	behaviours.
Serious neglect	Neglect includes a failure to provide a child with an adequate standard of nutrition, medical care, clothing, shelter, or supervision. Significant neglect is when the child is exposed to an extremely dangerous or life-threatening situation and there is a continued failure to provide a child with the necessities of life.
Family violence	Family violence is defined under the <i>Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic.)</i> to include behaviour that causes a child to hear, witness or be exposed to the effects of family violence such as abusive, threatening, controlling or coercive behaviour. While family violence does not form part of the official definition of 'child abuse' in the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic.), the impact of family violence on a child can be a form of abuse, for example, where it causes serious emotional or psychological harm to a child. A child can also be a direct victim of family violence.

Child abuse can have a significant effect on a child's physical, social, psychological, or emotional health, development, and wellbeing. The younger the child the more vulnerable they are to abuse and the more serious the consequences are likely to be.

There can be physical or behavioural indicators of child abuse and neglect, or a combination of both. While the presence of a single indicator, or even several indicators, does not necessarily prove that abuse or neglect has occurred, the repeated occurrence of either a physical or behavioural indicator, or the occurrence of several indicators together, should alert school staff to the possibility of child abuse or neglect.

Child abuse is more commonly perpetrated by someone who is known to and trusted by the child and is also often someone highly trusted within their families, communities, schools.

For further definitions of all types of child abuse, a comprehensive list of the indicators of harm and advice on identifying perpetrators of child sexual abuse, refer to the protocol https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/protect/ChildSafeStandard5_SchoolsGuide.pdf

Grooming

Grooming is a criminal offence under the *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)* and is a form of child abuse and sexual misconduct. This offence targets predatory conduct undertaken by an adult to prepare a child, under the age of 16, to engage in sexual activity at a later time. Grooming can include communicating (including electronic communications) and/or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent or carer.

School staff member

For the purpose of this policy a school staff member includes a contractor engaged by the school or school council to perform child-related work.

POLICY

All children and young people have the right to protection in their best interests. Western Autistic School understands the important role our school plays in protecting children from abuse. We have a range of policies and measures in place to prevent child abuse from occurring at our school or during school activities.

Information for students

- All students should feel safe to communicate with any staff member to raise any concerns about their safety or any other concerns that they have.
- If a student does not know who to approach at Western Autistic School, they should start with classroom teacher
- There are posters in each classroom of Western Autistic School with photos of key staff members to support student voice and agency and accessibility to school leaders.

Identifying child abuse

To ensure we can respond in the best interests of students and children when complaints or concerns relating to child abuse are raised, all staff and relevant volunteers must:

- understand how to identify signs of child abuse and behavioural indicators of perpetrators- for detailed information on identifying child abuse and behavioural indicators of perpetrators refer to [Identify child abuse](#)
- understand their various legal obligations in relation to reporting child abuse to relevant authorities- for detailed information on the various legal obligations refer to Appendix A
- follow the below procedures for responding to complaints or concerns relating to child abuse, which ensure our school acts in the best interests of students and children and complies with both our legal and Department policy obligations.

At Western Autistic School we recognise the diversity of the children, young people, and families at our school and take account of their individual needs and backgrounds when considering and responding to child safety incidents or concerns.

Presently, the criteria for entry into Western Autistic School includes a severe language impairment, therefore all students benefit from individualised support to develop their communication skills. Students who cannot rely solely on speech to communicate are supported to use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems to express themselves, and emphasis is placed on authentic communication with the student. The school strives to navigate challenges around our student's ability to self-advocate via the expression of opinions, preferences, and problems, and to ask for help.

Procedures for responding to an incident, disclosure, allegation, or suspicion of child abuse

In responding to a child safety incident, disclosure, allegation or suspicion, Western Autistic School will follow:

- the [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#) for complaints and concerns relating to all forms of child abuse
- the [Four Critical Actions: Student Sexual Offending](#) for complaints and concerns relating to student sexual offending
- our Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy and Bullying Prevention Policy for complaints and concerns relating to student physical violence or other harmful student behaviours.

School staff and volunteer responsibilities

1. Immediate action

If a school staff member or volunteer witnesses an incident of child abuse, or reasonably believes, suspects, or receives a disclosure or allegation that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused, they must:

- If a child is at immediate risk of harm, separate alleged victims and others involved, administer first aid (appropriate to their level of training) and call 000 for urgent medical or police assistance where required to respond to immediate health or safety concerns.
- Notify Assistant Principal Wellbeing as soon as possible, who will ensure our school follows the steps in these procedures.

NOTE for staff and volunteers:

- if you are uncertain if an incident, disclosure, allegation, or suspicion gives rise to a concern about child abuse you must always err on the side of caution and report the concern to Assistant Principal Wellbeing.
- if the Assistant Principal Wellbeing is unavailable, the Principal will take on this role.
- if the concerns relate to the conduct of Assistant Principal Wellbeing or Principal notify the Southwest Victoria Region Department of Education on 1300333232 who must then take on responsibility for ensuring our school follows these procedures.

Refer to Appendix B for guidance on how to respond to a disclosure of child abuse.

2. Reporting to authorities and referring to services

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed, and relevant school staff have been informed, the Assistant Principal Wellbeing **must** report all incidents, suspicions, and disclosures of child abuse as soon as possible.

The following steps will ensure our school complies with the four critical actions as well as additional actions required under the Child Safe Standards.

The Assistant Principal Wellbeing must ensure:

- all relevant information is reported to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Child Protection, Victoria Police or relevant services where required
- the incident is reported to the Department's [eduSafe Plus portal](#) or the Incident Support and Operations Centre (1800 126 126) in accordance with the severity rating outlined in the [Managing and Reporting School Incidents Policy](#)
- all [reportable conduct](#) allegations or incidents are reported by the Principal to the Department's Employee Conduct Branch (03 7022 0005) – where a reportable conduct allegation is made against the Principal, the Regional Director must be informed who will then make a report to Employee Conduct Branch

NOTE: In circumstances where staff members are legally required to report child abuse to DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police and they are unable to confirm that the information has been reported by another person at the school or the designated member of school staff does not agree that a report needs to be made, the staff

member who has formed the reasonable belief must still contact DFFH Child Protection and Victoria Police to make the report.

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 or The Orange Door (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support) DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police.

3. Contacting parents or carers

The Assistant Principal Wellbeing must ensure parents and carers are notified unless advised otherwise by DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police, or there are other safety and wellbeing concerns in relation to informing parents/carers.

Principals may contact the Department of Education and Training Legal Division for advice on notifying parents and carers, and where relevant, the wider school community.

For further guidance, refer to [PROTECT Contacting parents and carers](#)

4. Ongoing protection and support

The Assistant Principal Wellbeing must ensure appropriate steps are taken by the school to protect the child and other children from any continued risk of abuse. These steps must be taken in consultation with any relevant external agency or Department staff such as DFFH Child Protection, Victoria Police, Legal Division or Employee Conduct Branch. Ongoing protection will also include further reports to authorities if new information comes to light or further incidents occur.

Appropriate, culturally sensitive, and ongoing support must be offered and provided to all affected students. Ongoing support will be based on any available advice from the Department, parents and carers, health practitioners, and other authorities (such as DFFH or Victoria Police) and may include referral to wellbeing professionals, development of a safety plan, student support group meetings, and, for student-to-student incidents, behaviour management and support measures.

5. Recordkeeping

The Assistant Principal Wellbeing will ensure that:

- detailed notes of the incident, disclosure, allegation or suspicion are taken with recommendation to use the([Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: Template](#) or the [Responding to Student Sexual Offending: template](#) are both available on Protect website) including, where possible, by the staff member or volunteer who reported the incident, disclosure, or suspicion to them.
- detailed notes are taken of any immediate or ongoing action taken by the school to respond to the incident, disclosure, allegation, or suspicion
- all notes and other records relating to the incident, disclosure, allegation, or suspicion, including the schools immediate and ongoing actions, are stored confidentially.

For school visitors and school community members

All community members aged 18 years or over have legal obligations relating to reporting child abuse – refer to Appendix A for detailed information.

- Any person can make a report to DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection. For contact details, refer to the [Four Critical Actions](#).
- Members of the community do not have to inform the school if they are making a disclosure to DFFH Child Protection or the Victoria Police. However, where a community member is concerned about the safety of a child or children at the school, the community member should report this concern to the principal so that appropriate steps to support the student can be taken

Additional requirements for all staff

All staff play an important role in supporting student safety and wellbeing and have a duty of care to take reasonable steps to prevent reasonably foreseeable harm to students.

Fulfilling the roles and responsibilities in the above procedure does not displace or discharge any other obligations that arise if a person reasonably believes that a child is at risk of child abuse. This means that if, after following the actions outlined in the procedure, a staff member reasonably believes that a child remains at risk of abuse, they must take the following steps:

- if they are concerned that the school has not taken reasonable steps to prevent or reduce the risk, raise these concerns with the principal in the first instance, and escalate to the regional office if they remain unsatisfied
- report the matter to the relevant authorities where they are unable to confirm that the information has been reported by another staff member

Staff must refer to Appendix A for further information on their obligations relating to reporting to authorities.

COMMUNICATION

This policy will be communicated to our school community in the following ways:

- Available publicly on our school's website (or insert other online parent, carer, student communication method)
- Included in staff induction processes and annual staff training
- Included in volunteer induction processes and training for relevant volunteers
- Discussed in annual staff briefings or meetings
- Hard copy available from school administration upon request

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

The following Department of Education and Training policies and guidance are relevant to this policy:

- [Child Safe Standards](#)
- [Protecting Children — Reporting and Other Legal Obligations](#)
- [Managing and Reporting School Incidents](#)

- [Reportable Conduct](#)
- [Restraint and Seclusion](#)
- [Identify child abuse](#)
- [Report child abuse in schools \(including four critical actions\)](#)
- [Identify and respond to student sexual offending](#)

The following school policies are also relevant to this policy:

- Child Safety Policy
- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Statement of Values and School Philosophy
- Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy
- Volunteer Policy
- Duty of Care Policy
- Inclusion and Diversity Policy

POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Policy last reviewed	July 2022
Consultation	School council August 2022, Newsletter August 2022
Approved by	Principal
Next scheduled review date	July 2024

**WESTERN
AUTISTIC
SCHOOL**

**CHILD SAFETY RESPONDING AND
REPORTING OBLIGATIONS POLICY AND
PROCEDURE**

WESTERN AUTISTIC SCH