



## **APPENDIX A**

# **CHILD SAFETY RESPONDING AND REPORTING PROCEDURES** **AT BERENDALE SCHOOL**

### FOR STUDENTS

- All students should feel safe to speak to any staff member to raise any concern about their safety or any other concerns that they have.
- If a student does not know who to approach at Berendale School, they should start with the Child Safe Officer
- Teacher

### MANAGING DISCLOSURES MADE BY STUDENTS

When managing a disclosure, you should:

- listen to the student and allow them to speak
- stay calm and use a neutral tone with no urgency and where possible use the child's language and vocabulary (you do not want to frighten the child or interrupt the child)
- be gentle, patient, and non-judgemental throughout
- highlight to the student it was important for them to tell you about what has happened
- assure them that they are not to blame for what has occurred
- do not ask leading questions, for example gently ask, "What happened next?" rather than "Why?"
- be patient and allow the child to talk at their own pace and in their own words
- do not pressure the child into telling you more than they want to, they will be asked a lot of questions by other professionals and it is important not to force them to retell what has occurred multiple times
- reassure the child that you believe them and that disclosing the matter was important for them to do
- use verbal facilitators such as, "I see", restate the child's previous statement, and use non-suggestive words of encouragement, designed to keep the child talking in an open-ended way ("what happened next?")
- tell the child in age appropriate language you are required to report to the relevant authority to help stop the abuse, and explain the role of these authorities if appropriate (for a young child this may be as simple as saying "I will need to talk to people to work out what to do next to help you").

## WHEN MANAGING A DISCLOSURE, YOU SHOULD AVOID:

- displaying expressions of panic or shock
- asking questions that are investigative and potentially invasive (this may make the child feel uncomfortable and may cause the child to withdraw)
- going over the information repeatedly (you are only gathering information to help you form a belief on reasonable grounds that you need to make a report to the relevant authority)
- making any comments that would lead the student to believe that what has happened is their fault
- making promises to the child about what will occur next or that things will be different given the process can be unpredictable and different for each child depending on their circumstances (instead reassure them that you and others will do your best to help).

## GENERAL PROCEDURES

Our school will follow the ***Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse***. (Four Critical Actions) when responding to incidents, disclosures, and suspicions of child abuse.

All staff at our school who believe that a child is in need of protection, even if it doesn't meet the threshold required for mandatory reporting or the staff member is not a mandatory reporter, should in the first instance, speak to Child Safe Officer (Athina Caravatas – Assistant Principal) should make the required reports to DHHS Child Protection and/or Victoria Police as necessary.

At our school, the Child Safe Officer will be responsible for monitoring overall school compliance with this procedure.

Nothing in this procedure prevents a staff member or any other person from reporting to the relevant authorities if they form a reasonable belief that a child is at risk of abuse.

## REPORTING SUSPICIOUS, DISCLOSURES OR INCIDENTS OF CHILD ABUSE

### *Responsibilities of all school staff*

If a school staff member reasonably suspects or witness an incident of child abuse or receives a disclosure of child abuse, they must:

- if a child is at immediate risk of harm, separate alleged victims and others involved, administer first aid, and call 000.
- Speak to the Principal, Assistant Principal or Child Safe Officer as soon as possible, who will follow the Four Critical Actions.
- Make detailed notes of the incident or disclosure and ensure that these notes are kept and stored securely in locked office filing cabinet.
- If the staff member is a mandatory reporter and reasonably believes that a student has suffered physical and/or sexual abuse from which the child's parents have not protected the child, they must make a report to DHHS Child Protection or must ensure that a report to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police has been made by the Principal, Assistant Principal or Child Safe Officer. If the report has not been made by another staff member, the mandatory reporter must make the report.

- If the staff member has formed a 'reasonable belief' that a sexual offence has occurred against a child, they must make a report to Victoria Police or they must ensure that a report to Victoria Police has been made by the Assistant Principal or Child Safe Officer. If the report has not been made by another staff member, the staff member must make the report.

In circumstances where a member of the leadership team disagrees that a report needs to be made, but the staff member has formed a 'reasonable belief' that the child is in need of protection and/or has been the victim of sexual abuse, the staff member must still contact DHHS Child Protection and/or Victoria Police to make the report.

The Principal, Assistant Principal or Child Safe Officer is responsible for promptly managing the school's response to an incident, suspicion, or disclosure of child abuse, and ensuring that the incident, suspicion, or disclosure is taken seriously. The principal, Assistant Principal or Child Safe Officer is also responsible for responding appropriately to a child who make or is affected by an allegation of child abuse.

If the Principal, Assistant Principal or Child Safe Officer receives a report from a school staff member or member of the school community of a suspicion, disclosure, or incident of child abuse, they must:

- Follow the Four Critical Actions as soon as possible, including:
  - Responding to an emergency
  - Reporting to authorities/referring to services
  - Contacting parents/carers and
  - Providing ongoing support.
- Make detailed notes of the incident or disclosure, including actions taken and ensure that those notes are kept and stored securely in a locked office filing cabinet. They are also responsible for ensuring that any staff member who reported the incident, disclosure, or suspicion to them also makes and keep notes of the incident.
- Berendale School, the Principal, Assistant Principal or Child Safe Officer will be responsible for ensuring that there is a prompt response to the disclosure and that the child is appropriately supported.

If the principal/Assistant Principal or Child Safe Officer is unavailable, a Leading Teacher will take on the role and responsibilities described in this section.

## DUTY OF CARE AND ONGOING SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

Fulfilling the requirements in this procedure does not displace or discharge any other obligations that arise if a person reasonably believes that a child is at risk of abuse.

All staff have a duty of care to take reasonable steps to prevent reasonably foreseeable harm to students. All staff must ensure that the Principal, Assistant Principal, Child Safe Officer, or other appropriate staff member is aware if any incidents, suspicions, or disclosures of child abuse as soon as possible after they occur. This will allow appropriate supports to be put in place for the student affected.

## FOR SCHOOL VISITORS, VOLUNTEERS AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY MEMBERS

All community members aged 18 years or over should be aware of their legal obligations – see failure to disclose offence above, in this Policy.

Any person can make a report to DHHS Child Protection if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection. For contact details see the Four Critical Actions – <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/protect/FourCriticalActionsChildAbuse.pdf>

There is no requirement for community members to inform the school if they are making a disclosure to DHHS Child Protection or the Victoria Police. However, where a community member is concerned about the safety of a child or children at the school, and where disclosure of that concern will not compromise any potential police investigation, the community member should report this concern to the principal so that appropriate steps to support the student can be taken.

## REVIEW CYCLE

This policy was last approved by school council on May 2020 and is scheduled for review in 2023.

<b>School:</b> Berendale School	<b>Author:</b> Principal	
<b>Approved by:</b> School Council	<b>Date: June 2020</b>	<b>Review date: June 2023</b>
References: Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide.		