PROTECT THE EDUCATION STATE VICTORIA State Government | Education and Training

Protecting Children from Abuse: For Parents and Carers

GET THE FACTS

As adults we all play a critical role in protecting children from harm.

As a parent or carer you have the primary responsibility for protecting and caring for your own children and supporting them to build relationships that are safe and respectful.

You also play a critical role in identifying and responding to suspected abuse within the community. In fact it may amount to a criminal offence if you fail to report suspected child sexual abuse.

REPORTING ABUSE

What should I do if I suspect that *my child* has been abused?

If you believe your child has been abused, or is at risk of being abused contact Victoria Police immediately via the local police station or on 000 if it's an emergency.

What should I do if I suspect that *another child* has been abused?

If you suspect a child has been abused, or is at risk of abuse (such as physical abuse, family violence or neglect) you should report immediately to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Child Protection (see contact details at the end of this fact sheet).

- If you suspect a child has been sexually abused, you must also report your concerns to the Victoria Police. You may be committing a criminal offence if you fail to do so
- You should report even if you're not sure. It is the role of authorities to investigate your concerns and determine if any further action needs to be taken.
- Parents and carers are also often in a position to protect the friends of their children. This is because children are most likely to disclose their experiences of abuse to their peers, who in turn may share this with their own parents and carers.
- If your child talks to you about their friend, and you suspect that the child is being abused or is at risk of being abused, you should act. You may be the only adult in a position to act and your response may be critical in protecting that child's safety.

What should I do if I suspect that a child is being abused and authorities have previously investigated and dismissed my report?

If you have new grounds for believing that a child is being abused, you should make another report to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police. Every report is critical to protecting a child as it builds evidence and helps authorities to gain a clearer understanding of risks to the child.

What happens to my child if someone at the school suspects that my child has been abused?

All staff members at your child's school are required to report suspected child abuse to DHHS, Child Protection and, in some circumstances, to Victoria Police.

Your child's school will contact you as soon as possible, unless they have been advised not to do so by DHHS, Child Protection and/or Victoria Police.

Where appropriate the school will work with you to ensure your child is provided with support, which may include referring them to wellbeing professionals.

When is it a criminal offence to not report suspect abuse?

Any adult may face criminal charges if they believe that another adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 years of age and does not report this information to the police.

FACTS ON CHILD ABUSE

What is child abuse?

Child abuse:

- can include physical abuse, sexual abuse, grooming, emotional or phychological harm, neglect or family violence
- does not have to involve physical contact or force (e.g. child sexual abuse can include talking to a child in a sexually explicit way)
- can be committed by any member of the community, including someone within a child's family or someone within the school setting.

The trauma associated with child abuse can significantly impact upon the wellbeing and development of a child. This is why it is critical that we all respond immediately to any form of suspected abuse.

What are the signs that a child has been abused?

There are a range of physical and behavioural indicators of child abuse.

Most importantly you should act if you notice anything that causes you to form a reasonable belief that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused, including (but not limited to):

- a change in a child's behaviour (e.g. withdrawal, regressive behaviour, or non-age appropriate sexual behaviours)
- physical indicators of abuse (e.g. unexplained bruises, welts, signs of malnutrition)
- an inappropriate relationship between an adult and a child (e.g. inappropriate physical contact, unexplained gifts or phone/email contact).

THE SCHOOL'S ROLE

How must schools respond to suspected child abuse?

All staff in Victorian schools are obligated to respond to any incident or suspicion of child abuse as outlined below:

1. **Respond to the emergency**
   Address any immediate health and safety needs (e.g. administer first aid or contact emergency services).
2. **Inform authorities**
   Report any reasonable belief that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused to the DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police.
3. **Contact parents/carers when appropriate**
   Contact parents/carers once authorities advise that it is safe and appropriate to do so.

   Ideally parents/carers will play a central role in providing support for their children, however schools will be instructed not to contact parents/carers in circumstances where this may impede an investigation or place the child at greater risk.
4. **Provide ongoing support for all children impacted by the abuse**
   Provide appropriate support for all children impacted by abuse. This will likely include ongoing counselling from professionals.
   The child's ongoing support will be documented in a *Student Support Plan*.

These actions are outlined in further detail in *Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools.*

Are the staff at my child's school required to report child abuse?

Yes – all staff at your child's school are required by law to report any reasonable belief that a child has been abused, or is at risk of abuse.

In some circumstances, it may be a criminal offence for school staff to fail to report child abuse to the authorities.

PROTECTING MY CHILD

What can I do to help educate and protect my child from abuse?

Have a chat to your child and make sure that he or she knows that no one is allowed to threaten, hurt or touch them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable.

Every relationship should be respectful and no one should behave in a way that makes them feel unsafe or afraid.

Your child's school will also be supporting your child in learning about their rights to be safe and respected. Victorian government schools are teaching the *Respectful Relationships* program which promotes positive attitudes and behaviours and is aimed at preventing family violence.

What should I talk about when I explain safety to my child?

There are some things you can do at home to build your child's understanding of safe and respectful relationships including:

- talking openly with your child about their feelings and relationships
- being sure that they understand you will listen and act if they are concerns about how anyone is treating them
- using the correct names for body parts and having age-appropriate conversations about touching and sexual activity
- letting your child know that adults should never harm or act in a sexual way with any child.

Keeping children safe outside of the home or school

You play a critical role in ensuring your children are spending time in safe places.

In Victoria all people who are working with your children such as coaches and music teachers need to have a current Working With Children Check.

You may like to check that any staff and volunteers spending time with your child after school hours and on weekends have a valid Working With Children Check.

If you think that you may need some help to keep your children safe from harm and support their healthy development, it is important you find some help. Visit the Victorian Government's Better Health Channel for information on seeking support. See www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Where can I go for more information and support?

You can contact DHHS Child Protection and Victoria Police directly to discuss any concerns you may have for the wellbeing of a child (see contact details on the next page)

If you have any concerns about your child or another child at your child's school talk to the principal or another staff member at the school about your concerns. You can also raise this matter with DHHS Child Protection and the Victoria Police.

For further information on where to go for support to keep your children safe from harm visit the Victorian Government's Better Health Channel: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

For more information on:

- your child's school's role in preventing and managing child abuse: www.education.vic.gov.au/protect
- indicators of abuse, visit www.education.vic.gov.au/protect

If you are concerned or unsure about your school's response and/or would like to talk to someone outside of the school please contact:

- Victorian government schools Regional Office: www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/regions.aspx
- Catholic Schools local Diocesan education office: www.cecv.catholic.edu.au/About-Us/Dioceses
- Independent Schools Victoria: www.is.vic.edu.au/who-we-are/contact-us/

CONTACT INFORMATION

24 Hour Services

Victoria Police	000
Department of Health and Human Services Child Protection	131 278
Department of Education and Training Security Services Unit	(03) 9589 6266

Department of Education and Training

Security Services Unit	(03) 9589 6266
Student Incident and Recovery Unit	(03) 9637 2934 or (03) 9637 2487
Legal Division	(03) 9637 3146
Employee Assistance Program	1300 361 008
Employee Health	(03) 9637 2395
Employee Conduct Branch	(03) 9637 2595
Privacy Unit	(03) 9637 3601
International Division	(03) 9651 3976
Communications Division	(03) 9637 2871

Catholic Education

Archdiocese of Melbourne: ■ Office of Professional Conduct, Ethics & Investigation ■ Legal Services ■ Student Wellbeing Information Line ■ Communications & Marketing Unit (Media Advisor)	(03) 9267 0228
Diocese of Sale	(03) 5622 6600
Diocese of Ballarat	(03) 5337 7135
Diocese of Sandhurst	(03) 5443 2377

Independent Schools

Independent Schools Victoria	(03) 9825 7200

Regional

North Eastern Victoria	
General enquiries	1300 333 231
Benalla office	(03) 8392 9500
Glen Waverley office	(03) 8392 9300
North Western Victoria	
Bendigo office	(03) 5337 8444
Coburg office	(03) 9488 9488
South Eastern Victoria	
Dandenong office	(03) 8765 5600
Moe office	(03) 5127 0400
South Western Victoria	
General enquiries	1300 333 232
Ballarat office	(03) 5337 8444
Footscray office	(03) 8397 0300
Geelong office	(03) 5225 1000
Horsham office	(03) 5310 5300
Warrnambool office	1300 333 232

Department of Health and Human Services Child Protection

Region	Local Government Areas (LGAs)	Phone No
Northern and western suburban LGAs	Banyule, Brimbank, Darebin, Hobsons Bay, Hume, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Melton, Moonee Valley, Moreland, Nillumbik, Whittlesea, Wyndham, Yarra.	**1300 664 977**
Eastern suburban LGAs	Boroondara, Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Monash, Whitehorse, Yarra Ranges.	**1300 360 391**
Southern suburban LGAs	Bayside, Cardinia, Casey, Frankston, Glen Eira, Greater Dandenong, Kingston, Mornington Peninsula, Port Phillip, Stonnington.	**1300 655 795**
West Rural and Regional LGSs	Ararat, Ballarat, Golden Plains, Hepburn, Hindmarsh, Horsham, Moorabool, Northern Grampians, Pyrenees, West Wimmera, Yarriambiack, Colac-Otway, Corangamite, Glenelg, Greater Geelong, Moyne, Queenscliffe, Southern Grampians, Surf Coast, Warrnambool.	**1800 075 599**
North-western rural and regional LGAs	Buloke, Campaspe, Central Goldfields, Gannawarra, Greater Bendigo, Loddon, Macedon Ranges, Mildura, Mount Alexander, Swan Hill.	**1800 675 598**
North-eastern rural and regional LGAS	Alpine, Benalla, Greater Shepparton, Indigo, Mansfield, Mitchell, Moira, Murrindindi, Strathbogie, Towong, Wangaratta, Wodonga.	**1800 650 227**
Eastern and south-eastern rural and regional LGAs	Bass Coast, Baw Baw, East Gippsland, Latrobe, South Gippsland, Wellington.	**1800 020 202**

Child First

Alpine	1800 705 211
Ararat	1300 783 341
Ballarat	1300 783 341
Banyule	(03) 9450 0955
Bass Coast	(03) 5662 5150
Baw Baw	1800 339 100
Bayside	1300 367 441
Benalla	1800 705 211
Boroondara	1300 762 125
Brimbank	1300 138 180
Buloke	1300 665 218
Campaspe	1800 260 338
Cardinia	(03) 9705 3939
Cardinia - Aboriginal children and families	(03) 9794 5973
Casey	(03) 9705 3939
Casey - Aboriginal children and families	(03) 9794 5973
Central Goldfields	1800 260 338
Colac-Otway	(03) 5232 5500
Corangamite	(03) 5232 5500
Darebin	(03) 9450 0955
East Gippsland	(03) 5152 0052
Frankston	1300 721 383
Gannawarra	1300 665 218
Glen Eira	1300 367 441
Glenelg	1300 543 779
Golden Plains	1300 783 341
Greater Bendigo	1800 260 338
Greater Dandenong	(03) 9705 3939
Greater Dandenong - Aboriginal children and families	(03) 9794 5973
(Greater Geelong	1300 551 948
Greater Shepparton	1300 854 944
Hepburn	1300 783 341
Hindmarsh	1800 195 114
Hobson's Bay	1300 775 160
Horsham	1800 195 114
Hume	1300 786 433
Indigo	1800 705 211
Kingston	1300 367 441
Knox	1300 369 146
La Trobe	1800 339 100
Loddon	1800 260 338
Macedon Ranges	1800 260 338

Manningham	1300 762 125
Mansfield	1800 705 211
Maribyrnong	1300 775 160
Maroondah	1300 369 146
Melbourne	1300 775 160
Melton	1300 138 180
Mildura	1300 625 533
Mitchell	1800 663 107
Moira	1300 854 944
Monash	1300 762 125
Moonee Valley	1300 775 160
Macedon Ranges	1300 783 341
Moorabool	1300 786 433
Moreland	1300 721 383
Mornington Peninsula	1800 260 338
Mount Alexander	1300 543 779
Moyne	1800 663 107
Nillumbik	(03) 9450 0955
Northern Grampians	1800 195 114
Port Phillip	1300 367 441
Pyrenees	1300 783 341
Queenscliff	1300 551 948
South Gippsland	(03) 5662 5150
Southern Grampians	1300 543 779
Stonnington	1300 367 441
Strathbogie	1300 854 944
Surf Coas	1300 551 948
Swan Hill	1300 665 218
Towong	1800 705 211
Wangaratta	1800 705 211
Warrnambool	1300 543 779
Wellington	(03) 5144 7777
West Wimmera	1800 195 114
Whitehorse	1300 762 125
Whittlesea	(03) 9450 0955
Wodonga	1800 705 211
Wyndham	1300 775 160
Yarra	(03) 9450 0955
Yarra Ranges	1300 369 146
Yarriambiak	1800 195 114

Other Services

Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASA) – Emergency Counselling & Support Line 1800 806 292	**1800 806 292**
Australian Childhood Foundation	**1800 176 453**
Children's Protection Society	**(03) 9450 0900**
Child Wise	**(03) 9695 8900**
Vic Aboriginal Education Association	**(03) 9481 0800**
Child Safety Commission	**1300 782 978**
Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner	**1800 880 176**
Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)	**(03) 9287 8800**
Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organinsation (VACCHO)	**(03) 9411 9411**

Sexually Abusive Behaviour Treatment Services Providers:

Aust Childhood Foundation	**(03) 9874 3922**
Children's Protection Society	**(03) 9450 0900**
Berry St	**(03) 5822 8100**
Mallee Sexual Assault	**(03) 5025 5400**
South Eastern CASA	**(03) 9928 8741**
Ballarat CASA	**(03) 5320 3933**
Barwon CASA	**(03) 5222 4318**
Campaspe CASA	**(03) 5441 0430**
Gippsland CASA	**(03) 5134 3922**
Goulburn Valley CASA	**(03) 5831 2343**
Upper Murray CASA	**(03) 5722 2203**
Wimmera CASA	**(03) 5381 927**