



Holy Trinity

Eltham North

Child Protection Policy and Procedures

Procedure for Handling Disclosures and Suspicion of Harm

Introduction

Children and young people have the right to be emotionally and physically safe at all times. Every organisation that works with children has an obligation to protect children from exploitation and abuse.

It is Holy Trinity's responsibility to create and maintain protective environments for children.

Policy Statement

Holy Trinity Primary School will take every practicable step to ensure that all members feel safe within a setting of mutual respect, and that any allegations of child abuse are dealt with consistently and appropriately.

Objectives

These policies and procedures concerning child protection have the following goals:

- To provide ways to minimise the risk of child abuse to youth members
- To ensure that all allegations of child abuse or suspected child abuse are handled in a consistent and appropriate manner

This policy provides guidance in the following specific areas:

- Understanding child abuse
- Identifying child abuse
- Responding to situations of suspected or known child abuse
- Prevention – Holy Trinity Protection Code of Conduct

Definition of Child Abuse

The Children's Protection Act 1993 categorises child abuse in four ways:

- Sexual abuse
- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Neglect

Responding to Suspected Child Abuse

A. Basic Principles

Everything must be done to ensure the ongoing safety of the child concerned along with any other child in the alleged perpetrator's circle.

Indeed, the child is the primary concern and ALL other concerns (including guilt or innocence of the alleged offender) are secondary. This does not mean that the alleged offender is to be considered guilty without due investigation. Under no circumstances must any child be left in a hazardous situation or in a potentially hazardous situation.

B. Reporting

The law states that certain people must report their concerns if they have reasonable grounds to suspect a child has been, or is being abused or is neglected. Certain members of the community are bound by law as mandated notifiers, however child protection is a community responsibility and any person can report suspected child abuse to the Child First or the Department of Human Services.

If the alleged offender is a member, volunteer or staff member of Holy Trinity Primary School, the School will immediately advise the alleged offender in writing that a report has been made that involves them and that he/she is suspended from all Holy Trinity activities until the matter is investigated by the appropriate authorities. This action is procedural policy, and not an indication or implication of guilt or otherwise of any person reported upon.

Accordingly, if an allegation is made against a staff member, that person will be stood-down with pay until the matter is finalised to the satisfaction of the school Principal and St. Francis Xavier Parish Priest. (Holy Trinity is part of the St Francis Xavier Parish) It is important that no details of the report be communicated to the alleged offender. This must be left to the authorities.

If allegations are substantiated, the accused person will be immediately dismissed from the school.

Regardless of any legal outcome, Holy Trinity Primary School reserves the right to refuse reinstatement to any volunteer or staff member at its sole discretion.

C. Responding to a Child Who Discloses Abuse

When a child under 18 years of age begins to share with you an experience of abuse the following guidelines should be followed:

- Listen carefully to the child.
- Reassure the child that you believe him/her. It is essential to understand that children rarely fabricate allegations of abuse and therefore all disclosures of abuse should be believed and actioned.
- Reassure the child that what happened is not the child's fault. Children are never responsible for violence or sexual misbehaviour inflicted on them by other people
- Reassure the child that they have done the right thing in telling someone, and that you are pleased that the child has shared this with you. Perpetrators often threaten a victim in an attempt to ensure silence.
- Acknowledge that it is hard to talk about these issues.
- Do not press the child for details. It is not your role to conduct an investigation. Asking leading questions may in fact prejudice any subsequent investigations.
- Do not make promises that you cannot keep (e.g. confidentiality).
- Tell the child that certain adults who can protect them need to be informed so that the abuse can stop.
- As soon as possible after the conversation speak with the principal or deputy principal and then phone Child First / Department of Human Services.
- Make notes of the conversation immediately whilst the facts are still fresh in your mind for reporting purposes.
- Never say "I don't believe it" (through shock). Try not to show emotions such as disgust, horror, disbelief or panic in front of the child. This can make the child feel ashamed and helpless, adding to the abuse inflicted by the abusers. If a child senses that you cannot cope with the information, he/she will lose confidence in you and withdraw, enabling the abuser to continue the abuse.

D. Forming a Suspicion on Reasonable Grounds that Abuse or Neglect Has Occurred

It is important to realise that it is not essential to have absolute proof that abuse has occurred before following the notification procedures outlined in this policy.

All that is required is that you have formed a suspicion on reasonable grounds that abuse has occurred. Suspicion on reasonable grounds to notify child abuse may include the following:

- When a child tells you he or she has been abused. The report procedure must be followed as soon as possible after a child discloses the abuse to you. Rarely, if ever, do children lie about abuse. Every disclosure must be taken seriously. Do not confront a person named by a child, leave this to the authorities.
- When a child informs you that he or she knows someone who has been abused. The report procedure should also be followed in this situation and if the child identifies the victim then that information can form part of the report. However, the child could actually be speaking of him/herself.

Do not confront a person named by a child as a person who has been abused, leave this to the authorities.

- If someone else who is in a position to know (perhaps a relative, friend, neighbour or sibling of the child) informs you that a child is suffering abuse. Any information received from a person who is in a position to provide reliable information should always be taken seriously and the notification procedures outlined in the policy should be followed. A report must be made, even though you might reasonably believe someone else has made a report.
- When you make observations of a particular child's behaviour and/or injuries.
- If a child's behaviour or appearance indicates that abuse or sexual misbehaviour may be occurring and/or displays some of the symptoms of abuse, then a suspicion on reasonable grounds has arisen and a report should be made.

It is important to recognise that one or two indicators alone do not necessarily mean that abuse is occurring. Try to identify a pattern of indicators emerging.

If there is any doubt, the Child First / Department of Human Services will provide advice on reporting.

E. Forming a Suspicion on Reasonable Grounds that a Person is an Offender

In addition to the abovementioned grounds for suspecting child abuse, it is important that all members exercise appropriate vigilance against potential perpetrators.

Accordingly, the list below represents certain behaviour characteristics that often apply to a person who is engaging in, or who intends to engage in, child abuse.

Importantly, it needs to be understood that one or two of these behaviour characteristics on their own do not necessarily indicate that a person is an abuser, or a potential abuser.

Several characteristics together provide reason to raise concern. Such a person would need to be observed closely. If there is no known victim or suspected victim, the 'notifier' who has concerns about someone else with respect to the characteristics below (or who suspects that a person's behaviour is inappropriate), must report their observations to the school Principal or Deputy Principal, Child First / Department of Human Services

F. Possible General Indicators of an Offender

- When the majority of a suspected abuser's relationships are with children. (Some abusers don't relate well to people of their own age)
- Is over friendly/familiar with children
- Describes children as angelic or pure
- Has low self-esteem, poor self image
- Possible sexual abuse as a child
- May remove himself/herself mid-way through an activity to have time with children who may be in the toilets
- Gives articles of his/her clothing to a child as gifts, e.g. a cap, a jacket, footyshirt etc. This is an attempt to demonstrate ownership of the child
- Carries photos of children other than his/her own, often indicating that these children love him/her
- Gives extreme affection to children, e.g. front-on close hugging, always touching or flirting.
- Flatters children and boosts their egos
- Has favourites to whom gifts are given
- Pays special attention to sad, isolated or lonely children and those in single parent families.
- Displays withdrawn, placid demeanour
- Can be single or married. Some reports show that 47% of child abusers are married. May be experiencing marital problems, but not necessarily
- Over emphasis upon morality – are legalistic and inflexible. Could well be a reflection of his/her own bad actions
- Strong denial of offence or any intention to offend
- Convincing in protests of innocence – has developed this as a defence mechanism. May be very outspoken about child sex offenders
- Avoids screening processes, or attempts to do so
- Attempts to engineer opportunities to be alone with a child, e.g., babysitting, targets single parents, child minding, etc
- Offers to take or takes child home, shopping or on an outing. Offers to collect child from school
- Dislikes submission to authority, prefers to work alone, and is negative (or dismissive) when sexual abuse topics are raised
- Spends considerable time with children
- Voices opinion on sex education, suggesting that children are not taught properly
- Can be any personal or social make-up, e.g. extrovert, introvert, married, single, old, young, rich or poor. While the majority of abusers are male, they are not necessarily always so

G. Possible Domestic indicators of an Offender

- Shows improper behaviour.
- Showers with children.
- Expects an open door policy in the bathroom.
- Attempts to sit children on lap, even when child or adolescent resists.

Recruitment Procedure

The following procedure must be adhered to when recruiting volunteers / employing staff. Holy Trinity will adhere to the Guidelines on the Employment of Staff in Catholic Schools

- All personnel will be given a formal interview
- New employees and volunteers will provide a current police check prior to employment
- Police checks will be performed regularly (3 yearly) on all employees and volunteers
- New employees and volunteers will sign a Prohibited Persons Declaration
- An individual will be barred from working with children if they have prior convictions relating to violent or sexually related offences
- Two adults will be present / in the vicinity whenever children are being supervised wherever possible
- Reporting of reasonable suspicions of abuse will be reported to the authorities



Holy Trinity Primary School Protection Code of Conduct

I

(Write Name)

acknowledge that I have read and understand Holy Trinity Primary School Child Protection Policy, 2016.

I agree that in the course of my association with Holy Trinity Primary School, I must:

- treat children with respect regardless of race, colour, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status
- not use language or behaviour towards children that is inappropriate, harassing, abusive, sexually provocative, demeaning or culturally inappropriate
- not engage children under the age of 18 in any form of sexual intercourse or sexual activity including paying for sexual services or acts
- wherever possible, ensure that another adult is present when working in the proximity of children
- not invite unaccompanied children into my home, unless they are at immediate risk of injury or in physical danger
- not sleep close to unsupervised children unless absolutely necessary, in which case I must obtain my supervisor's permission, and ensure that another adult is present if possible
- use any computers, mobile phones, video cameras, cameras or social media appropriately, and never to exploit or harass children or access child exploitation material through any medium
- not use physical punishment on children
- not hire children for domestic or other labour which is inappropriate given their age or developmental stage, which interferes with their time available for education and recreational activities, or which places them at significant risk of injury
- comply with all relevant Australian and local legislation, including labour laws in relation to child labour
- immediately report concerns or allegations of child exploitation and abuse and policy noncompliance in accordance with appropriate procedures
- immediately disclose all charges, convictions and other outcomes of an offence, which occurred before or occurs during my association with Holy Trinity Primary School that relate to child exploitation and abuse
- when photographing or filming a child or using children's images for work-related purposes, I must endeavour to comply with local traditions or restrictions for reproducing personal images before photographing or filming a child
- obtain informed consent from the child and parent or guardian of the child before photographing or filming a child. As part of this I must explain how the photograph or film will be used ensure photographs, films, videos and DVDs present children in a dignified and respectful manner and not in a vulnerable or submissive manner. Children should be adequately clothed and not in poses that could be seen as sexually suggestive ensure images are honest representations of the context and the facts

- ensure file labels, meta data or text descriptions do not reveal identifying information about a child when sending images electronically or publishing images in any form.

I understand that the onus is on me, as a person associated with Holy Trinity, to use common sense and avoid actions or behaviours that could be construed as child exploitation and abuse.

Signed:

Date: