



COUNTRY EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP CHILD SAFE POLICY

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to outline the procedures that CEP has in place to respond to complaints or concerns relating to child abuse and to ensure that all staff (including interns) and members of the Committee of Management 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 by staff, volunteers, contractors, service providers, visitors or any other person while connected to CEP (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.

The definition of child abuse is broad and can include student-to-student incidents and concerns, as well as behaviour committed by an adult.

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.

CEP staff member

For the purpose of this policy, a CEP staff member includes a contractor engaged by the organisation to perform child-related work.

POLICY

CEP understands the important role it plays in protecting children from abuse during CEP-led activities.

Information for students

- All students should feel safe to speak to any staff member to raise any concerns about their safety or any other concerns they may have.
- If a student does not know who to approach at CEP, they should start with the RYA Coordinators, Manager or CEO.

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 organisation (CEP) acts in the best interests of students and children and complies with both our legal and policy obligations.

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

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

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 the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (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. CEP staff are not mandated to report an incident, however, if CEP staff choose to submit a report, CEP staff are expected to notify the school principal so that appropriate steps to support the child can be taken, unless the notification involves the principal

If CEP staff are worried about a child's wellbeing, but I don't believe the child is in need of protection, then the following procedure should take place.

1. CEP staff will contact the school principal or the school contact and discuss their concerns.

2. CEP staff will record any reports or conversations with school contacts regarding student well-being.

Additional resources:

[Four Critical Actions: Student Sexual Offending](#) for complaints and concerns relating to student sexual offending

Contact Child Protection

To make a report, you should contact the child protection intake service covering the local government area (LGA) where the child normally resides. Telephone numbers to make a report during business hours (8:45 am-5:00 pm), Monday to Friday, are listed below.

- **North Division intake:** 1300 664 977
- **South Division intake:** 1300 655 795
- **East Division intake:** 1300 360 391
- **West Division intake** - metropolitan: 1300 664 977
- **West Division intake** - rural and regional: 1800 075 599

If you are not sure which number to call, check the following website for details on the LGAs covered by each intake service at [Child protection contacts](#).

Staff and volunteer responsibilities

1. Immediate action

If a CEP 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, the following recommendations apply:

- 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 the school contacts as soon as possible

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 the school principal or school contact.
- If the concerns relate to the conduct of the school contact then the school principal must be advised.

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 CEP staff member should report all incidents, suspicions and disclosures of child abuse as soon as possible to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Child Protection, Victoria Police or relevant services where required.

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

3. Contacting parents or carers

It is strongly recommended that CEP staff have a discussion with the school principal or school contact prior to contacting parents about any well-being concerns.

Further resources:

[PROTECT Contacting parents and carers](#)

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/mature-minors-and-decision-making/policy>

4. Ongoing protection and support

Where applicable and in consultation with the school, CEP staff must ensure appropriate steps are taken by the CEP to protect the child and other children from any continued risk of abuse.

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 School, Department, parents and carers, health practitioners, and other authorities (such as DFFH or Victoria Police) and may include referral to wellbeing professionals and development of a Safety Plan.

5. Record keeping

The CEP staff member will ensure that:

- Detailed notes of the incident, disclosure, allegation or suspicion are taken, including where possible, by the staff member or volunteer who reported the incident, disclosure, or suspicion to them.
- All notes and other records relating to the incident, disclosure, allegation or suspicion are to be stored securely on the CEP drive in the CEP Policies folder.

Additional requirements for all CEP staff

All CEP 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 CEP CEO.
- report the matter to the relevant authorities where they are unable to confirm that the information has been reported by another staff member

COMMUNICATION

This policy will be communicated in the following ways:

- Available publicly on CEP's website.
- Included in staff induction processes and annual staff training.

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](#)

POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Policy last reviewed	June 2025
Consultation	Executive of CEP Committee of Management
Approved by	CEP Committee of Management
Next scheduled review date	June 2027

APPENDIX A

LEGAL OBLIGATIONS RELATING TO REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

The following information outlines the various legal obligations relating to the reporting of child abuse to relevant authorities.

It is important to note that the procedures outlined in the above policy ensure compliance with the below reporting obligations, and also include additional steps to ensure compliance with CEP's duty of care obligations.

Mandatory reporting to Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH), Child Protection

The following individuals are mandatory reporters under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic):

- registered teachers and early childhood teachers (including principals and school staff who have been granted permission to teach by the VIT)
- school counsellors, including staff who provide direct support to students for mental, emotional or psychological wellbeing, including (but not limited to) school health and wellbeing staff, primary welfare coordinators, student wellbeing coordinators, mental health practitioners, chaplains, and Student Support Services staff
- nurses
- registered psychologists
- police officers
- registered medical practitioners
- out of home care workers (excluding voluntary foster and kinship carers)
- early childhood workers
- youth justice workers
- people in religious ministry
- midwives

All mandatory reporters must make a report to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Child Protection as soon as practicable if, during the course of carrying out their professional roles and responsibilities, they form a belief on reasonable grounds that:

- a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical abuse and/ or sexual abuse; and
- the child's parents or carers have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from harm of that type.

A mandatory reporter who fails to comply with this legal obligation may be committing a criminal offence.

If charged with not making a mandatory report, it may be a defence for the person charged to prove that they honestly and reasonably believed that all of the reasonable grounds for their belief had been the subject of a report to child protection made by another person.

The identity of a person who reports any protective concerns to DFFH Child Protection is protected by law. It is an offence for a person, other than the person who made the report, to disclose the name of the person who made a report or any information that is likely to lead to their identification.

Any person can make a report to DFFH Child Protection (131 278 – 24 hour service) if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection, even if they are not a mandatory reporter listed above.

Reportable Conduct

The Reportable Conduct Scheme is focused on worker and volunteer conduct and how organisations investigate and respond to suspected child abuse. The scheme aims to improve organisational responses to suspected child abuse and to facilitate the identification of individuals who pose a risk of harm to children.

There are five types of 'reportable conduct' listed in the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*:

- sexual offences against, with or in the presence of, a child
- sexual misconduct (which includes grooming) against, with or in the presence of a child
- physical violence against, with or in the presence of, a child
- behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child
- significant neglect of a child.

A reportable conduct allegation is made where a person makes an allegation, based on a reasonable belief, that a worker or volunteer has committed reportable conduct or misconduct that **may** involve reportable conduct.

If CEP staff or volunteers become aware of reportable conduct by any current or former employee, contractor or volunteer, they must notify the CEO or Chair immediately.

Failure to disclose an offence

Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults (ie persons aged 18 years and over), not just professionals who work with children, have a legal obligation to report to Victoria Police, as soon as practicable, where they form a 'reasonable belief' that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under the age of 16 in Victoria.

Failure to disclose information to Victoria Police (by calling 000, local police station or the Police Assistance Line 131 444) as soon as practicable may amount to a criminal offence unless a person has a 'reasonable excuse' or exemption from doing so.

"Reasonable belief" is not the same as having proof. A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds.

For example, a 'reasonable belief' might be formed when:

- a child states that they have been sexually abused
- a child states that they know someone who has been sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves)
- someone who knows a child states that the child has been sexually abused
- professional observations of the child's behaviour or development leads a mandated professional to form a belief that the child has been sexually abused
- signs of sexual abuse leads to a belief that the child has been sexually abused.

"Reasonable excuse" is defined by law and includes:

- fear for the safety of any person including yourself or the potential victim (but not including the alleged perpetrator or an organisation)

- where the information has already been disclosed to Victoria Police and you have no further information to add (for example, through a mandatory report to DFFH Child Protection or a report to Victoria Police from another member of school staff).

Further information

For more information about the offences and reporting obligations outlined in this fact sheet refer to: [Protecting Children — Reporting and Other Legal Obligations](#).

Child (Family Division)

A person who is under the age of 17 or, if a protection order is in force in relation to him or her, is under the age of 18.

APPENDIX B: MANAGING DISCLOSURES OF CHILD ABUSE

Important information for staff

When managing a disclosure relating to child abuse 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-judgmental 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")
- Take prompt action in relation to following the procedures outlined below.

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 any promises you will keep the information the student provided confidential
- 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).