

# Catholic College Sale PROTECTION OF CHILDREN – REPORTING OBLIGATIONS PROCEDURE

# 1.0 POLICY AUTHORITY

The Board of Catholic College Sale Limited (the Board) governs the College. Based on the principle of subsidiarity and in keeping with the Board's Delegations Schedule, the Board delegates a broad range of duties, functions, powers, and authority to the Principal of Catholic College Sale Ltd (the College). This includes the effective implementation of this *Protection of Children – Reporting Obligations Procedure* and the compliance obligations outlined herein.

#### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

Protecting children and young people against sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. The College has a moral and legal responsibility to ensure children and young people are safe in their care and to ensure that all forms of abusive behaviours towards children are prevented.

It is a clear legal duty of all adults to report child sexual abuse to the police. Any adult who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child has an obligation to report that information to Victoria Police on 000 or the local police station.

This obligation applies to all employees and adult community members over the age of 18 years, and should be read in conjunction with relevant College Child Safety and Protection Policies.

It is imperative to prevent, reduce and minimise child abuse and exploitation in all their forms.

# 3.0 PURPOSE

These Procedures inform College employees of their responsibilities in relation to the disclosure/reporting responsibilities and removing the risk to children and young people of suspected abuse where practicable.

These Procedures acknowledge the particular duty that College employees have towards children and young people in their care.

It respects the dignity of children and young people and outlines the rights and responsibilities of College employees.

#### 4.0 PROCEDURE

The College has a moral, legal and mission-driven responsibility to create nurturing school environments where children and young people are respected, and their voices heard, and where they are safe and feel safe.

Every person involved in Catholic education has a responsibility to understand the important and specific role they have individually and collectively to ensure that the well-being and safety of all children and young people are at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make.

All College employees should be aware of the actions to take as soon as they witness a child protection incident, receive a disclosure or form a reasonable suspicion or belief that a child has been, or is at risk of being, abused in accordance with the Four Critical Actions for

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Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse (Four Critical Actions for Schools).

# 5.0 RESPONDING TO AND REPORTING CHILD PROTECTION CONCERNS

The approach to responding to and reporting child protection concerns in the joint protocol incorporates Four Critical Actions for Schools.

A College staff member must act and follow the Four Critical Actions for Schools as soon as they become aware of a child protection incident, that is, when a child is experiencing, or is at risk of experiencing, abuse.

# 5.1 Becoming aware of a child protection incident

There are four main ways in which a College staff member may become aware that a child is experiencing, or is at risk of experiencing, abuse:

# • Witnessing an incident

If you witness an incident where you believe a child has been subjected to, or may be at risk of, abuse, including exposure to family violence, you must first take immediate action to protect the safety of the child or children involved and then refer to Four Critical Actions for Schools.

# • Forming a suspicion or reasonable belief

All suspicions that a child has been, is being, or is at risk of being, abused must be taken seriously, including suspicions that the abuse is taking or may take place outside College grounds or areas. If your suspicion develops into a reasonable belief, you must act and refer to Four Critical Actions for Schools.

### Receiving a disclosure about or from a current student

All disclosures must be treated seriously. You should immediately refer to Four Critical Actions for Schools.

#### • Receiving a disclosure about or from a former student

If you receive a disclosure from a former student about historical abuse, you must act. If the former student is currently of school age and attending a Victorian school, you must immediately refer to Four Critical Actions for Schools.

If the former student is no longer of school age or attending a Victorian school, you must still report the disclosure.

#### 5.2 Notes and records

College staff members are to keep clear and comprehensive notes relating to incidents, disclosures and allegations of child abuse using Protect: Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: A Template for all Victorian Schools (PROTECT).

Even if a College staff member decides not to make a report, they must still accurately document their notes relating to the incident, disclosure or allegation of child abuse using PROTECT.

Notes and records must be kept securely on College grounds and must not be destroyed, as they may be needed at a later time.

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#### 5.3 Disclosures

It is the role of College staff members to reassure and support a child or young person who makes a disclosure of abuse. However, College staff members should never promise to keep any disclosures confidential, as all disclosures of abuse must be reported.

The role of College staff remains the same if disclosures are made by a parent, guardian or carer, or a sibling, or if disclosures involve family violence.

For strategies on how to manage a disclosure, refer to PROTECT.

### 6.0 CRITICAL ACTIONS

There are *Four Critical Actions* that must be taken when responding to and reporting a child protection incident, disclosure or suspicion:

- 1. Responding to an Emergency;
- 2. Reporting to Authorities;
- 3. Contacting Parents, Guardians or Carers;
- 4. Providing Ongoing Support.

# 6.1 Critical Action 1: Responding to an Emergency

If there is no risk of immediate harm, go to Action 2.

If a child is at immediate risk of harm, College staff must ensure their safety by:

- separating alleged victims and others involved;
- administering first aid;
- calling 000 for urgent medical and/or police assistance to respond to immediate health or safety concerns;
- identifying a contact person at the College for future liaison with police.

College staff may also need to maintain the integrity of the potential crime scene and preserve evidence.

#### 6.2 Critical Action 2: Reporting to Authorities

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed, College staff must report all incidents, suspicions and disclosures of child abuse as soon as practicable. Failure to report physical and sexual child abuse may amount to a criminal offence.

If the source of suspected abuse comes from within the school.

#### Victoria Police

College staff must report all instances of suspected child abuse involving a College staff member, contractor or volunteer to Victoria Police (call 000 or your local police station). College staff must also report internally to the Principal.

All allegations of 'reportable conduct' must be reported as soon as possible to the Principal.

If the source of suspected abuse comes from within the family or community.

# Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Child Protection

College staff must report to DFFH Child Protection if a child is considered to be:

- in need of protection from child abuse;
- at risk of being harmed (or has been harmed) and the harm has had, or is likely to have, a serious impact on the child's safety, stability or development and the parents, guardians or carers have not protected or are unlikely to protect the child.

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#### Victoria Police

College staff must also report all instances of suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police (call 000 or your local police station).

College staff must also report internally to the principal.

# Other concerns

If a College staff member believes that a child is not subject to abuse, but they still hold significant concerns for the child's well-being, the College staff member must still act. This may include making a referral or seeking advice from:

- Child FIRST/the Orange Door (in circumstances where the College staff member believes the family is open to receiving support);
- The Lookout has a service directory, information, and guidance to help you respond to family violence;
- family violence victims/survivors can be referred to 1800 Respect for counselling, information and a referral service: 1800 737 732;
- DFFH Child Protection;
- Victoria Police call 000 or your local police station.

# 6.3 Critical Action 3: Contacting Parents, Guardians or Carers

The Principal must consult with DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police (call 000 or your local police station) to determine what information can be shared with parents, guardians or carers. They may advise:

- not to contact the parents, guardians or carers (e.g. in circumstances where the parents, guardians or carers are alleged to have engaged in the abuse, or the child is a mature minor and does not wish for their parent/carer to be contacted);
- to contact the parents, guardians or carers and provide agreed information (this must be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion);
- how to communicate with all relevant parties with consideration for their safety.

#### 6.4 Critical Action 4: Providing Ongoing Support

The College must provide support for children impacted by abuse. This can include the development of a student support plan in consultation with wellbeing professionals. This is an essential part of the College's duty of care requirements.

Strategies may include development of a safety plan, direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals and support services.

College staff must follow the Four Critical Actions every time they become aware of a further instance or risk of abuse. This includes reporting new information to authorities.

Information to support the College workplaces in understanding their obligation to employees and to provide suggestions on how to assist employees experiencing family and domestic violence may be found in the Family Domestic Violence: A guide to supporting staff.

# 7.0 REPORTING OBLIGATIONS WHERE THERE IS A CONCERN THAT A CHILD IS BEING ABUSED

Note: For information on how to report a suspicion, disclosure or incident of abuse, see the Four Critical Actions for Schools.

Note: When making any report regarding suspected child abuse, it is strongly recommended that employees keep clear and comprehensive notes.

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#### Failure to disclose

All adults must report to Victoria Police where they form a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under the age of 16. Failure to disclose the information may be a criminal offence unless you have a 'reasonable excuse' or have an 'exemption' from doing so.

If you are an adult who reasonably believes that a sexual offence has been committed against a child under the age of 16 by another adult, then you must call Victoria Police on 000 or your local police station.

# Failure to protect

Principals or Leadership staff, who become aware that an adult associated with the College (such as an employee, contractor, volunteer or visitor) poses a risk of sexual abuse (including through grooming) to a child under the care of the College, must take all reasonable steps to remove or reduce that risk.

This may include, for example, removing the adult from child-related work pending investigation. Failure to do so may be a criminal offence.

This applies to any staff member in a position of authority.

# **Reportable Conduct Scheme**

The Principal must notify the Chair of the College Board as soon as possible after becoming aware of an allegation of reportable conduct.

There is an allegation of reportable conduct where a person has a reasonable belief that there has been:

- a sexual offence, sexual misconduct or physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of a child, or
- behaviour causing significant emotional or psychological harm to a child, or
- significant neglect of a child, or
- misconduct involving any of the above

The Chair of the College Board will report allegations of 'reportable conduct' raised against CCS Ltd employees (and contractors, volunteers, allied health workers and other office holders) who are 18 years or over to the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP).

#### **Mandatory Reporting**

A mandatory reporter must report to the DFFH Child Protection as soon as practicable if, in the course of practising their profession or carrying out their duties, they form a belief on reasonable grounds that:

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

It may be a criminal offence not to report in these circumstances.

Individuals who are required to report:

- Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registered teachers, including principals;
- College staff who have been granted permission to teach by the VIT;
- registered doctors, nurses and all members of the police force;
- registered psychologists;
- people in religious ministry;

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 staff who provide direct support to students for mental, emotional or psychological wellbeing, including (but not limited to) school psychologists and College wellbeing support officers.

# 8.0 OTHER LEGAL OBLIGATIONS RELATING TO SUSPICIONS, DISCLOSURES OR INCIDENTS OF CHILD ABUSE

#### **Duty of care**

All College staff have a duty of care to take reasonable steps to protect children under their care from harm that is reasonably foreseeable. In relation to suspected child abuse, reasonable steps may include (but are not limited to):

- acting on concerns and suspicions of abuse as soon as practicable;
- seeking appropriate advice or consulting with other professionals or agencies;
- reporting the suspected child abuse to appropriate authorities such as Victoria Police and DFFH Child Protection;
- arranging counselling and/or other appropriate welfare support for the child;
- providing ongoing support to the child and young person;
- sharing information with other College staff who will also be responsible for providing ongoing support to the child.

#### **Child Safe Standards**

All schools are required to comply with the Child Safe Standards and Ministerial Order 1359 — Child Safe Standards, to create and maintain a child safe organisation.

Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS), Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) and Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Framework (MARAM).

Schools are Information Sharing Entities (ISEs) under the CISS and FVISS. These schemes complement existing obligations in relation to child safety, including the reportable conduct scheme, mandatory reporting and child safe standards. Under the CISS and FVISS, schools may collect and share information (including personal or sensitive information) with other ISEs, where this may improve child wellbeing or safety, or help to assess or manage the risk of family violence. For more information, see: College Child and Family Violence Information Sharing Schemes Policy and Procedure, Information Sharing and Family Violence Reforms Contextualised Guidance, Child Information Sharing Scheme Ministerial Guidelines, Family Violence Information Sharing Guidelines, and Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework.

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# 9.0 LEGISLATION AND RESOURCES

- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic.)
- Child Wellbeing and Safety (Information Sharing) Regulations 2018
- Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic.)
- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic.)
- Crimes Act 1958 (Vic.)
- Crimes Amendment (Protection of Children) Act 2014 (Vic.)
- Family Violence Protection (Information Sharing) Regulations 2018
- Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework
- Child Information Sharing Scheme Ministerial Guidelines
- Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse
- Information Sharing and Family Violence Reforms Contextualised Guidance
- Protect: Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: A Template for all Victorian Schools

# 10.0 RELATED POLICIES AND DOCUMENTS

- Child and Family Violence Information Sharing Schemes Policy
- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Protection of Children Anti-Grooming Policy
- Protection of Children Failure to Disclose Policy
- Protection of Children Failure to Protect Policy
- Duty of Care Policy
- Pastoral Care Policy
- Responding to and Reporting Child Safety Incidents or Concerns Policy

# 11.0 APPROVAL

Approved by	CC Sale Ltd Board
Person(s) Responsible	Principal
Date(s) Reviewed or Updated	August 2025
Next Review Date	August 2027

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