



SUPPORT MATERIALS FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS

FEELING SAFE- PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Get the facts

This fact sheet is about making sure you know how to keep safe. It gives you the facts about what to do if someone is hurting you or your friends or making you feel unsafe.

WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS?

- Everyone has the right to feel safe and be protected.
- No one is allowed to threaten you, hurt you or touch you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable.
- No one should behave in a way that makes you feel unsafe or afraid, including anyone in your family, anyone at school or anywhere else in the community.

HOW DO I KNOW IF SOMETHING IS WRONG?

- Every relationship should be respectful.
- It is wrong for anyone to hurt you or make you feel unsafe, uncomfortable or afraid.
- Remember a person doesn't have to physically hurt or touch you to be doing the wrong thing.
- Even if you are not sure, if something doesn't feel right you should tell an adult who can help you.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I FEEL UNSAFE?

- Tell an adult – telling someone won't get you in trouble.
- If you feel threatened, unsafe, or if you feel uncomfortable about how someone is touching, talking to you, or treating you, you should tell a trusted adult.
- You can tell a teacher or any adult at your school. They will be able to help you.
- You can also tell your parent, carer, or any family member or adult you trust.
- Even if the person who is making you feel like this has asked you not to tell anyone, you should still talk to an adult. It is more important that you are safe and protected.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I AM WORRIED THAT SOMEONE I KNOW IS UNSAFE?

- Tell an adult you trust.
- You can tell a teacher or any adult at your school.
- They will be able to help your friend or the person you are worried about.
- You can also tell your parent, carer, or any family member or adult that you trust.
- Even if the person who you are worried about has asked you not to tell anyone, you should still talk to an adult. It is more important to make sure that your friend is safe and protected.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I TELL AN ADULT AT THE SCHOOL THAT I FEEL UNSAFE, OR THAT I THINK MY FRIEND IS UNSAFE?

- Adults at your school must listen to your concerns and help.
- In some cases the adult at school may need to tell another adult about your concerns so that you, or the person you know can be protected.
- Adults at your school can provide you with support and make sure that you don't have to deal with this alone.

WHAT IF I DON'T FEEL LIKE I CAN TALK TO ANYONE AT MY SCHOOL?

- If you don't feel like you can talk to an adult at your school, you can talk to your parent or carer.
- If you don't feel like you can talk to your parent or carer, you can talk to another adult within your family. This may be an aunt, uncle, a step-parent, or a grandparent.

- If you don't feel like you can talk to any of these adults, you should still try and find an adult that you can trust, and that you can talk to.
- You don't need to deal with things on your own.

THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP YOU. HERE ARE SOME OTHER SUGGESTIONS:

- visit eHeadspace (which provides an online and a 9am-1am telephone support service) www.eheadspace.org.au or 1800 650 850
- call KidsHelp Line on 1800 55 1800 or visit for 24 hour support
- call or visit your local police station or call 000.

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM ABUSE: FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

GET THE FACTS

As adults we all play a critical role to protect 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 sexual child abuse.

REPORTING ABUSE

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SUSPECT THAT MY CHILD HAS BEEN ABUSED?

If you believe that 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 that 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 detail at the end of this fact sheet)

- If you suspect that 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.
- Parent 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 that 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 physiological harm, neglect or family violence
- does not have to involve physical contact or force (eg, 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 (eg. 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 concerned 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 that 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 weekend 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: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/parenting-support-to-help-prevent-abuse>

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 page 53)

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: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/parenting-support-to-help-prevent-abuse>

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 NUMBERS

Contact Numbers

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

Regional

<i>North Eastern Victoria</i>	
Glen Waverley office	(03) 8392 9300
Seymour office	1300 333 231

Department of Health and Human Services Child Protection

<u>Box Hill</u>	883 Whitehorse Road, Box Hill 3128	1300 360 452
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Child FIRST

1300 721 383

Other Services

Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASA) – Emergency Counselling & Support Line	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 Organisation (VACCHO)	(03) 9411 9411

Sexually Abusive Behaviour Treatment Services Providers:

Australian Childhood Foundation	(03) 9874 3922
Children's Protection Society	(03) 9450 0900
Berry Street	(03) 5822 8100