CHILD SAFETY RESPONDING AND REPORTING OBLIGATIONS POLICY
(including Mandatory Reporting)

Date Approved:	August 2025
Approved by:	SCC Board

1. INTRODUCTION

Shepparton Christian College is committed to ensuring that all children in our care are safe, happy, and empowered to take an active role in their own safety. We have zero tolerance for child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be taken seriously and addressed in line with our robust policies and procedures. We are dedicated to preventing child abuse, identifying risks early, and removing or reducing those risks wherever possible.

2. RATIONALE

All children have a right to feel safe and to be safe. As teachers, we have a legal and moral responsibility to respond to serious incidents involving the abuse or neglect of any child in our care, and to report any instance we believe involves physical abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect.

As a school community, every adult has the responsibility to report suspected instances of child abuse.

3. AIMS

To uphold every child's right to be safe and to ensure each child is protected from physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect.

4. BACKGROUND

All adults have a responsibility to protect children from abuse. Additionally, some individuals have legislated responsibilities.

Mandatory Reporting

Mandatory reporting describes the legal obligation of certain professionals and community members to report instances of child physical or sexual abuse. These individuals, known as *mandated reporters*, include teachers, principals, and school counsellors. Failure to fulfil this obligation may result in fines and/or imprisonment. Mandated reporters must notify protective services if they form a belief, on reasonable grounds, that a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical injury or sexual abuse, and that the child's parents or guardians have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from such harm.

Failure to Disclose

It is a legal requirement that any adult (aged 18 and over) who holds a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria by an adult against a child (under 16 years of age) disclose that information to police (unless they have a reasonable excuse). Failure to disclose this information may constitute a criminal offence and can result in imprisonment.
https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/failure-to-disclose-offence

Failure to Protect

If a person in a position of authority within our organisation becomes aware of a substantial risk that a child under the age of 16, who is under the care, supervision or authority of our organisation may become a victim of a sexual offence committed by an adult associated with the organisation, and that person has the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, they must take all reasonable steps to do so. Failure to take appropriate action to address the risk may constitute the criminal offence of *failing to protect* and may result in imprisonment.
https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/failure-to-protect-a-new-criminal-offence-to

Grooming

Shepparton Christian College is aware of the offence of *grooming* and ensures that measures are in place to reduce associated risks, including those occurring through online means. The Staff Code of Conduct prohibits engaging in conversations with students via written or electronic communication, such as phone calls, emails, social media, text messages, or chat programs, outside of a school context. For further information regarding grooming, see:
https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/grooming-offence

Reportable Conduct Scheme

Should allegations of child abuse, or other child-related misconduct, be made against any staff member, volunteer or contractor, it is a mandated requirement that these incidents be reported to the **Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP).** These matters will be investigated in accordance with the guidelines of the Reportable Conduct Scheme.

Under this scheme, there are five types of reportable conduct that must be reported as soon as practicable in line with this policy:

1. sexual offences committed against, with or in the presence of a child
2. sexual misconduct committed against, with or in the presence of a child
3. physical violence against, with or in the presence of a child
4. any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child
5. significant neglect of a child

https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/reportable-conduct-scheme/

Reporting to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (formerly Department of Health and Human Services)

Information relating to reporting child safety concerns to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing can be found here: https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/making-report-child-protection

5. THE FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS

The Victorian Government has provided the *Four Critical Actions for Schools*, which outline the steps schools must take in response to suspected abuse.

These critical actions are as follows:

1. Action 1: Respond to an emergency
    a. If a child is at immediate risk of harm, ensure their safety first, including by calling 000 if necessary.
    b. Where an incident of suspected abuse occurs at the school, any items that may constitute evidence should be preserved.
2. Action 2: Report to authorities
    a. Further details on who to report to can be found below in *Section 6. Implementation.*
    b. Ensure that all reports and actions taken are documented.
3. Action 3: Contact parents or carers
    a. In most cases, clear advice will be given by DFFH or Victoria Police after a report has been made.
    b. In some cases, parents or carers will need to be notified in order to prevent further abuse.
    c. In other cases, contacting parents or carers may further endanger the student.
    d. Follow advice given by DFFH or Victoria Police. Further information can be found at: https://www.schools.vic.gov.au/action-3-contacting-parents-or-carers
4. Action 4: Provide ongoing support
    a. Action should be taken to support students who are impacted by child abuse.

More in-depth information regarding the Four Critical Actions can be found here: https://www.schools.vic.gov.au/report-child-abuse-schools

6. IMPLEMENTATION

All members of the Shepparton Christian College community, be it staff, volunteers, contractors, parents or students, are required to report suspected abuse as soon as practicable. The following outlines the appropriate reporting mechanisms.

- If a staff member forms a belief that a child or young person is at risk, they must notify the appropriate authorities in line with the *Four Critical Actions for Schools,* outlined in **Section 5.** Where practical, staff should discuss their concerns with the Principal, or in his/her absence, the Assistant Principal, before making the report.
    - Contact numbers
        - For child protection reports (including mandatory reporting), contact Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) as soon as possible at **1300 360 391**, or on the after school hours crisis line at **13 12 78**

- If a child is at immediate risk of harm, or the belief relates to sexual abuse, contact Shepparton police at **03 5820 5777**
- Where a child is not subject to abuse but there are other significant concerns relating to a child's wellbeing, contact Orange Door at **1800 634 245**

- If it is believed that a child is at immediate risk, this should be reported to Victoria Police immediately.
- The Principal must be notified as soon as practicable, and no later than 24 hours after forming a belief. The Principal is responsible for ensuring there is a prompt and appropriate response to any allegation or disclosure of child abuse, and that the allegations are taken seriously.
    - In the absence of the Principal, the Assistant Principal will undertake this responsibility.
    - If the allegation is against the Principal, the Board Chair and Assistant Principal jointly undertake this responsibility.
- The Principal is also responsible for ensuring that any child at risk is protected and safe whilst the allegation is being resolved.
    - In the absence of the Principal, the Assistant Principal will undertake this responsibility.
    - If the allegation is against the Principal, the Board Chair and Assistant Principal will jointly undertake this responsibility.
- When a person forms a belief, they must make detailed notes outlining how the belief was formed and any actions taken. If a report (mandatory or otherwise) has been made, a detailed account of the reasons for the report must be submitted to the Principal. All reports, information sheets, and subsequent discussions and information are to be recorded and must remain strictly confidential. This information will form part of the school file but must be clearly labelled 'Confidential'.
- All incidents must be monitored, and any subsequent signs or indications of abuse must also be reported.
- Staff members are required to keep a written record of all discussions relating to a student with whom there is a concern.
- New staff will be informed of reporting responsibilities and procedures as part of their induction procedure.
- All staff will be reminded of reporting responsibilities annually.

- Fulfilling the roles and responsibilities outlined in this procedure does not displace or discharge any other legal or moral obligations that arise if a person reasonably believes that a child is at risk of child abuse.
- In accordance with the Code of Conduct, any suspect or suspicious behaviours must be reported to the Principal, regardless of whether there is a belief that a child has been harmed or is at risk of harm. Particular attention should be given to recognising and reporting potential *grooming* behaviours.

- Where a child raises an allegation of inappropriate behaviour towards themselves or another child, these allegations must be taken seriously.
    - If the allegations result in forming a belief that abuse has, or is likely to occur, reports need to be made to DFFH and/or Victoria police as outlined above.
- Where an allegation of inappropriate behaviour by a staff member, volunteer or contractor towards a child is historic in nature, it will be taken seriously, and where appropriate, reported to **DFFH, Victoria Police** and **the Commission for Children and Young People** as required by the circumstances.
- If an allegation of abuse or abusive behaviour by an adult towards a young person is made, it must be reported to the **Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP)** in line with the *Reportable Conduct Scheme*. The Principal is responsible for ensuring this report is made. Where an allegation meets the threshold defined by the CCYP, it will be investigated in line with the CCYP's recommendations and guidelines. If there is any doubt, advice should be sought directly from the CCYP on **1300 782 978**.
- If the alleged abuser is a staff member, volunteer or contractor, that person will be suspended from their normal duties until the allegations are investigated in full.

7. EVALUATION/REVIEW

- This policy will be reviewed at least once every two years.