



# **Bayside Special Developmental School**

## **Child Protection Policy and Procedures for responding to and reporting allegations of suspected child abuse**

### **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 our responsibility to create and maintain protective environments for children.

### **Policy Statement**

Bayside Special Developmental School will take every practicable step to ensure that all students 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 students
- To ensure that all allegations of child abuse or suspected child abuse are handled in a consistent and appropriate manner

These procedures provide guidance in the following specific areas:

- Understanding the definition of child abuse
- Identifying child abuse
- Responding to situations of suspected or known child abuse

### **Definition of Child Abuse**

Child abuse can be categorized 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 all other children in our school. 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 whole school responsibility and any person can report suspected child abuse.

## **C. Responding to a Child**

### **Who Discloses Abuse**

When a student at Bayside Special Developmental School 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.
- 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.
- As soon as possible after the conversation, complete the Incident Report and pass this report to a Principal Class Officer.

## **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 these procedures. 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.
- 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 procedures outlined in this document 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.

This policy ratified at School Council meeting

15<sup>th</sup> August 2016