

Don Valley Primary School Procedure for Responding to and Reporting Allegations of Suspected Child Abuse

The following procedures should be followed should there be a disclosure either by a child or parent/carers of child abuse.

If a child discloses an incident of abuse to you:

- Try and separate them from the other children discreetly and listen to them carefully
- Let the child use their own words to explain what has occurred
- Reassure the child that you take what they are saying seriously, and it is not their fault and that they are doing the right thing
- Explain to them that this information may need to be shared with others, such as with their parent/carer, specific people in the school, or the police
- Do not make promises to the child such as promising not to tell anyone about the incident, except that you will do your best to keep them safe
- Do not leave the child in a distressed state. If they seem at ease in your company, stay with them
- Provide them with an incident report form to complete, or complete it together, if you think the child is able to do this
- As soon as possible after the disclosure, record the information using the child's words and report the disclosure to the principal, police or child protection
- Ensure the disclosure is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely

If a parent/carer says their child has been abused in the school, or raises a concern:

- Explain that the school has processes to ensure all abuse allegations are taken very seriously
- Ask about the wellbeing of the child
- Allow the parent/carer to talk through the incident in their own words
- Advise the parent/carer that you will take notes during the discussion to capture all details
- Explain to them the information may need to be repeated to authorities or others, such as the school principal/child safety officer, the police or child protection
- Do not make promises at this early stage, except that you will do your best to keep the child safe
- Provide them with an incident report form to complete, or complete it together
- Ask them what action they would like to take and advise them of what the immediate next steps will be
- Ensure the report is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely

It is important to be aware of:

- Some people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds facing barriers in reporting allegations of abuse (e.g. anxiety when talking with police, communicating in English, etc.)
- Ensuring a culturally appropriate response of an allegation of abuse should it involve an Aboriginal child (e.g. engaging with a local Aboriginal community group to review school policy and procedures)
- Difficulties caused by disability (e.g. children with hearing or cognitive impairments may need support to help them explain the incident)

If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse phone 000.

Legal Responsibilities:

- Every adult who reasonably believes that a child has been abused, whether in the school or not, has an obligation to report that belief to authorities.
- The **failure to disclose** criminal offence requires all adults (aged 18 and over) who hold a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria by an adult against a child under 16 to disclose that information to police
- While failure to disclose only covers child sexual abuse, all adults should report other forms of child abuse to authorities. Failure to disclose does not change mandatory reporting responsibilities
- **Mandatory reporters** (doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers, principals and police) must report to child protection if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse
- The **failure to protect** criminal offence applies where there is a substantial risk that a child under the age of 16 under the care, supervision or authority of the school will become a victim of a sexual offence committed by an adult associated with the school. A person in a position of authority in the school will commit the offence if they know of the risk of abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently failed to do so.