



Background

The Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Limited (DOBCEL) Board is committed to:

- zero tolerance of child abuse
- listening to and empowering children and young people
- keeping children and young people safe.

The DOBCEL Board maintains governance oversight of DOBCEL schools. DOBCEL maintains a management arm to ensure that DOBCEL schools are safe for children and young people and are places where children and young people can flourish.

The DOBCEL Board is committed to supporting schools to take a proactive role in the care, wellbeing and protection of children and young people.

The Board has particular responsibilities for the safeguarding of children and young people as required by Ministerial Order 1359: Implementing the Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools and School Boarding Premises. This ministerial order places accountability for managing the risk of child abuse with the Board. Consistent with MO 1359, the Board requires schools governed by DOBCEL to have appropriate arrangements to regulate the conduct and decisions of school staff for the benefit of students.

These arrangements include implementing and complying with the DOBCEL child safe policies and having clear and comprehensive procedures and reporting mechanisms. The objective for the Board and the wider school community is to be confident in the capacity of schools to make and implement appropriate decisions, with child safety as the guiding principle.

Becoming Aware of Student Sexual Offending

There are four main ways in which a school staff member may become aware that a child is a victim of a student sexual offending and/or a student has engaged in student sexual offending:

1. Witnessing an incident

If a school staff member witnesses an incident where they believe a child has been subjected to, or may be at risk of, abuse, including exposure to family violence, immediate action must be taken to protect the safety of the child or children involved (Action 1: Responding to an Emergency). Next, they must refer to Action 2: Reporting to Authorities. Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Student Sexual Offending.

2. Forming a suspicion or reasonable belief

All suspicions that a child is a victim of a student sexual offending and/or a student has engaged in student sexual offending must be taken seriously. This includes an offence that is suspected to have occurred outside of school premises and/or outside school hours.

If a suspicion is formed that a student is victim of student sexual offending and/or a student has committed student sexual offending, action must be taken, even if the student sexual offending has not been directly witnessed. In some circumstances, it may be surmised that a student's sexual

behaviour is indicative of their own experience of child abuse. Physical or behavioural signs may be the only indication that a child is impacted by abuse. If reasonable belief can be formed that a student is engaged in student sexual offending and may have also been impacted by child abuse the following must be observed:

- Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Student Sexual Offending AND
- Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

3. Receiving a disclosure about or from a current student if:

- a current student discloses that they have been, or are in danger of becoming a victim of student sexual offending, or
- a person (child or adult) discloses that they believe a current student has been, or is at risk of being a victim of student sexual offending, or
- a person (child or adult), discloses that they believe that a current student has engaged, or is at risk of engaging in student sexual offending, the disclosure must be treated seriously, and immediate action taken by following these [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Student Sexual Offending](#).

4. Receiving a disclosure about or from a former student

- If disclosure is received that a former student of the school is a victim of historical student sexual offending, action must be taken.
- If any student involved in the alleged historical student sexual offending is currently of school age and attending a Victorian school the following must be observed: Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Student Sexual Offending.
- If all impacted students are no longer of school age or attending a Victorian school, action must be taken. Contact Victoria Police to report the matter and advise DOBCEL Manager Safeguarding and Standards.

Notes and records

School staff members are to keep clear and comprehensive notes relating to incidents, disclosures and allegations of Student Sexual Offending using [Protect: Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: A Template for all Victorian Schools](#).

Even if a school staff member decides not to make a report, they must still accurately document their notes relating to the incident, disclosure or allegation of Student Sexual Offending *Protect: Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: A Template for all Victorian Schools*.

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

Disclosures

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

The role of school staff remains the same if disclosures are made from a parent/carer or a sibling, or if disclosures involve family violence.

Strategies on how to manage a disclosure, can be found in [PROTECT: Identifying and Responding to Student Sexual Offending](#)

There are Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Student Sexual Offending which must be taken when responding to and reporting a child protection incident, disclosure or suspicion:

1. Responding to an Emergency
2. Reporting to Authorities/Referring to Services
3. Contacting Parents/Carers
4. Providing Ongoing Support.

Critical Action 1: Responding to an Emergency

If there is no risk of immediate harm Critical Action 2 is to be observed. If a child is at immediate risk of harm their safety must be ensured by:

- separating alleged victims and others involved, ensuring that if the parties involved are all present at the school, they are supervised separately by a school staff member
- 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 school for future liaison with Police.

If the alleged student sexual offending has occurred at the school, school staff should also ensure that reasonable steps are taken to preserve the environment, the clothing and other items and to prevent any potential witnesses (including school staff members, volunteers and contractors) from discussing the incident until Victoria Police or relevant authorities arrive on the premises.

Critical Action 2: Reporting to Authorities

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed incidents, suspicions, and disclosures of student sexual offending must be reported to:

- **VICTORIA POLICE:** All instances on **000**
- **DFFH Child Protection**, If it is believed that:
 - the victim's parent/carers are unable or unwilling to protect the child
 - the student who is alleged to have engaged in the student sexual offending is:
 - aged over 10 and under 15 years and may need therapeutic treatment to address these behaviours
 - may be displaying physical and behavioural indicators of being the victim of child abuse.
 - **Internally**
Internal reports are to be made to:
 - the Principal
 - DOBCEL Manager Safeguarding and Standards
 - DOBCEL Executive Director

A contact person at the school must be nominated for future liaison with Victoria Police and/or Child Protection and advice sought about contacting parents/carers (see **Action 3**)

Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse contains further guidance in reporting to authorities.

Critical Action 3: Contacting parents/carers

The Principal **must** consult with **Victoria Police** or **DFFH Child Protection** to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers. They may advise:

- **not to contact the parents/carers** (e.g. in circumstances where contacting the parents/carers is likely to affect adversely a Victoria Police investigation or where the student is a mature minor and has requested that their parent/carer not be notified.
- **to contact the parents/carers** and provide agreed information (this must be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day of the incident, disclosure, or suspicion).

Critical Action 4: Providing continued support

The school **must** provide support for students who are victims of a student sexual offence AND students who have engaged in a sexual offence. This is an essential part of duty of care requirements.

This support should include the development of a student support plan in consultation with wellbeing professionals and which outlines support strategies.

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

Approving authority	DOBCEL Board
Approval Date	December 2025
Review Date	December 2027

FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Responding to Student Sexual Offending

PROTECT



YOU MUST TAKE ACTION

As a school staff member, you play a **critical role** in protecting children in your care.

- You **must** act by following the 4 critical actions as soon as you witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a suspicion that a student is a victim of a student sexual offending and/or a student has engaged in sexual offending
- You **must** act even if you are unsure and have not directly observed student sexual offending (e.g. if a victim, or another person tells you about the offence)
- You **must** use the *Responding to Student Sexual Offending template* to keep clear and comprehensive notes.

1 IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO AN INCIDENT

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

If a child is at immediate risk of harm you **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 school for future liaison with Police.

Where necessary you may also need to maintain the integrity of the potential crime scene and preserve evidence.

2 REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed you **must** report incidents, suspicions and disclosures of student sexual offending as soon as possible:

VICTORIA POLICE

All instances on **000**

DHHS CHILD PROTECTION

If you believe that:

- the victim's parent/carers are unable or unwilling to protect the child
- the student who is alleged to have engaged in the student sexual offending is:
 - aged over 10 and under 15 years and may be in need of therapeutic treatment to address these behaviours
 - may be displaying physical and behavioural indicators of being the victim of child abuse*.

INTERNALLY

ALSO report internally to:

- **School Principal and/or leadership team** (all instances)
- **Government Schools:** DET Security Services Unit
- **Catholic Schools:** Diocesan education office

3 CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

Your Principal **must** consult with **Victoria Police** or **DHHS Child Protection** to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers of all impacted students. They may advise:

- **not to contact the parents/carers** (e.g. in circumstances where contacting the parents/carers is likely to adversely affect a **Victoria Police** investigation or where the student is a mature minor and has requested that their parent/carer not be notified)
- **to contact the parents/carers** and provide agreed information (this must be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion).

4 PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

Your school **must** provide support for students who are victim to a student sexual offence AND students who have engaged in a sexual offence. This is an essential part of your duty of care requirements.

This support should include the development of a **Student Support Plan** in consultation with wellbeing professionals, outlining support strategies.

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

You must identify a contact person at the school for future liaison with Victoria Police and/or Child Protection and seek advice about contacting parents/carers (see **Action 3**).

*See the *Four Critical Steps for Schools: Responding Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse* for further guidance in these circumstances.

CONTACT

DHHS CHILD PROTECTION AREA

North Division **1300 664 977**
 South Division **1300 655 795**
 East Division **1300 360 391**
 West Division (Rural) **1800 075 599**
 West Division (Metro) **1300 664 977**

AFTER HOURS

After hours, weekends, public holidays **13 12 78**

CHILD FIRST

www.dhs.vic.gov.au

VICTORIA POLICE

000 or contact your local police station

DET SECURITY SERVICES UNIT

(03) 9589 6266

STUDENT INCIDENT AND RECOVERY UNIT

(03) 9651 3622

EMPLOYEE CONDUCT BRANCH

(03) 9637 2595

DIOCESAN OFFICE

Melbourne (03) 9267 0228
 Ballarat (03) 5337 7135
 Sale (03) 5622 6600
 Sandhurst (03) 5443 2377

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS VICTORIA

(03) 9825 7200



FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

YOU MUST TAKE ACTION

As a school staff member, you play a **critical role** in protecting children in your care.

■ You **must** act, by following the Four Critical Actions, as soon as you witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a reasonable belief* that a child has, or is at risk of being abused.

■ You **must** act if you form a suspicion/ reasonable belief, even if you are unsure and have not directly observed child abuse (e.g. if the victim or another person tells you about the abuse).

■ It is strongly recommended that you use the **Responding to Suspected Child Abuse template** to keep clear and comprehensive notes, even if you make a decision not to report.

* A reasonable belief is a deliberately low threshold. This enables authorities to investigate and take 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 you **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 school for future liaison with Police.

Where necessary you may also need to maintain the integrity of the potential crime scene and preserve evidence.

2 REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES / REFERRING TO SERVICES

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

Q: Where does the source of suspected abuse come from?

WITHIN THE SCHOOL

VICTORIA POLICE

You **must** report all instances of suspected child abuse involving a school staff member, contractor, volunteer or visitor to Victoria Police.

You **must also** report **Internally** to:

GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

- School principal and/or leadership team
- Employee Conduct Branch
- DET Incident Support and Operations Centre.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

- School principal and/or leadership team
- Diocesan education office.

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

- School principal and/or school chairperson
- Commission for Children and Young People on **1300 782 978**.

All allegations of reportable conduct **must** be reported as soon as possible to:

GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

- Employee Conduct Branch

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

- Diocesan education office

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

- Commission for Children and Young People on **1300 782 978**.

WITHIN THE FAMILY OR COMMUNITY

DHHS CHILD PROTECTION

You **must** report to DHHS 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.

VICTORIA POLICE

You **must also** report all instances of suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police.

You **must also** report **Internally** to:

GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

- School principal and/or leadership team
- DET Incident Support and Operations Centre.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

- School principal and/or leadership team
- Diocesan education office.

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

- School principal and/or chairperson.

OTHER CONCERNS

If you believe that a child is not subject to abuse, but you still hold **significant concerns** for their wellbeing you **must** still act. This may include making a referral or seeking advice from:

- Child FIRST/The Orange Door (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support)
- DHHS Child Protection
- Victoria Police.

3 CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

Your principal **must** consult with DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers. They may advise:

- **not to contact** the parents/carer (e.g. in circumstances where the parents 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/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.

4 PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

Your school **must** provide support for children impacted by abuse. This should include the development of a **Student Support Plan** in consultation with wellbeing professionals. This is an essential part of your duty of care requirements.

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

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

CONTACT

DHHS CHILD PROTECTION

AREA

North Division **1300 664 977**
South Division **1300 655 795**
East Division **1300 360 391**
West Division (Rural) **1800 075 599**
West Division (Metro) **1300 664 977**

AFTER HOURS

After hours, weekends, public holidays **13 12 78**.

CHILD FIRST

<https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/referral-and-support-teams>

ORANGE DOOR

<https://www.vic.gov.au/familyviolence/the-orange-door.html>

VICTORIA POLICE

000 or your local police station

DET INCIDENT SUPPORT AND OPERATIONS CENTRE

1800 126 126

INCIDENT MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT UNIT

1800 126 126

EMPLOYEE CONDUCT BRANCH

(03) 9637 2595

DIOCESAN OFFICE

Melbourne **(03) 9267 0228**
Ballarat **(03) 5337 7135**
Sale **(03) 5622 6600**
Sandhurst **(03) 5443 2377**

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS VICTORIA

(03) 9825 7200

THE LOOKOUT

The LOOKOUT has a service directory, information, and evidence based guidance to help you respond to family violence: <http://www.lookout.org.au>.

Family violence victims/survivors can be referred to **1800 Respect** for counselling, information and a referral service: **1800 737 732**.

PROTECT

THE EDUCATION STATE

VICTORIA
Department of Education and Training

cecv
catholic education commission of victoria inc

Religious Education

