

## SCHOOL PROCESSES FOR RESPONDING TO AND REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

### **RATIONALE:**

Barwon Heads Primary School has a designated staff member in the role of Student Guidance Officer with responsibility for supporting the school and students to create a safe and engaging school environment. The Student Guidance Officer will ensure that all children know who to talk to if they are worried or are feeling unsafe, and make sure that they are comfortable to do so. Children will be encouraged and supported in their efforts to protect themselves and others. Barwon Heads Primary School will proactively engage with children in an age-appropriate manner about abuse, to create a safe environment for them. At Barwon Heads Primary School the safety of the child and the risk of harm is the primary consideration, with due regard for confidentiality and fairness to the person against whom the allegation is made. While the standards apply specifically to child abuse, our school strongly promotes children's health, mental health and wellbeing in a broader sense. For Barwon Heads Primary School's community to comprehend the purpose of the Child Safe Standards it is pertinent that we understand the forms of child abuse.

### **Forms of child abuse:**

- Unintentional/accidental harm
- Physical child abuse
- Child sexual abuse
- Serious emotional or psychological abuse
- Cultural abuse
- Serious Neglect
- Family Violence
- Grooming

### **Managing a disclosure**

At Barwon Heads Primary School we feel it is very important to validate a child's disclosure. This means listening to the child, taking them seriously and responding and acting on the disclosure by implementing our school's reporting procedures. Key Steps include:

- Try and separate them from the other children discreetly
- Let them know that if you are concerned about their safety or at risk of self-harm, that you will need to let other people know, such as the Principal and their parent/carer. Let them know that you will act on this information
- Let the child talk about their concerns in their own time and in their own words. Give them your full attention, the time and a quiet space in which to do this
- **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
- Let them know 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
- Alert relevant people in the school, the police or Child Protection, as documented in KVPS Child Safe Policy

- 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 or the Child Safety Officer, police or child protection
- Ensure the disclosure is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely
- Contact the child's parents to let them know (other than if the disclosure related to abuse within the family)
- Assist the child and their family to access appropriate support for the child, such as counselling
- Let the child and their family know about steps the school is taking, such as an investigation, and any resulting action, such as changes to policy or procedures

If a parent/carer says their child has been abused in the school or raises a concern the same process will be followed as well as assisting the child and their family to access appropriate support for the child, such as counselling.

- Explain that BHPS 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 notes will be taken during the discussion to capture all details
- Explain to them the information may need to be repeated to authorities or others, such as the Principal or 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

At Barwon Heads Primary School we record any child safety complaints, disclosures or breaches of the Code of Conduct and store the records in accordance with security and privacy requirements. Barwon Heads Primary School keeps a record of action taken, any internal investigations and any reports made to statutory authorities or professional bodies.

### **What concerns should be reported?**

Concerns about the safety and wellbeing of children can range from an uncomfortable feeling through to a direct observation or a disclosure by a child. Staff and the community are encouraged to speak to someone and be proactive rather than wait until it is too late. Staff have been made aware of their duty of care to children and of their legal responsibilities.

Examples of child safety concerns include:

- Concerns about a physical environment that may pose a risk to children (this includes health and hygiene issues)
- Inappropriate or special relationships developing between any individual involved in this school and children
- Breaches of the Staff Code of Conduct, particularly if they are persistent
- Feelings of discomfort about interactions between a child any individual involved in this school suspicions or beliefs that children are at risk of harm
- Observations of concerning changes in behaviour
- Children's disclosures of abuse or harm, which must be reported to Child Protection or the police

### Concerns that are reported to the police?

- Physical or sexual abuse of children is a crime and must be reported to the police.
- If a child is in imminent or immediate danger, 000 is called immediately.

### When should concerns be reported to Child Protection?

Reports to Child Protection can be made if the School believes, on reasonable grounds, that a child is in need of protection. Child Protection is part of the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services. It provides child-centred, family-focused services to protect children and young people from significant harm caused by abuse or neglect within the family. It also aims to ensure that children and young people receive services to deal with the impact of abuse and neglect on their wellbeing and development. It is the Child Protection practitioner's job to investigate significant harm.

### How to make a report?

Reports of child abuse can be made directly to the regional Child Protection Office as soon as possible. Contact number is **1300 664 977** or **13 12 78** for after-hours notifications.

### Legal responsibilities to report child abuse

While the child safe standards focus on organisations such as our school, every adult who reasonably believes that a child has been abused, whether in their school or not, has an obligation to report that belief to authorities.

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 and school principals, police, youth workers, social workers and psychologists are mandatory reporters under the ***Children, Youth and Families Act 2005***. If they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse they must report to Child Protection.

As long as a report is made in good faith, the report is not unprofessional conduct or a breach of professional ethics and the reporter cannot be held legally liable. Confidentiality is provided for reporters in the ***Children, Youth and Families Act 2005***, and prevents the disclosure of the name or any information likely to lead to the identification of a person who has made a report in accordance with the legislation except in very specific circumstances.

### **Regular review**

This document will be reviewed every two years and following significant incidents if they occur.

**PROTECT**

