

Thomastown Meadows PS

Mandatory Reporting Policy

PROCESSES FOR RESPONDING AND REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

Rationale:

- This policy has been adopted in line with the Ministerial Order No. 870 Child Safe Standards-Procedures for responding to and reporting allegations of child suspected child abuse Clause 11.
- Thomastown Meadows, in its commitment to promoting and protecting the interests and safety of children, have a zero tolerance for child abuse. Everyone involved with Thomastown Meadows is responsible for the care and protection of children and the reporting of child abuse (including physical, sexual, grooming, emotional/psychological and neglect).
- The school is committed to providing a safe environment where children are safe, feel safe and their voices heard about decisions affecting their lives.
- This policy defines the roles and responsibilities of school staff in protecting the safety and wellbeing of children and enable staff to:
 - i. Identify indicators that a child may be in need of protection
 - ii. Make a report about a child who may be in need of protection
 - iii. Comply with reporting obligations under the child protection law and criminal law and fulfil their duty of care

Aim:

All staff members are to understand their moral obligation to protect any child under their care by responding and reporting incidents, disclosures and suspicions. Staff members, volunteers and contractors are to be aware of signs and behaviours that may indicate that a child has been subject to abuse, or that a school community member, or employee may be the perpetrator of abuse.

Failure to disclose is a criminal offence and expects that an adult who holds a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under that age of 16 is to disclose this information to Police.

Implementation:

- All school staff members have a moral and legal obligation and Duty of Care to protect any child under their care. Staff must respond to any reasonable suspicion that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused by ensuring that all information is documented and reported to the Principal/Leadership Team and Student Wellbeing Officer. School policy and procedures regarding mandatory reporting will be following including the Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse.

Dealing with a disclosure from a child:

- Try separating the child discreetly from others and listening to them carefully by allowing the child to use their own words to explain what had occurred.
- Reassure them that what they are saying will be taken seriously and that it is not their fault and that by talking to you is the right thing.

- Explain to them that this information may need to be shared to others, such as Police, parent/carer, specific staff members.
- Do not make promises to the child such as not telling anyone about the incident, except that you will do your best to keep them safe.
- Do not leave the child in a distressed state. Stay with them if they seem at ease in your company.
- Depending on their age, abilities and emotional state at the time of the disclosure provide the child with an incident report or complete it together. Similarly take notes in the child's words and read them back to the child to ensure they have been written accurately.
- Ensure disclosure is recorded appropriately on the incident report form along with any other additional notes taken and ensure the information is stored securely.
- Report the disclosure to the Child Safe/Wellbeing Officer and or Principal/Leadership Team, Police or Child Protection following the school procedures.

NB An advocate will be provided eg: Primary Welfare Officer, Multi Cultural Aid, KESO, VACCA when a child discloses; with consideration given to cultural, linguistic/diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islanders and children with a disability.

Dealing with a report from a parent/carer of abuse at school:

- Explain the school's processes and ensure that the abuse allegation will be taken seriously.
- Ask about the wellbeing of the child
- Allow the parent/carer to discuss the incident in their own words.
- Advise that notes will be taken during the discussion.
- Explain that the information may need to be discussed with the schools leadership team/Principal and Wellbeing/Safety officer, the Police or child protection.
- Do not make promises except that the best will be done to ensure the child's safety.
- Provide them with an incident report form and/or complete it together.
- Ask what action they would like to take next and advise of the immediate next steps.
- Ensure all information is collected accurately in the parents/carers words and stored securely.
- It is also important to be aware of cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds when reporting allegations due to barriers that they may face. For e.g anxieties associated with authority-Police. Where possible have an interpreter present and be sensitive to the needs and issues of people and ensure these are being met.
- If allegations of abuse involve an Aboriginal child, ensure culturally appropriate responses.
- Children with a disability may also experience barriers in disclosing an incident and support to meet their needs must be ensured (e.g hearing impaired sign language interpreters to be used).

Internal Investigation

- Should the abuse occur within the school, the accused staff member, volunteer or contractor will be stood down, or transferred to a position that does not involve contact with children, until an investigation has been concluded.
- Investigations will be conducted in conjunction with Police and other external investigations with legal support.
- All participants involved in the investigation must be required to maintain confidentiality and can be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement

- All information collated throughout the investigation will be stored in an appropriate location to maintain confidentiality.
- The person receiving the allegation is to document the specific details regarding the alleged incident by asking questions such as :
- Can you tell me what happened from the start?
- When and where did the incident occur?
- Who was there?
- What was said and done?
- At this stage, the matter should be reported to the Principal/Leadership Team, Wellbeing Officer and/or Safety Officer who will then follow the Four Critical Actions.

Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse

1. Responding to an Emergency

If there is no immediate risk of harm go to ACTION 2

If a child is at immediate risk you must ensure their safety by:

- Separating the alleged victims and others involved
- Administer 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 to further liaise with Police

2. Reporting to Authorities

As soon as health and safety concerns are addressed, reports regarding all incidences, suspicions and disclosures of child abuse should be reported as soon as possible. Failure to do so may result in a criminal offence.

- **Within the school**-All instances of suspected child abuse involving a staff member, contractor or volunteer must be reported to the Police
- *Report Internally to:* School Principal/Leadership team
 - Employee Conduct branch
 - DET Security Services
- **Within the community or family**- Reports to be made to **DHHS Child Protection** if the child is considered to be:
 - In need of protection from child abuse
 - At risk of being harmed (or has been harmed) and the harm had has, or is likely to have a serious impact on the child's safety, stability and development
 - **Victoria Police**- all reports of suspected sexual abuse including grooming
 - **Internally**-Principal/Leadership Team
 - DET Security Services

3. Contacting Parents/Carers

In consultation with DHHS Child Protection or the Victoria Police a decision about what information can be provided to the parents/carers will be determined. They may advise:

- **Not to contact** the parents/carer (e.g circumstances where the carers/parents are alleged to have engaged in the abuse)
- **To contact** the parent/carer and provide the agreed information (this to be done on the same day the disclosure, incident or suspicion occurs).

4. Providing Ongoing Support

The school must provide support for the children impacted by abuse. This should include a student support plan in consultation with wellbeing professionals.

Please see Appendix 2 - Four Critical Actions for School: responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse (flow chart)

Evaluation:

- This policy is to be **reviewed** every **two years**. The review will assess whether the policies or procedures require modification to better protect children.

This Policy has been ratified by School Council in

August 2016

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Mandatory Reporting- Incident Report

Date of Incident:	
Time of Incident:	
Location of Incident:	
Name of Child/children involved:	
Name of staff/volunteer involved:	
Reporter name and position:	

Cultural Background:

- Aboriginal
- Torres Strait Islander
- Other:

Disability:

Interpreter required: yes/no

Please categorise incident-

Physical Violence	
Sexual Offence	
Serious Emotional or Psychological abuse	
Serious neglect	
Other:	

Please describe the incident: (staff to support children to record this information if needed)

Completed by:.....

Date.....

Signature

TMPS is committed to promoting and protecting the interests and safety of children by providing an environment where children are safe, feel safe and their voices are heard.

Office use:

Date incident report received:	
Name of person managing report:	

Has the incident been reported?

Child Protection Contact Details:
Police Contact Details:
Other: Contact details:

If not reported why?

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Action to be taken:

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