

PROTECT

Protecting Children from Abuse: For Parents and Carers

GET THE FACTS REPORTING ABUSE

What should I do if I suspect that my child has been abused?

If you believe your child has been abused, or is at risk of being abused contact Victoria Police immediately via the local police station or on 000 if it's an emergency.

What should I do if I suspect that another child has been abused?

If you suspect a child has been abused, or is at risk of abuse (such as physical abuse, family violence or neglect) you should report immediately to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Child Protection (see contact details at the end of this fact sheet).

- If you suspect a child has been sexually abused, you must also report your concerns to the Victoria Police. You may be committing a criminal offence if you fail to do so
- You should report even if you're not sure. It is the role of authorities to investigate your concerns and determine if any further action needs to be taken.
- Parents and carers are also often in a position to protect the friends of their children. This is because children are most likely to disclose their experiences of abuse to their peers, who in turn may share this with their own parents and carers. ■ If your child talks to you about their friend, and you suspect that the child is being abused or is at risk of being abused, you should act. You may be the only adult in a position to act and your response may be critical in protecting that child's

What should I do if I suspect that a child is being abused and authorities have previously investigated and dismissed my report?

If you have new grounds for believing that a child is being abused, you should make another report to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police. Every report is critical to protecting a child as it builds evidence and helps authorities to gain a clearer understanding of risks to the child.

What happens to my child if someone at the school suspects that my child has been abused?

All staff members at your child's school are required to report suspected child abuse to DHHS, Child Protection and, in some circumstances, to Victoria Police.

Your child's school will contact you as soon as possible, unless they have been advised not to do so by DHHS, Child Protection and/or Victoria Police.

Where appropriate the school will work with you to ensure your child is provided with support, which may include referring them to wellbeing professionals.

When is it a criminal offence to not report suspect abuse?

Any adult may face criminal charges if they believe that another adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 years of age and does not report this information to the police.

FACTS ON CHILD ABUSE

What is child abuse?

Child abuse:

- can include physical abuse, sexual abuse, grooming, emotional or psychological harm, neglect or family violence
- does not have to involve physical contact or force (e.g. child sexual abuse can include talking to a child in a sexually explicit way)
- can be committed by any member of the community, including someone within a child's family or someone within the school setting. The trauma associated with child abuse can significantly impact upon the wellbeing and development of a child. This is why it is critical that we all respond immediately to any form of suspected abuse.

What are the signs that a child has been abused?

There are a range of physical and behavioural indicators of child abuse.

Most importantly you should act if you notice anything that causes you to form a reasonable belief that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused, including (but not limited to):

- a change in a child's behaviour (e.g. withdrawal, regressive behaviour, or non-age appropriate sexual behaviours)
- physical indicators of abuse (e.g. unexplained bruises, welts, signs of malnutrition)
- an inappropriate relationship between an adult and a child (e.g. inappropriate physical contact, unexplained gifts or phone/email contact).

THE SCHOOL'S ROLE

How must schools respond to suspected child abuse?

All staff in Victorian schools are obligated to respond to any incident or suspicion of child abuse as outlined below:

1. Respond to the emergency

Address any immediate health and safety needs (eg. administer first aid or contact emergency services).

2. Inform authorities

Report any reasonable belief that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused to the DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police.

3. Contact parents/carers when appropriate

Contact parents/carers once authorities advise that it is safe and appropriate to do so. Ideally parents/carers will play a central role in providing support for their children, however schools will be instructed not to contact parents/ carers in circumstances where this may impede an investigation or place the child at greater risk.

4. Provide ongoing support for all children impacted by the abuse

Provide appropriate support for all children impacted by abuse. This will likely include ongoing counselling from professionals. The child's ongoing support will be documented in a Student Support Plan.

These actions are outlined in further detail in Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools.

Are the staff at my child's school required to report child abuse?

Yes — all staff at your child's school are required by law to report any reasonable belief that a child has been abused, or is at risk of abuse.

In some circumstances, it may be a criminal offence for school staff to fail to report child abuse to the authorities.

PROTECTING MY CHILD

What can I do to help educate and protect my child from abuse?

Have a chat to your child and make sure that he or she knows that no one is allowed to threaten, hurt or touch them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable.

Every relationship should be respectful and no one should behave in a way that makes them feel unsafe or afraid.

Your child's school will also be supporting your child in learning about their rights to be safe and respected. Victorian government schools are teaching the Respectful Relationships program which promotes positive attitudes and behaviours and is aimed at preventing family violence

What should I talk about when I explain safety to my child?

There are some things you can do at home to build your child's understanding of safe and respectful relationships including:

- talking openly with your child about their feelings and relationships
- being sure that they understand you will listen and act if they are concerned about how anyone is treating them
- using the correct names for body parts and having age-appropriate conversations about touching and sexual activity
- letting your child know that adults should never harm or act in a sexual way with any child.

Keeping children safe outside of the home or school

You play a critical role in ensuring your children are spending time in safe places.

In Victoria all people who are working with your children such as coaches and music teachers need to have a current Working with Children Check.

You may like to check that any staff and volunteers spending time with your child after school hours and on weekends have a valid Working with Children Check.

If you think that you may need some help to keep your children safe from harm and support their healthy development, it is important you find some help. Visit the Victorian Government's Better Health Channel for information on seeking support See www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au.



FURTHER INFORMATION

Where can I go for more information and support?

You can contact DHHS Child Protection and Victoria Police directly to discuss any concerns you may have for the wellbeing of a child (see contact details on the next page)

If you have any concerns about your child or another child at your child's school talk to the principal or another staff member at the school about your concerns. You can also raise this matter with DHHS Child Protection and the Victoria Police.

For further information on where to go for support to keep your children safe from harm visit the Victorian Government's Better Health Channel: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

For more information on:

- your child's school's role in preventing and managing child abuse:

www.education.vic.gov.au/protect

- indicators of abuse, visit www.education.vic.gov.au/protect

If you are concerned or unsure about your school's response and/or would like to talk to someone outside of the school please contact:

- Victorian government schools Regional Office:

www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/regions.aspx

- Catholic Schools local Diocesan education office:

www.cecv.catholic.edu.au/About-Us/Dioceses

- Independent Schools Victoria:

www.is.vic.edu.au/who-we-are/contact-us/



CONTACT INFORMATION

24 Hour Services Regional

Victoria Police	000
Department of Health and Human Services Child Protection	131278

Department of Education and Training

North Eastern Victoria	
General enquiries	1300 333 231
Benalla office	(03) <u>8392 9500</u>
Glen Waverley office	(03) 8392 9300
North Western Victoria	
Bendigo office	(03) 5337 8444
Coburg office	(03) 9488 9488
South Eastern Victoria	
Dandenong office	(03) <u>8765 5600</u>
Moe office	(03) 5127 0400
South Western Victoria	
General enquiries	1300 333 232
Ballarat office	(03) 5337 8444
Footscray office	(03) 8397 0300
Geelong office	(03) 52251000
Horsham office	(03) 5310 5300
Warrnambool office	1300 333 232

Catholic Education

Archdiocese of Melbourne: Office of Professional Conduct, Ethics & Investigation Legal Services Student Wellbeing Information Line E Communications & Marketing Unit (Media Advisor)	(03) 9267 0228
Diocese of Sale	(03) 5622 6600
Diocese of Ballarat	(03) 5337 7135
Diocese of Sandhurst	(03) 5443 2377

Independent Schools

Independent Schools Victoria	(03) 9825 7200
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Department of Health and Human Services Child Protection

Region	Local Government Areas (LGAs)	Phone No
Northern and western suburban LGAs	Banyule, Brimbank, Darebin Hobsons Bay, Hume, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Melton, Moonee Valley, Moreland, Nillumbik, Whittlesea, Wyndham, Yarra.	1300 664 977
Eastern suburban I-GAS	Boroondara, Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Monash, Whitehorse, Yarra Ranges.	1300 360 391
Southern suburban I-GAS	Bayside, Cardinia, Casey, Frankston, Glen Eira, Greater Dandenong, Kingston, Mornington Peninsula, Port Phillip, Stonnington.	1300 655 795
West Rural and Regional LGSs	Ararat, Ballarat, Golden Plains, Hepburn, Hindmarsh, Horsham, Moorabool, Northern Grampians, Pyrenees, West Wimmera, Yarriambiack, Colac-Otway, Corangamite, Glenelg, Greater Geelong, Moyne, Queenscliffe, Southern Grampians, Surf Coast, Warrnambool,	1800 075 599
North-western rural and regional I-GAS	Buloke, Campaspe, Central Goldfields, Gannawarra, Greater Bendigo, Loddon, Macedon Ranges, Mildura, Mount Alexander, Swan Hill.	1800 675 598
North-eastern rural and regional I-GAS	Alpine, Benalia, Greater Shepparton, Indigo, Mansfield, Mitchell, Moira, Murrindindi, Strathbogie, Towong, Wangaratta, Wodonga,	1800 650 227
Eastern and south-eastern rural and regional I-GAS	Bass Coast, Baw Baw, East Gippsland, Latrobe, South Gippsland, Wellington.	1800 020 202