

Responding to Allegations, Concerns and Complaints of Child Abuse Policy

Ardmona Primary School takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our staff and volunteers are trained to deal appropriately with allegations. We work to ensure all children, families, staff and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour. We all have a responsibility to immediately report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place (see information about failure to disclose below with regards to Legislative Responsibilities). Our Reporting procedure outlined below clearly identifies when reports must be made to other authorities, including the Department of Health and Human Services and Victoria Police. All concerns about abuse must also be immediately taken to our Principal or Assistant Principal. Additional to this procedure is our Mandatory Reporting policy.

Reasonable Belief:

If an adult has a reasonable belief that an incident has occurred they must report the incident. Factors that contribute to a reasonable belief may be—

- A child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes in fact, a child may be referring to themselves).
- Behaviour consistent with that of an abused victim is observed.
- Someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it.
- Observing suspicious behaviour 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 important to note that a reasonable belief is a deliberately low threshold: this enables authorities to investigate and take action.

When 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, the Principal or Assistant Principal, 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.
- As soon as possible after the disclosure, record the information using the child's words and report the disclosure to the Principal or Assistant Principal, police or child protection.
- Ensure the disclosure is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely .



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If a parent/carer says their child has been abused in your organisation or raises a concern—

- Explain that Ardmona Primary 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 Principal or Engagement and Wellbeing Assistant Principal, 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 - Important considerations for at risk groups You need to be aware that some people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds may face barriers in reporting allegations of abuse.

For example, people from some cultures may experience anxiety when talking with police, and communicating in English may be a barrier for some. You need to be sensitive to these issues and meet people's needs where possible, such as having an interpreter present (who could be a friend or family member).

If an allegation of abuse involves an Aboriginal child, you will need to ensure a culturally appropriate response. A way to help ensure this could include engaging with parents of Aboriginal children, possibly with the assistance/support of our Koorie Engagement Support Officer (KESO).

Some children with a disability may experience barriers disclosing an incident. For example, children with hearing or cognitive impairments may need support to help them explain the incident, including through sign language interpreters.

Advice on communicating with people with a disability can be found on the Department of Health and Human Services website: www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-business-and-community/community-involvement/people-with-a-disability-in-the-community/communicate-and-consult-with-people-with-a-disability/communication-with-people-with-disabilities.

Where the source of suspected abuse comes from within the school –

All instances of suspected child abuse involving a school staff member, contractor or volunteer must be reported to the Victoria Police. An internal report must also be made to:

- The Principal.
- The Employee Conduct Branch of DET.
- DET Security Service Unit
- Where the source of suspected abuse comes from 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.
- You must also report all instances of suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police. Internally you must report to the School Principal and/or Assistant Principal and to the DET Security Services Unit.
- Contacting parents/carers The Principal and/or Assistant Principal will consult with DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers.



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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, suspicion).
- Providing ongoing support It is an obligation of our school to provide support for children impacted by abuse. This should include the developed 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.
- Legislative responsibilities Ardmona Primary School takes our legal responsibilities seriously. We understand that every adult who reasonably believes that a child has been abused, whether in our school or not, has an obligation to report that belief to authorities.
- Failure to Disclose Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility.
- All adults in Victoria (over 18 years of age), who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 years of age, has an obligation to report that information to police. Failure to Protect People in Authority at Ardmona Primary School – (Principal or Principal’s delegate) will commit an offence if they are aware that a child has a substantial risk of child sexual abuse, has the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fails to do so.

NOTE: While failure to disclose only covers child sexual abuse, all adults should report other forms of child abuse to authorities. More information about failure to disclose is available on the Department of Justice and Regulation website: <https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families>

Mandatory reporting finally any person who is a mandatory reporter must also satisfy their duties.

More information on this may be found in our [Mandatory Reporting and Procedures Policy](#).

Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed as part of the School’s annual policy cycle.

Review Cycle

Policy last reviewed	June 2022
Approved by	Principal
Next scheduled review date	June 2024



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