

Myrtleford P12 College



STUDENT DISCLOSURE AND SUPPORT PLAN POLICY

Rationale:

Myrtleford P12 College acknowledges within our statement of commitment that it is our moral and legal responsibility to create a nurturing school environment where children and young people are respected, their voices are heard and they are safe and feel safe. Myrtleford P12 College and its staff promote the empowerment of all children to raise concerns over their safety and to disclose child abuse. Adequate support measures need to be activated when this occurs.

Aims:

To support the student who has been the victim of child abuse and follow processes and protocols established by the Department of Education when a disclosure has been made.

Implementation:

All Myrtleford P12 College staff **must act** as soon as they witness an incident that breaches student safety or when they form a reasonable belief that a child has been or is at risk of being abused.

Myrtleford P12 College will record any child safety complaints, disclosures or breaches of the Code of Conduct (and subsequent action) on the DET recommended Responding to Suspected Child Abuse template and store these to DET and Myrtleford P12 College security and privacy conventions.

To make processes, understandings and obligations clear, our College has appointed a dedicated Child-Safety Officer (Wellbeing Co-ordinator) which staff must liaise with on all child safety areas.

Receiving a Disclosure (current student / former student)

If a child discloses that they have been, are being, or are in danger of being abused, Myrtleford P12 College staff must treat the disclosure seriously and take immediate action by following the *Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse*.

If a former student discloses historical abuse, all staff **must act**. If the former student is currently of school age and attending a Victorian school, staff must follow the *Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse*. If the student is no longer of school age or attending a Victorian school, staff must still act by contacting Victoria Police.

Forming a Reasonable Belief

If Myrtleford P12 College staff witness behaviour, have a suspicion or receive a disclosure of child abuse, that staff member needs to determine whether they have formed a Reasonable Belief that a child is being abused or is at risk of being abused. A reasonable belief does not require proof (but needs to be more than a rumour).

Six different identified types of abuse

1: Physical

Abuse which is any non-accidental infliction of physical violence on a child by any person.

2: Sexual

Is when a person uses power or authority over a child to involve them in sexual activity (which can also include non-contact offences). It may not always involve force, as in some circumstances, a child may be manipulated.

3: Grooming

Is when a person engages in predatory conduct to prepare a child for sexual activity at a later time. This may involve communicating and / or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent / carer.

4: Emotional

Emotional child abuse occurs when a child is repeatedly rejected, isolated, or frightened by threats or by witnessing family violence.

5: Neglect

Serious neglect significantly impairs the health or physical development of the child or places this development at serious risk.

6: Family Violence

Family violence can include physical violence or threats, verbal abuse, emotional and physical abuse, sexual abuse and financial and social abuse.

When identifying child abuse, it is critical to remember that:

- The trauma associated with child abuse can significantly impact upon the wellbeing / development of a child.
- All concerns about the safety and wellbeing of a child, or the conduct of a staff member, contractor or volunteer **must** be acted upon as soon as practicable.

Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

Staff members of Myrtleford P12 College play a critical role in protecting children in their care; including-

- Staff must act by following the four critical actions, as soon as they witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a reasonable belief that a child has, or is at risk of being abused.
- Staff must act if they form a suspicion / reasonable belief, even if they are unsure and have not directly observed child abuse (e.g. if the victim or another person tells them about the abuse).
- Staff **must** use the *Responding to Suspected Child Abuse* template to keep clear and comprehensive notes.

Action 1: Responding to an emergency

If a child is at immediate risk of harm, the staff member must ensure their safety by:

- Separating alleged victims and others involved;
- Administering first aid (if required);
- Calling 000 for urgent medical and/or police assistance to respond to immediate health or safety concerns;
- Liaising with Alkira's Child Safety Officer who will respond with Police on the specific incident.

Action 2: reporting to authorities

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed, the staff member **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.

If the source of suspected abuse is from within our College, all staff members must report all instances of suspected child abuse and sexual abuse involving a school staff member, contractor or volunteer to Victoria Police. School staff **must also** report the incident **internally** to:

- School Principal and/or Child Safety Officer
- Employee Conduct Branch
- DET Security Services Unit

If the source of suspected abuse is from within the family or community, all staff **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.

Action 3: CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

The 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 / carers (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 parents / carers 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).

Action 4: PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

Myrtleford P12 College **will** provide ongoing support for children impacted by abuse via **Student Support Plans**, liaison with DET / External agencies, SSGs and wellbeing strategies; as follows-

- Management Support Plan - for victims of sexual abuse and
- Supportive Behaviour Plan - for alleged student perpetrators of sexual abuse.

Strategies in support of a child may include **liaison and communication** with (but not limited to), the following:

- DHHS Child Protection and Victoria Police;
- Regional Office and engagement of Student Incident and Recovery Unit (SIRU);
- Parents/carers of all impacted students (where appropriate, following advice from authorities);
- If an international student is impacted, liaison with International Education Division (Government schools);
- If an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Student is impacted, liaison with Koorie Education Officer;
- Liaison with Victoria Police;
- Ongoing communication and action as set out by the Employee Conduct Branch (Government schools).

Strategies of **ongoing support** of a child may include (but not limited to), the following:

- Overseeing the development of a short-term action plan for all children impacted by suspected abuse in consultation with the Region and the Student Incident and Recovery Unit (SIRU);

- Ensuring ongoing education and support services are provided for all children involved via formation of a Student Support Group (SSG), overseen by the Child Safety Officer and representatives from a number of support agencies, including Student Incident and Recovery Unit (SIRU);
- Developing, implementing and reviewing a **Student Support Plan** in partnership with children and their parents/carers, allied health workers and external support agencies where appropriate (this plan should list appropriate school-level and non-school based supports and should assist students in returning to school);
- Addressing concerns as they arise.

Provision of **school based wellbeing services** for a child may include (but not limited to), the following:

- Continued monitoring of the situation and the health and wellbeing of impacted children and staff members;
- Ensuring the provision of ongoing support for the children, families and staff members involved.

** The Principal (or representative) will undertake a review process between 4-6 weeks after a report is made.

** Staff must understand that fulfilling the roles and responsibilities contained in the procedures does not displace

or discharge any other obligations that arise if a person reasonably believes that a child is at risk of child abuse.

** If a staff member believes that a child is not subject to abuse, but still holds **significant concerns** for their wellbeing, they must still act. This may include making a referral or seeking advice from Child FIRST (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support), or to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police.

** Staff **must** use the *Responding to Suspected Child Abuse* template to keep clear and comprehensive notes

Contact Information for Staff:

- **DHHS - Child Protection: Wangaratta:** 1300 655 795; Wangaratta (03) 03 57220555 A/H: 13 12 78
- **Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Team:** (SOCIT) Wangaratta: (03) 57230448
- **Regional Office:** Glen Waverly: 1300 233 331
- **(DET) Security Services Unit:** (03) 9589 6266
- **(DET): Student Incident and Recovery Unit:** (03) 9637 2934
- **Child First: Upper Murray Family Care): (03) 57 2000** www.dhs.vic.gov.au
- **(Casey) Aboriginal children and families:** (03) 9794 5973
- **Victoria Police:** 000
- **eHeadspace** (online and a 9am-1am telephone support service) www.eheadspace.org.au or 1800 650 850
- **KidsHelp Line** on 1800 55 1800 or visit for 24-hour support
- Talk to your doctor, psychologist, social worker

** In the case of **international students**, the Principal must notify the International Education Division on (03) 9637 2990 to ensure that appropriate support is arranged for the student.

** In the case of **Koorie students**, the Principal must notify the Regional Office to ensure that the Regional Koorie support officer can arrange appropriate support for the student.

It is a requirement under **Ministerial Order No. 870- Child Safe Standards- Managing the risk of child abuse in schools** for schools to keep clear and comprehensive notes on all observations, disclosures and other details that led them to suspect the abuse. All documentation will be stored securely.

Information contained in this policy has been taken, in part, from DET's **PROTECT** documents- *Identifying and Responding to ALL Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools* and linked website- www.education.vic.gov.au/protect

Evaluation:

This policy will be reviewed as part of the College's three-year review cycle.

This policy was last ratified by School Council in **September 2018**