

Lighthouse Christian College Cranbourne
Child Safety Responding and Reporting Policy

1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the procedures our school has in place to respond to complaints or concerns relating to child abuse and to ensure that all staff and members of our College community understand and follow the various legal obligations that apply to the reporting of child abuse to relevant authorities.

2.0 Scope

This policy applies to all staff (including casual staff and pre-service teachers or interns), the College Council, volunteers (including parent volunteers), contractors and external education providers. This is intentionally broad, reflecting the College's commitment to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people under its care, and is intended to include anyone associated with the College and working with its students. This policy applies to complaints and concerns relating to child abuse made by or in relation to a child or student, College staff, volunteers (including parent volunteers), contractors, service providers, visitors or any other person while connected to Lighthouse Christian College Cranbourne (physical and online).

3.0 Policy Statement

Lighthouse Christian College Cranbourne understands the important role our College plays in protecting children from abuse. We have a range of policies and measures in place to prevent child abuse from occurring at our school or during school activities.

3.1 Information for Students

- All students should feel safe to speak to any staff member to raise any concerns about their safety or any other concerns that they have
- If a student does not know who to approach, they should start with one of our Student Wellbeing Coordinators
- In addition, students can access our Child Safety Help sheet in the diary for assistance, or talk to their class teacher

3.2 Identifying Child Abuse

To ensure we can respond in the best interests of students and children when complaints or concerns relating to child abuse are raised, all staff and relevant volunteers must:

- understand how to identify signs of child abuse and behavioural indicators of perpetrators - for detailed information on identifying child abuse and behavioural indicators of perpetrators refer to Identify child abuse
- understand their various legal obligations in relation to reporting child abuse to relevant authorities. For detailed information on the various legal obligations refer to Appendix A.
- follow the below procedures for responding to complaints or concerns relating to child abuse, which ensure our school acts in the best interests of students and children and complies with both our legal and College policy obligations. At Lighthouse Christian College Cranbourne, we recognise the diversity of the children, young people, and families at our school and take account of their

individual needs and backgrounds when considering and responding to child safety incidents or concerns.

3.2.1 Procedures for Responding to an Incident, Disclosure, Allegation or Suspicion of Child Abuse

In responding to a child safety incident, disclosure, allegation or suspicion, Lighthouse Christian College Cranbourne will follow:

- the Four Critical Actions for Schools for complaints and concerns relating to all forms of child abuse
- the Four Critical Actions: Student Sexual Offending for complaints and concerns relating to student sexual offending
- our Bullying and Harassment Policy for complaints and concerns relating to student physical violence or other harmful student behaviours.

3.2.2 School Staff and Volunteer Responsibilities

Immediate action

If a school staff member or volunteer witnesses an incident of child abuse, or reasonably believes, suspects or receives a disclosure or allegation that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused, they must:

- If a child is at immediate risk of harm, separate alleged victims and others involved, administer first aid (appropriate to their level of training) and call 000 for urgent medical or police assistance where required to respond to immediate health or safety concerns.
- Notify the relevant Principal, Deputy Principal and Class Teacher as soon as possible, who will ensure our College follows the steps in these procedures.

NOTE for staff and volunteers:

- if you are uncertain if an incident, disclosure, allegation or suspicion gives rise to a concern about child abuse you must always err on the side of caution and report the concern to the relevant Principal, Deputy Principal and Class Teacher.
- If the Principal, Deputy Principal and Class Teacher is unavailable, please contact the Administration Manager who will take on this role.
- If the concerns relate to the conduct of the Principal, Deputy Principal or the Class Teacher, notify the Administration Manager, or the Principal if the conduct relates to the Deputy Principal; who must then take on responsibility for ensuring our College follows these procedures.
- If a reportable allegation involves the Principal (Head of Organisation), any person can and should notify the Commission for Children and Young People. Please also contact the School Council Chair and the Deputy Principal who will respond accordingly. With respect to where an allegation involves the Principal, the School Council Chair is the nominated person to engage with the Commission for Children and Young People.

Refer to Appendix B for guidance on how to respond to a disclosure of child abuse. Reporting to authorities and referring to services as soon as the immediate health and safety concerns of the child or young person have been addressed, and relevant College staff have been informed, the Principal must report all incidents, suspicions and disclosures of child abuse as soon as possible, keeping the Deputy Principal and Class Teacher informed of the progress of the report at all times.

The following steps will ensure our College complies with the four critical actions as well as additional actions required under the Child Safe Standards. The Principal must ensure:

- all relevant information is reported to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Child Protection, Victoria Police or relevant services where required
- the incident is reported to the relevant Deputy Principal and the Senior Child Safety Officer (Principal)
- all reportable conduct allegations or incidents are reported to the Principal, or his delegate. If a reportable allegation involves the Principal (Head of Organisation), any person can and should notify the Commission for Children and Young People. Please also contact the School Council Chair and the Deputy Principal who will respond accordingly. With respect to where an allegation involves the Principal, the School Council Chair is the nominated person to engage with the Commission for Children and Young People.

NOTE: In circumstances where staff members are legally required to report child abuse to DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police and they are unable to confirm that the information has been reported by another person at the school or the designated member of school staff does not agree that a report needs to be made, the staff member who has formed the reasonable belief must still contact DFFH Child Protection and Victoria Police to make the report. If you believe that a child is not subject to abuse, but you still hold significant concerns for their wellbeing you must still act. This may include making a referral or seeking advice from Child FIRST or The Orange Door (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support) DFFH Child Protection, Family Pastor or Victoria Police. Please discuss this with the Principal or Deputy Principal and ensure that the relevant Class Teacher is informed of progress on the report.

Contacting parents or carers

The Principal and Deputy Principal must ensure parents and carers are notified unless advised otherwise by DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police, or there are other safety and wellbeing concerns in relation to informing parents/carers.

Advice on notifying parents and carers, and where relevant, the wider school community, should be sought from the DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police. Please discuss communication with the wider school community with the Deputy Principal or Principal. For further guidance, refer to PROTECT

Contacting parents and carers

Ongoing protection and support

The Principal in conjunction with the Deputy Principal, and the Class Teacher must ensure appropriate steps are taken by the College to protect the child and other children from any continued risk of abuse. These steps must be taken in consultation with any relevant external agency such as DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police. Ongoing protection will also include further reports to authorities if new information comes to light or further incidents occur. Strategies may include development of a safety plan, direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals and support, crisis accommodation and continued adherence to the Four Critical Actions For Schools.

Appropriate, culturally sensitive and ongoing support must be offered and provided to all affected students. Ongoing support will be based on any available advice from the parents and carers, health practitioners, and other authorities (such as DFFH or Victoria Police) and may include referral to

external wellbeing professionals, the development of a safety plan, student support group meetings, and, for student-to-student incidents, behaviour management and support measures. All support provided is to be documented under the Students File and the sub-category of the Child Safety Reporting category.

Recordkeeping

The Principal, Deputy Principal and Class Teacher will ensure that:

- detailed notes of the incident, disclosure, allegation or suspicion are taken using the Child Safe and Mandatory Reporting Template including, where possible, by the staff member or volunteer who reported the incident, disclosure, or suspicion to them
- detailed notes are taken of any immediate or ongoing action taken by the school to respond to the incident, disclosure, allegation or suspicion
- all notes and other records relating to the incident, disclosure, allegation or suspicion, including the College's immediate and ongoing actions, are stored electronically in a Pastoral Note in the student file and restricted, according to Appendix C.

3.3 For School Visitors and School Community Members

All community members aged 18 years or over have legal obligations relating to reporting child abuse – refer to Appendix A for detailed information.

Any person can make a report to DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection. For contact details, refer to the Four Critical Actions.

Members of the community do not have to inform the school if they are making a disclosure to DFFH Child Protection or the Victoria Police. However, where a community member is concerned about the safety of a child or children at the school, the community member should report this concern to our Senior Child Protection Coordinator (Deputy Principal) so that appropriate steps to support the student can be taken.

3.4 Additional Requirements for All Staff

All staff play an important role in supporting student safety and wellbeing and have a duty of care to take reasonable steps to prevent reasonably foreseeable harm to students.

Fulfilling the roles and responsibilities in the above procedure does not displace or discharge any other obligations that arise if a person reasonably believes that a child is at risk of child abuse. This means that if, after following the actions outlined in the procedure, a staff member reasonably believes that a child remains at risk of abuse, they must take the following steps:

- if they are concerned that the College has not taken reasonable steps to prevent or reduce the risk, raise these concerns with the Senior Child Safety Officer (Principal) in the first instance, and escalate to the Deputy Principal or the College Chair if they remain unsatisfied
- report the matter to the relevant authorities where they are unable to confirm that the information has been reported by another staff member. Staff must refer to Appendix A for further information on their obligations relating to reporting to authorities.

3.5 Communication

This policy will be communicated to our school community in the following ways:

- Available publicly on our school's website and on the College's intranet (Waverley Engage)
- Included in staff induction processes and annual staff training and available on the College's Staff Portal
- Published annually via the School's newsletter
- Included in volunteer induction processes and training for relevant volunteers and contractors
- Discussed at annual staff briefings or meetings
- Included in the respective campus' College Handbook (for parents and students)
- Hard copy available from the College General Office upon request

4.0 Definitions Child abuse

Child abuse includes:

- physical violence inflicted on a child
- sexual offences committed against a child
- grooming of a child by an adult
- family violence committed against or in the presence of a child
- serious emotional or psychological harm to a child
- serious neglect of a child.

The definition of child abuse is broad and can include student to student incidents and concerns, as well as behaviour committed by an adult.

Grooming

Grooming is a criminal offence under the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) and is a form of child abuse and sexual misconduct. This offence targets predatory conduct undertaken by an adult to prepare a child, under the age of 16, to engage in sexual activity at a later time. Grooming can include communicating (including electronic communications) and/or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent or carer.

5.0 Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Additional Requirements for All Staff

All staff play an important role in supporting student safety and wellbeing and have a duty of care to take reasonable steps to prevent reasonably foreseeable harm to students. Fulfilling the roles and responsibilities in the above procedure does not displace or discharge any other obligations that arise if a person reasonably believes that a child is at risk of child abuse. This means that if, after following the actions outlined in the procedure, a staff member reasonably believes that a child remains at risk of abuse, they must take the following steps:

- if they are concerned that the College has not taken reasonable steps to prevent or reduce the risk, raise these concerns with the Senior Child Protection Officer (Deputy Principal) in the first instance, and escalate to the Principal or the College Chair if they remain unsatisfied
- report the matter to the relevant authorities where they are unable to confirm that the information has been reported by another staff member. Staff must refer to Appendix A for further information on their obligations relating to reporting to authorities.

6.0 Relevant Policies Procedures

- Behaviour Management Policy
- Child Safety Policy
- Child Safety Strategy
- Child Safety and Mandatory Reporting Policy
- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Restrictive Interventions Policy
- College Values
- Student Code of Conduct
- Student Duty of Care Policy
- Volunteer Policy

7.0 Relevant External Resources

The following external guidance is relevant to this policy:

- Child Safe Standards
- Protecting Children — Reporting and Other Legal Obligations
- Reportable Conduct
- Identify child abuse
- Report child abuse in schools (including four critical actions)

Date of next review: January 2026

School Council Approval: 10th February 2025

APPENDIX A LEGAL OBLIGATIONS RELATING TO REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

The following information outlines the various legal obligations relating to the reporting of child abuse to relevant authorities.

It is important to note that the procedures outlined in the above policy ensure compliance with the below reporting obligations, and also include additional steps to ensure compliance with the relevant authorities and our College's duty of care obligations.

Mandatory reporting to Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Child Protection The following individuals are mandatory reporters under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic):

- registered teachers and early childhood teachers (including principals and school staff who have been granted permission to teach by the VIT)
- school counsellors including staff who provide direct support to students for mental, emotional or psychological wellbeing, including (but not limited to) school health and wellbeing staff, primary welfare coordinators, student wellbeing coordinators, mental health practitioners, chaplains, and Student Support Services staff
- nurses
- registered psychologists
- police officers
- registered medical practitioners
- out of home care workers (excluding voluntary foster and kinship carers)
- early childhood workers
- youth justice workers
- people in religious ministry
- midwives

All mandatory reporters must make a report to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Child Protection as soon as practicable if, during the course of carrying out their professional roles and responsibilities, they form a belief on reasonable grounds that:

- a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical abuse and/ or sexual abuse; and
- the child's parents or carers have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from harm of that type.

A mandatory reporter who fails to comply with this legal obligation may be committing a criminal offence. It is important for all staff at Lighthouse Christian College Cranbourne to be aware that they are legally obliged to make a mandatory report on each occasion that they form a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection and they must make a mandatory report even if the Class Teacher, Deputy Principal or Principal or any other mandatory reporter does not share their belief that a report is necessary.

If charged with not making a mandatory report, it may be a defence for the person charged to prove that they honestly and reasonably believed that all of the reasonable grounds for their belief had been the subject of a report to child protection made by another person.

The identity of a person who reports any protective concerns to DFFH Child Protection is protected by law. It is an offence for a person, other than the person who made the report, to disclose the name of the person who made a report or any information that is likely to lead to their identification.

At Lighthouse Christian College Cranbourne, all mandated staff and selected College staff who are not mandatory reporters but considered front-facing to students, must undertake the Mandatory Reporting and Other Obligations eLearning Module annually.

The policy of the College requires all staff who form a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection to discuss their concerns with the Principal, Deputy Principal and inform the relevant Class Teacher and to report their concerns to DFFH and in some circumstances to Victoria Police, or to ensure that all the information relevant to the report has been made by the Principal or another school staff member. Any person can make a report to DFFH Child Protection (131 278 – 24 hour service) if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection even if they are not a mandatory reporter listed above.

Reporting student wellbeing concerns to Church Pastor/Child FIRST/Orange Door

At Lighthouse Christian College Cranbourne, we also encourage staff to make a referral to Church Pastor/Child FIRST/Orange Door when they have significant concern for a child's wellbeing. For more information about making a referral to Church Pastor/Child FIRST/Orange Door, refer to the Protect website on Responding To Other Concerns About The Wellbeing Of A Child and the Orange Door.

Reportable Conduct

The Reportable Conduct Scheme is focussed on worker and volunteer conduct and how organisations investigate and respond to suspected child abuse. The scheme aims to improve organisational responses to suspected child abuse and to facilitate the identification of individuals who pose a risk of harm to children. There are five types of 'reportable conduct' listed in the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005:

- sexual offences against, with or in the presence of, a child
- sexual misconduct (which includes grooming) against, with or in the presence of, a child
- physical violence against, with or in the presence of, a child
- behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child
- significant neglect of a child. A reportable conduct allegation is made where a person makes an allegation, based on a reasonable belief, that a worker or volunteer has committed reportable conduct or misconduct that may involve reportable conduct.

If College staff or volunteers (including parent volunteers) become aware of reportable conduct by any current or former employee, contractor or volunteer (including parent volunteer), they must notify the Principal immediately.

If a reportable conduct allegation involves the Principal (Head of Organisation), any person can and should notify the Commission for Children and Young People. Please also contact the School Council

Chair and the Deputy Principal who will respond accordingly. With respect to where an allegation involves the Principal, the School Council Chair is the nominated person to engage with the Commission for Children and Young People.

The Principal or Deputy Principal must notify the School Council Chair of any reportable conduct allegations involving current or former employees of the school (including casual), contractors and volunteers (including parent volunteers, music tutors, pre-service teachers and members of the School Council).

The Principal has a legal obligation to inform the Commission for Children and Young People when an allegation of reportable conduct is made.

For more information about reportable conduct see the Department of Education's website or for a broader understanding of it outside of the context of schools, the Commission for Children and Young People's website.

Failure to disclose offence

Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults (ie persons aged 18 years and over), not just professionals who work with children, have a legal obligation to report to Victoria Police, as soon as practicable, where they form a 'reasonable belief' that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under the age of 16 in Victoria.

Failure to disclose information to Victoria Police (by calling 000, local police station or the Police Assistance Line 131 444) as soon as practicable may amount to a criminal offence unless a person has a 'reasonable excuse' or exemption from doing so. "Reasonable belief" is not the same as having proof. A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds.

For example, a 'reasonable belief' might be formed when:

- a child states that they have been sexually abused
- a child states that they know someone who has been sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves)
- someone who knows a child states that the child has been sexually abused
- professional observations of the child's behaviour or development leads a mandated professional to form a belief that the child has been sexually abused
- signs of sexual abuse leads to a belief that the child has been sexually abused. "Reasonable excuse" is defined by law and includes:
 - fear for the safety of any person including yourself or the potential victim (but not including the alleged perpetrator or an organisation)
- where the information has already been disclosed to Victoria Police and you have no further information to add (for example, through a mandatory report to DFFH Child Protection or a report to Victoria Police from another member of school staff).

Failure to protect offence

This reporting obligation applies to school staff in a position of authority. This can include principals, assistant principals and campus principals. Any staff member in a position of authority who becomes aware that an adult associated with their school (such as an employee, contractor, volunteer or visitor) poses a risk of sexual abuse to a child under the age of 16 under their care, authority or supervision, must take all reasonable steps to remove or reduce that risk.

The offence requires a person in authority to reduce or remove a known “substantial risk”. This may include removing the adult (ie persons aged 18 years and over) from working with children pending an investigation and reporting your concerns to Victoria Police.

If a school staff member in a position of authority fails to take reasonable steps in these circumstances, this may amount to a criminal offence.

What is a ‘substantial risk’?

The offence requires a person in authority to reduce or remove a known ‘substantial’ risk that an adult associated with the organisation may commit a sexual offence against a relevant child. It does not make it a criminal offence to fail to address every possible risk that a sexual offence may be committed against a child.

There are a number of factors that may assist in determining whether a risk is a substantial risk. These include:

- the likelihood or probability that the child will become the victim of a sexual offence
- the nature of the relationship between a child and the adult who may pose a risk to the child
- the background of the adult who may pose a risk to the child, including any past or alleged misconduct
- any vulnerabilities particular to a child which may increase the likelihood that they may become the victim of a sexual offence
- any other relevant fact which may indicate a substantial risk of a sexual offence being committed against a child.

When determining whether a risk is substantial, the courts will consider a variety of factors, which may include those listed above. The courts will consider all the facts and circumstances of the case objectively, and will consider whether a reasonable person would have judged the risk of a sexual offence being committed against the child abuse as substantial. It is not necessary to prove that a sexual offence, such as indecent assault or rape, was committed.

When does a person ‘know’ there is a risk of child sexual abuse?

This offence requires a person in authority to act if they *know* that there is a substantial risk that a child may become the victim of a sexual offence. A person is generally taken to know that there is a risk if he or she is aware that it exists or will exist in the ordinary course of events. This is more than merely holding a tentative belief or suspicion.

However, it is expected that a person in authority will take steps to follow up on a suspicion or belief that children in their organisation were at risk of harm.

When does a person negligently fail to reduce or remove a substantial risk?

Under the offence, a person is taken to have negligently failed to reduce or remove a substantial risk if that failure involves a great falling short of the standard of care that a reasonable person would exercise in the same circumstances. The offence does not require a person in authority to eliminate all possible risks of child sexual abuse.

For example, a person in authority who knows that an adult associated with the organisation poses a substantial risk to children, and moves that adult from one location in an organisation to another location where they still have contact with children, is likely to be committing the offence. Another example is where a person in authority employs someone in a role that involves contact with children, when the person in authority knows the employee left their last job because of allegations of sexually inappropriate behaviour involving children.

Further information

For more information about the offences and reporting obligations outlined in this fact sheet refer to: Protecting Children — Reporting and Other Legal Obligations.

APPENDIX B: managing disclosures of child abuse

Important information for staff When managing a disclosure relating to child abuse you should:

- listen to the student and allow them to speak
- stay calm and use a neutral tone with no urgency and where possible use the child's language and vocabulary (you do not want to frighten the child or interrupt the child)
- be gentle, patient and non-judgmental throughout
- highlight to the student it was important for them to tell you about what has happened
- assure them that they are not to blame for what has occurred
- do not ask leading questions, for example gently ask, "What happened next?" rather than "Why?"
- be patient and allow the child to talk at their own pace and in their own words
- do not pressure the child into telling you more than they want to, they will be asked a lot of questions by other professionals, and it is important not to force them to retell what has occurred multiple times
- reassure the child that you believe them and that disclosing the matter was important for them to do
- use verbal facilitators such as, "I see", restate the child's previous statement, and use non-suggestive words of encouragement, designed to keep the child talking in an open-ended way ("what happened next?")
- tell the child in age-appropriate language you are required to report to the relevant authority to help stop the abuse, and explain the role of these authorities if appropriate (for a young child this may be as simple as saying "I will need to talk to people to work out what to do next to help you")
- Take prompt action in relation to following the procedures outlined below.

When managing a disclosure you should AVOID:

- displaying expressions of panic or shock
- asking questions that are investigative and potentially invasive (this may make the child feel uncomfortable and may cause the child to withdraw)
- going over the information repeatedly (you are only gathering information to help you form a belief on reasonable grounds that you need to make a report to the relevant authority)
- making any comments that would lead the student to believe that what has happened is their fault
- making any promises you will keep the information the student provided confidential
- making promises to the child about what will occur next or that things will be different given the process can be unpredictable and different for each child depending on their circumstances (instead reassure them that you and others will do your best to help).

APPENDIX C: Recording disclosures of child abuse

Important information for staff entering a Child Abuse Record When a disclosure relating to child abuse occurs, a record of the report and subsequent actions must be made in the Schools Student File:

- Child Safe Reporting Only
- Summarise the report
- Attach the associated Child Safe and Mandatory Reporting Template found in the Child Safe Policy and Staff Handbook, Support Plan or other associated documents

Endorsed by LCCC School Council: May 2025

Next Review: July 2026