Child Protection (Students)

Child Abuse (Maltreatment)

All children have the right to be protected from abuse, maltreatment and harm.

Child abuse or maltreatment occurs when a child (being a person under the age of 18) has been subjected to:

- Physical abuse;
- Sexual abuse;
- Emotional abuse; or
- Neglect

which has resulted or is likely to result in harm to the child’s wellbeing.

Child abuse may involve ongoing, repeated or persistent abuse, or it may arise from a single incident.

It is possible for a child to be maltreated by a parent/carer, another adult person or another child who may or may not be older.

Presbyterian Ladies' College's Policy

Presbyterian Ladies' College is committed to providing a safe environment for all our students.

It is our policy that:

- All staff are trained with respect to identification of child abuse and relevant procedures;
- All suspected cases of child abuse are reported to the Department of Child Protection (DCP);
- We maintain up-to-date procedures to assist staff in identifying and reporting child abuse;
- Work collaboratively with relevant external agencies that may be involved in child protection;
- We act immediately to ensure the safety of abused students; and
- We provide ongoing support and assistance to students who have been abused.

Indicators of Child Abuse (Maltreatment)

Children in need of care and protection may show indicators of harm and maltreatment within the college environment. The following indicators may assist staff who are concerned about children in their care:

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is persistent and/or severe assault, non-accidental injury or physical harm of a child and may include the deliberate deprivation of a child’s basic needs. Indicators of physical abuse may include:

- Bruises, burns, broken bones, cuts, welts;
- Lacerations, welts and abrasions, hair missing in tufts;
- Avoidance of physical contact;
- No or little emotion;
- Self harm;
- Overly compliant, shy, withdrawn, passive behaviour; and
- Disclosure to others either directly or indirectly.

**Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse is defined as exposing or subjecting a child to sexual activity, behaviour or threat that is inappropriate to the developmental level of age of the child and/or is an illegal activity. Indicators of sexual abuse may include:

- Signs of pain, itching or discomfort in the anal or genital area;
- Blood stained underwear;
- Urinary tract infections;
- Inappropriate displays of affection;
- Inappropriate interest in sexual matters;
- Self harm;
- Knowledge of sexual behaviour inappropriate to age; and
- Disclosure to others either directly or indirectly.

**Emotional Abuse**

Emotional abuse is emotionally or psychologically abusive behaviour which profoundly damages a child’s confidence and self esteem resulting in emotional harm, emotional deprivation or trauma, disturbed behaviour or the impairment of development. Indicators of emotional abuse may include:

- Depression, violent drawings or writing, eating disorders;
- Lethargy or fatigue;
- Low self esteem;
- Self harm;
- Evidence of drug abuse or dependence;
- Aggressive or delinquent behaviour;
- Truancy or college avoidance;
- Deliberate harming of animals;
- Poor peer to peer relationships;
- Delayed physical, emotional or intellectual development; and
- Disclosure to others either directly or indirectly.

**Neglect**

Neglect is the failure to provide the basic physical and emotional conditions that are essential for healthy development. It includes a child not receiving food, shelter, medical attention or supervision to such an extent that development is likely to be significantly impaired or injury may occur. Key indicators of neglect may include:

- Abandonment;
- Poor hygiene;
- Lack of adequate clothing;
- Inadequate nutrition;
- Lack of medical or dental care;
- Untreated developmental delays;
• Lack of adequate supervision;
• Sexual misconduct;
• Falling asleep at college;
• Excessively compliant or passive behaviour;
• Low self esteem;
• Deliberate harming of animals;
• Poor peer to peer relationships; and
• Disclosure to others either directly or indirectly.

Managing a Student's Disclosure of Abuse

A student may disclose information about abuse or neglect privately to a staff member. Alternatively a child may make a public disclosure such as making a disclosure in class or to a group of other students.

Private Disclosure

If a student discloses a situation of abuse directly to a staff member, their role is to reassure the student and support the student in their decision to disclose. The teacher must assure students that they have the right to feel safe and must listen actively to what the student is saying.

Disclosure of abuse can cause strong feelings in the person to whom the disclosure is being made. It is important for the staff member to be aware of, and control, their feelings in the situations.

The staff member must not push for details or conduct an investigation, or express judgment.

Sometimes a student may try and elicit a promise that a staff member not tell anyone about the disclosure. Do not make this promise.

Public Disclosure

It is possible that a student may start to disclose in class or with a group of other students. In this circumstance, a teacher should use a strategy of "protective interrupting" and:

• Acknowledge that you have heard the student and stop further disclosure whilst maintaining support and encouraging the student to discuss the matter in a more private situation;
• Quietly arrange to see the student as soon as possible away from other students; and
• Do not allow other students to ask questions and discourage them from making judgements.

Initial Reporting of Abuse

The identification of child abuse can be difficult especially where it is based upon the observation of multiple risk indicators that may often occur over a period of time.

Where a staff member suspects or has been told that neglect or abuse may be occurring they must raise the matter with the School Psychologist or Head of School. The matter will then be referred to the Principal. If the matter involves the Principal, the matter should be raised with the Chair of Council.

Initial Action Following Disclosure

The safety of students is paramount. Once disclosure has been made, consultation should take place with the college Psychologist and other professional colleagues as the particular circumstances demand, and a strategy should be determined to ensure the student’s immediate safety. This process must be documented (refer to the
Mandatory Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse

In Western Australia, it is a requirement of the Children and Community Services Act that the reporting of sexual abuse of a child is mandatory. Sexual abuse must be reported where a teacher forms a belief, on reasonable grounds, that a child has been the subject of sexual abuse or is the subject of ongoing sexual abuse.

For details of the process of mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse, refer to our Child Protection – Mandatory Reporting of Sexual Abuse Policy.

Reporting Physical or Emotional Abuse or Neglect

In all cases where abuse (with the exception of sexual abuse) is suspected on reasonable grounds, the college has established the following reporting procedures:

1. Initial reporting must be made to the School Psychologist or Head of School, who will refer to the Principal. If the matter involves the Principal, the matter should be reported to the Chair of Council.

2. The Principal, or other relevant person, may initially seek advice from the DCP if he/she is not sure what action to take.

3. If a child is in immediate danger or in a life-threatening situation, the Principal, or other relevant person, shall contact Western Australia Police immediately by dialling 000;

Strong concerns and disclosures of abuse and neglect from a person who is not the parent/care-giver or that relate to possible criminal conduct should also be advised to the Police. Principals should also notify DCP. The Principal may seek legal advice before doing so.

4. The Principal, or other relevant person in consultation with the Principal, shall report the concerns to the:

   Department for Child Protection (DCP) duty officer at the local District Office


   The DCP also has an after-hours crisis team that can be contacted on:

   Telephone: (08) 9223 1111
   Country free call: 1800 199 008

   The DCP is obliged to provide feedback to people making reports of child abuse within the bounds of confidentiality.

5. The Principal will inform the Chair of the School Council of the incident and the details of the allegation; and

6. The Principal, or other relevant person, will seek further advice from the police, the DCP and/or the college legal representatives as to the next appropriate course of action.

Only on the advice of DCP or Police, will the Principal discuss all strong concerns and disclosures of abuse and
neglect with parents.

**Ongoing Management Plan**

Together with the DCP and/or the police, the college shall develop and implement a management plan designed to provide ongoing support to the student who has been the subject of abuse.

**Record Keeping**

Where a staff member suspects child abuse but does not have enough information, written and dated records of their observations and concerns should be kept until reasonable belief is formed.

All verbal and written communications regarding child protection matters (including notes of observations, meetings and telephone calls) must be properly documented. The documented records should include dates, times and enough detail to record key conversations especially those relating to the student’s disclosure.

The records of child protection matters are stored securely on the College's online reporting system.

**Confidentiality**

Staff who have access to information regarding suspected or disclosed child abuse must keep such information confidential and secure, and must not disclose this information unless required to do so as part of the ongoing investigation or by law.

Staff must not provide undertakings that are inconsistent with their reporting obligations under this policy. In particular, staff must not promise a student that they will not tell anyone about the student’s disclosure.

Students and any other parties who become involved in the investigation (this may include other students) should be informed of the reporting process and requested to maintain confidentiality.

Inappropriate disclosure will be subject to disciplinary action.

**Children left at school - Staff Concern regarding neglect**

It is imperative that the school exhausts all avenues in attempting to contact the child's family and emergency contacts. In some cases the Principal may decide to drive the child home to establish contact with the family. It would be wise to ask another staff member to accompany the Principal.

If the school is unable to make any contact with the child's family, the Principal should contact the DCP and explain it is an emergency.

**Staff Responsibility**

All staff are responsible to ensure:

- Reports of child abuse are made as soon as practicable;
- They comply with their obligation for mandatory reporting of sexual abuse;
- Confidentiality is maintained throughout the process;
- Immediate support is given to students making disclosures;
- Records of all verbal and written communication are maintained and stored securely;
- No attempts to investigate the incident are made; and
- Participation in training.

**Implementation**

This policy is implemented through a combination of:
- Development of risk identification and reporting procedures;
- The provision of counselling services;
- Effective communication and incident notification procedures;
- Staff training;
- Initiation of corrective actions where necessary.
- Prevention Education in Junior, Middle and Senior Schools.

**Related Policies**

- [Student Duty of Care Policies](#)
- [Work Safe Policies](#)
- [Child Protection - Mandatory Reporting of Sexual Abuse Policy](#)
- [Child Protection - Working with Children Checks Policy](#)