

 <p>FOREST HILL COLLEGE</p>	<p>CHILD SAFETY RESPONDING AND REPORTING OBLIGATIONS POLICY AND PROCEDURES</p>
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RATIONALE

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child state that children have the right to protection because of their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.
- The core values of the College are established with the awareness that Forest Hill College is not a public place and as such, is to provide the maintenance of a safe and inclusive environment for all children including those with a disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, visitors and contractors, whether they work directly with children or not.
- Every person involved in Forest Hill College has a responsibility to understand the important and specific role they play to ensure the wellbeing and safety of all children at the College.

PURPOSE

To ensure school staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities in protecting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and are able to:

- understand their various legal obligations to report and take other reasonable steps to discharge the duty of care that may be owed to the child or young person
- identify indicators that a child or young person has been, is being, or is at risk of being abused
- make a report about a child or young person who has been, is being, or is at risk of being abused.

REPORTING OBLIGATIONS

- All children and young people have the right to protection in their best interests.
- Forest Hill College understands the important role our school plays in protecting children from abuse including:
 - Physical abuse
 - Sexual abuse (including sexual exploitation)
 - Family violence
 - Emotional abuse
 - Neglect (including medical neglect)
 - Grooming
- The staff at Forest Hill College are required by law to comply with various child safety reporting obligations. For detailed information about each obligation, please refer to Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools.
- At Forest Hill College, we also recognise the diversity of the children and young people at our school and take account of their individual needs and backgrounds when considering child safety.

Mandatory Reporting

 - Principals, registered teachers, registered medical practitioners, nurses and all members of the police force are mandatory reporters under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic).

- All mandatory reporters must make a report to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) 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 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 Forest Hill College 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 principal does not share their belief that a report is necessary.
- At our school, all mandated school staff must undertake the *Mandatory Reporting and Other Obligations eLearning Module* annually. We also encourage all other staff to undertake this module, even where they are not mandatory reporters.
- For more information about Mandatory Reporting, see the Department's *School Policy and Advisory Guide: Child Protection – Reporting Obligations*.

Child in need of protection

- Any person can make a report to DHHS Child Protection (131 278 – 24 hour service) if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection.
- The policy of the Department of Education and Training (DET) requires **all staff** who form a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection to report their concerns to DHHS or Victoria Police, and discuss their concerns with the school leadership team.
- For more information about making a report to DHHS Child Protection, see the Department's *School Policy and Advisory Guide: Child Protection – Making a Report and Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse*.
- At Forest Hill College we also encourage all staff to make a referral to Child FIRST when they have significant concern for a child's wellbeing. For more information about making a referral to Child FIRST see the *School Policy and Advisory Guide: Child Protection – Reporting Obligations*.

Reportable Conduct

- Our school must notify the Department's Employee Conduct Branch (9637 2594) if we become aware of an allegation of 'reportable conduct'.
- There is an allegation of reportable conduct where a person has formed a reasonable belief that there has been:
 - a sexual offence (even prior to criminal proceedings commencing), sexual misconduct or physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of a child;
 - behaviour causing significant emotional or physical harm to a child;
 - significant neglect of a child; or
 - misconduct involving any of the above.
- The Department, through the Employee Conduct Branch, has a legal obligation to inform the Commission for Children and Young People when an allegation of reportable conduct is made.

- Our principal must notify the Department’s Employee Conduct Branch of any reportable conduct allegations involving current or former teachers, contractors, volunteers (including parents), allied health staff and school council employees.
- If school staff become aware of reportable conduct by any person in the above positions, they should notify the school principal immediately. If the allegation relates to the principal, they should notify the Regional Director.
- For more information about Reportable Conduct see the Department’s *School Policy and Advisory Guide: Reportable Conduct Scheme*.

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 by another person aged 18 years or over.
- Failure to disclose information to Victoria Police (by calling 000 or local police station) 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, for example, through a mandatory report to DHHS Child Protection.
- For more information about this reporting obligation, see the Department’s *School Policy and Advisory Guide: Failure to disclose offence*.

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.

- 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.
- For more information about this reporting obligation, see the Department's *School Policy and Advisory Guide: Failure to protect offence*.

Grooming

- Grooming is a criminal offence under the *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)*. 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 and/or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent/carer.
- For more information about this offence and reporting obligations see: Child Exploitation and Grooming.

Related Policies and Further Information:

- Child Safe Environments Policy
- Child Safe Code of Conduct

Ratified by College Council