

# IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO A CHILD PROTECTION INCIDENT

## Managing Your Initial Response to a Child Protection Incident

### Responding to an Emergency

All staff, Board members, Volunteers, Third Party Contractors and External Education Providers must act as soon as they witness a child protection incident or form a reasonable suspicion or belief that a child has been or is at risk of being abused, neglected or groomed.

If a child is at immediate risk of harm you must ensure their safety by:

- separating alleged victims and others involved;
- administering first aid;
- calling 000 for urgent medical assistance or Police assistance to address immediate health and safety concerns; and
- nominating one of the College’s Child Protection Officers to be the future liaison with Police on the matter.

The following sections outline the **six ways** that you may become aware that a child may be experiencing abuse or grooming and strategies for managing each situation, and supporting and assisting children involved in the disclosure or report.

### Witnessing a Child Protection Incident

If you witness an incident where you believe a child has been subject to abuse, neglect or grooming, you must take immediate action to protect the safety of those involved.

Where there is an immediate risk to the health and/or safety of a child, follow the steps outlined in the **Responding to an Emergency** section of this Program.

The College’s **Procedures for Responding to and Reporting Child Protection Incidents** should be followed after the health and safety of the child involved is ensured.

### Observation of Risk Indicators

The different types of child abuse, neglect and grooming and their key risk indicators are set out in detail in the **Child Abuse - Definitions and Key Risk Indicators** (

The process of identifying child abuse, neglect or grooming purely through observation of risk indicators can be complex and may occur over time. The complexity is magnified by the fact that many of the key risk indicators described may also occur as a result of other factors, not related to child abuse, neglect or grooming.

If you form a concern that a child may be being abused or groomed, you should make written notes of your observations recording both dates and times. You should also report the matter internally to a College Principal.

## **Private Disclosure by a Child or Young Person**

If a child discloses a situation of abuse, neglect or grooming to you privately, you should stay calm and not display expressions of panic or shock.

You should reassure and support the child. You can do this by:

- stating clearly that the abuse, neglect or grooming is not the student's fault;
- reassuring the child that you believe them; and
- telling the child that disclosing the matter is the right thing to do.

You should be patient and allow the child to talk at their own pace. When responding, you should use the child's language and vocabulary.

Sometimes a child may try to elicit a promise from you that you will not tell anyone about the allegation. You must not make this promise, as you are responsible for reporting the matter.

Finally, remember that your role is not to investigate the allegation. You should not interrogate the child and pressure them to tell you more than they want to.

Once a disclosure is made you must report the matter in accordance with the College's **Procedures for Responding to and Reporting Child Protection Incidents**, and internally to the Principal as soon as possible. You should also make written notes of the circumstances of the disclosure recording both dates and times.

Following a disclosure of abuse or grooming by a child, staff should follow the steps set out in the College's **Support Following Disclosure Policy**.

## **Public Disclosure by a Child or Young Person**

Public disclosure occurs where you observe a child disclosing abuse, neglect or grooming to other children.

In this circumstance, you should use a strategy of "protective interrupting".

The aim of "protective interrupting" is to prevent a child from disclosing details of abuse, neglect or grooming in front of other students, whilst at the same time providing the child with the opportunity to disclose later, in a safe and confidential manner.

You can do this by:

- asking the child if you can talk privately; and
- moving the child away from the other students to a quiet space,

and then following the guidelines with respect to managing a private disclosure and the College's **Procedures for Responding to and Reporting Child Protection Incidents**.

Following a disclosure of abuse, neglect or grooming by a child, staff should follow the steps set out in the College's **Support Following Disclosure Policy**.

## **Third Party Disclosure**

A third party such as a friend of the child, a relative or another parent may provide you with information relating to child abuse, neglect or grooming.

In this situation, you should:

- listen to the person’s concerns seeking clarification where required
- thank the person for raising their concern
- advise the person that we have procedures for dealing with situations like this
- advise the person that you will discuss their concerns with the relevant authorities.

As with [Private Disclosure](#), you should reassure and support the person providing the information.

Sometimes a person may try to elicit a promise from you that you will not tell anyone about the allegation. You must not make this promise, as you are responsible for reporting the matter.

Finally, remember that your role is not to investigate the allegation. You should not interrogate the third party and pressure them to tell you more than they want to.

Once a third party disclosure is made you must report the matter in accordance with the College’s [Procedures for Responding to and Reporting Child Protection Incidents](#), and internally to the Principal as soon as possible. You should also make written notes of the circumstances of the disclosure recording both dates and times.

## **Disclosure by a Former Student**

A former student of the College may come forward to a current staff member, volunteer or other member of the College community, and disclose past abuse or grooming behaviour from their time at the College. If you receive a disclosure from a former student about historical abuse, you must act.

If the former student is still of schooling age in Tasmania and currently attending a Tasmanian school, you must follow the [Procedures for Responding to and Reporting Child Protection Incidents](#) in this Program, specifically the obligations you may have under the following policies:

- [Mandatory Reporting](#); and
- [Conduct Reportable to the Teachers Registration Board](#).

If the former student is no longer of schooling age or attending a school in Tasmania, you must still act.

If you are aware of an incident of past serious abuse of someone who is now an adult, the incident can be reported to the Police. Please note that the Police will usually require a statement from the victim, and some people may be uncomfortable or not ready to do this. It is important that you direct the former student to support and counselling services listed on the Royal Commission’s Support Services [web page https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/](https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/)

All disclosures by former students must be reported to a College Principal as soon as possible. The College will then determine the appropriate authority to report the matter to.

## **Support Following Disclosure**

You should take the following steps to support and assist a child or after a disclosure of child abuse, neglect or grooming is made.

The range of measures employed will depend on:

- the degree of severity of the situation
- the risk of harm to the child
- the capability and willingness of the parent to protect their child from harm.

### **After a disclosure is made:**

- do not promise the child or that you will not tell anyone about the allegation
- reassure the child that it was the right thing to do to tell an adult
- tell the child what you plan to do next
- do not confront the person believed to be the perpetrator
  
- report the matter to one of the College's **Principal** who will be able to assist you in developing additional support strategies
- whenever there are concerns that a child or is in immediate danger the Police should be called on 000.

## **Support for Staff and Volunteers**

Witnessing a child protection incident or receiving a disclosure or allegation of abuse, neglect or grooming can be a stressful experience for staff and volunteers involved. The College provides support to impacted staff and volunteers to access necessary support.

## **Procedures for Responding to and Reporting Child Protection Incidents**

Child abuse, neglect or grooming can take many forms. The abuser or perpetrator may be a parent, guardian, staff member, volunteer, another adult or even another child.

Unfortunately, the nature of child abuse, neglect or grooming is complex. The abuse, neglect or grooming may occur over time and potential risk indicators are often difficult to detect. Even our legal obligations for reporting allegations of child abuse, neglect and grooming can vary depending on the circumstances of the incident.

The College will take appropriate, prompt action in response to all allegations or disclosures of abuse, grooming, neglect, inappropriate behaviour or concerns about child safety by reporting all matters to Child Safety Services, or the Police, depending on the allegation or disclosure made.

Eastside Lutheran College has established simple and accessible procedures for anyone to report a child abuse or grooming concern internally to one of the College's Child Protection Officers.

Eastside Lutheran College has developed and implemented procedures for Board members, staff, volunteers, Third Party Contractors and External Education Providers for responding to allegations and disclosures of child abuse, neglect or grooming, or suspected child abuse, neglect or grooming, including procedures for support following a disclosure by a student.

Reporting procedures for parents/guardians and other community members are also included in our the College website, staff intranet and in hard copy at the College Office

Age-appropriate reporting procedures for students are developed through our pastoral care program.

## **Reporting a Child Protection Concern Internally**

Child abuse, neglect and grooming situations can be very complex, not only from the perspective of ascertaining whether abuse has occurred but also in understanding what steps to take to protect a child.

It is important to remember at all times that the safety and welfare of children is paramount.

Therefore, if you have a concern that a child may be experiencing abuse, neglect or grooming, whether or not you have formed a belief or suspicion on reasonable grounds that the abuse, neglect or grooming has occurred, you should immediately raise your concerns with the College's [Principal](#). The Principal will be able to assist you in clarifying your concerns and managing the next steps.

You may at any time report any concern for a child's safety, welfare or wellbeing to Child Safety Services on 1300 737 639.

Please note that reporting the matter internally does not release you from other legal and regulatory reporting obligations you may have, namely those under our:

- [Mandatory Reporting Policy](#); and
- [Conduct Reportable to the Teachers Registration Board](#).

**In addition, these reporting obligations apply even if the Principal, a Director, or Coordinator advises you not to proceed with reporting suspected abuse.**