

Notifying Reportable Conduct Policy

Reportable Conduct of Staff, Volunteers and Others

Source of Obligation

The Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) (the Act) requires the School to investigate and report to the Commission for Children and Young People (Commission) allegations of 'employee' reportable conduct or misconduct that may involve reportable conduct.

Korowa has developed the following Reportable Conduct of Staff, Volunteers and Others Policy which sets out our systems for enabling persons to report reportable conduct and for such reports to be investigated and responded to. This policy is made available to all staff, Volunteers, Contractors, members of the Council, families and students via our public website and staff intranet.

The Commission's website provides additional guidance and materials which assist the School to understand and meet our obligations under the Act.

Who is an Employee

Section 3 of the Act defines 'employee' as a person aged 18 years or over who is:

- employed by the School whether or not that person is employed in connection with any work or activities of the School that relate to children or
- engaged by the School to provide services, including as a volunteer, contractor, office holder or officer, whether or not the person provides services to children.

A minister or religion or a religious leader is also an employee.

Of relevance to the School, the following people are considered to be employees:

- School Council Members
- The Principal
- Staff members
- Volunteers
- Third Party Contractors
- External Education Providers

For the purposes of this policy, all of the above are referred to collectively as "staff" or "staff members".

What is Reportable Conduct

Reportable conduct is defined in Section 3 of the Act to mean:

- a sexual offence committed against, with or in the presence of, a child
- sexual misconduct committed against, with or in the presence of, a child
- physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of, a child
- any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child
- significant neglect of a child

“Sexual misconduct” includes:

- behaviour, physical contact or speech or other communication of a sexual nature, for example 'sexting'
- inappropriate touching or physical contact
- grooming behaviour
- voyeurism

For the purposes of the Reportable Conduct Scheme "Sexual offence" means a serious sexual offence as set out in clause 1 of Schedule 1 of the Sentencing Act 1991 (Vic), which includes rape, attempted rape, sexual assault, incest, various sexual offences against or involving a child, persistent sexual abuse of a child, grooming, and the production, distribution or possession of child abuse material.

In relation to emotional or psychological harm or neglect, “Significant” means that the harm is more than trivial or significant, but need not be as high as serious and need not have a lasting permanent effect.

The Commission has provided guidance on how to identify physical violence, behaviour that causes emotional or psychological harm to a child and neglect.

Physical violence includes an act that causes physical injury or pain. Examples of physical violence can include:

- hitting/kicking/punching
- pushing/shoving/grabbing/throwing/shaking
- using an object to hit or strike
- using inappropriate restraint/excessive force

Physical violence does not include:

- reasonable steps taken to protect a child from immediate harm, such as taking a child’s arm to stop them from going into oncoming traffic
- medical treatment given in good faith by an appropriately qualified person, such as a first aid officer administering first aid

Behaviour that causes emotional or psychological harm to a child requires a clear link between the alleged conduct and the significant harm suffered (significant is defined above).

Signs that a child may have been emotionally or psychologically harmed may include:

- patterns of out-of-character behaviour
- regression in behaviour
- distress and anxious behaviours
- other physical symptoms, such as self-harm

The exacerbation or aggravation of an existing mental health disorder may also cause emotional or psychological harm.

Examples of emotional or psychological harm may include:

- exposure to violence or threats of violence
- self-destructive behaviour
- antisocial behaviour
- persistent hostility/rejection
- humiliation/belittling
- scapegoating

It will not be reportable conduct if:

- a person takes reasonable steps to protect a child from immediate harm
- a person with responsibility for discipline takes lawful and reasonable disciplinary action, such as sending a child to sit in 'time out' for a period of time (refer to Behaviour Management Policy)
- an appropriately qualified person, gives medical treatment in good faith such as a first aid officer administering first aid

Neglect occurs when a person does not meet their obligations and responsibilities to keep a child safe and well. The neglect:

- must be more than minor and insignificant
- does not need to have a lasting or permanent effect
- may be an ongoing situation or a one off incident, as long as it is not minor in nature

Examples of different types of neglect include:

- supervisory neglect, which is the absence or inattention of a person which places the child at risk of physical harm or injury, sexual abuse or allows other criminal behaviours towards the child

- physical neglect, which is the failure to provide basic physical necessities for a child, such as adequate food, clothing and housing
- medical neglect, which is the failure to provide for appropriate medical care for a child, including a failure to acknowledge the seriousness of an illness or condition, or deliberately withholding appropriate care

Refer to Child Abuse - Definitions and Key Risk Indicators, contained in the Korowa Child Protection Program Handbook, for more information about sexual offences, grooming, physical violence, emotional or psychological harm and neglect.

Our Child Safe Code of Conduct outlines expected standards of behaviour for all staff, Volunteers and Third Party Contractors at the School. It is important to note that a breach of this Code will not always constitute an incident of reportable conduct. Such breaches can often be dealt with at the School level and don't need to be reported to the Commission. For example, reasonable discipline of a student would not amount to behaviour that causes emotional or psychological harm to a child and therefore is not reportable conduct.

What Must be Notified

Under the Act, the School must notify the Commission of a reportable allegation against a staff member.

Reportable allegation is defined in Section 3 of the Act to mean any information that leads a person to form a reasonable belief that an employee (member of staff) of the School has committed:

- reportable conduct
- misconduct that may involve reportable conduct – whether or not the conduct/misconduct is alleged to have occurred in the course of the person's employment at the School

Guidance from the Commission states that reasonable belief is more than a suspicion. There must be some objective basis for the belief. However, it is not the same as proof and does not require certainty.

Who Must Notify

Under the Act, any person may disclose a reportable allegation to the Commission (section 16L). A disclosure can be made using an online form available from the Commission's website, by phone or by letter.

While any person *may* disclose a reportable allegation, the "head" of the School *must* notify the CCYP of a reportable allegation (section 16M).

The "head" of the School has distinct responsibilities under the Reportable Conduct Scheme. The "head" of the School is the Principal.

It is a criminal offence if the head fails, without reasonable excuse, to comply with this obligation. The Act does not define what would be a "reasonable excuse", however, section 16M(5) provides

an exemption if the head honestly and reasonably believed that another person had notified the Commission.

.The “head” of the School must make a report using an online form available from the Commission's website.

Fulfilling the*Principal’s Responsibilities

The Principal is responsible for ensuring the School complies with the reportable conduct obligations under the Act. However, the Commission does not expect the Principal to practically carry out their responsibilities alone. They may seek help from other people within the School. This may include creating and developing systems, sending approved notifications to the Commission , or conducting investigations on behalf of the Principal.

The Principal cannot *delegate* their responsibilities under the Act - they are still solely responsible for ensuring the School's compliance with the Reportable Conduct Scheme.

The Principal has authorised the School’s Deputy Principal to carry out physical or practical tasks such as making notifications to the Commission, or liaising with the Commission, when the Principal is unavailable.

Reportable Conduct and Other Reporting Obligations

The Reportable Conduct obligation covered in this policy is separate and distinct from the:

- Mandatory Reporting obligation under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)
- Obligation to Report a Sexual Offence obligation under the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)
- Conduct that is Reportable to the Victorian Institute of Teaching under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)

The threshold for reporting allegations of reportable conduct is much lower than these other reporting obligations.

Any allegations of criminal conduct, including physical violence, significant emotional or psychological abuse, sexual offences and significant neglect must be reported to the Victorian Police as the first priority. A Police investigation will take priority over any investigation conducted by the School under this policy.

Internal Reporting of Reportable Allegations

As soon as a person, including a staff member, forms a reasonable belief that a staff member at the School has engaged in reportable conduct or misconduct that may involve reportable conduct (the reportable allegation), the person must notify a Child Protection Officer who must then notify the Principal. The report may be made verbally or in written form using the Responding to Suspected Child Abuse Template available on the School’s website.

While this Template was created for reporting abuse, rather than reportable conduct, it is an excellent way to record as much information about the incident/s as is available.

Where the reportable allegation involves the Principal, the staff member must notify a Child Protection Officer who must then notify the Deputy who will inform the Chair of the School Council.

It is important to note that the Child Protection Officer does not have a formal role under the Act (unless the Principal is a designated Child Protection Officer). However, it is the School's policy that the Child Protection Officer is notified first.

Where a verbal report is made by a staff member, it should be followed up with a written report provided to the Principal within 48 hours of the verbal report.

Where a staff member has a reasonable belief that the Principal has engaged in reportable conduct, verbal and written reports should be given by the Child Protection Officer to the Deputy Principal who will provide copies to Chair of the School Council.

Reporting to the Commission: The Principal or Deputy Principal

Where the Principal receives a reportable allegation from any person, including a staff member or a Child Protection Officer they must notify the Commission within three business days.

Where the reportable allegation involves the Principal, the person must notify a Child Protection Officer who must then notify the Deputy Principal who will become the 'head of the School' for the purposes of reporting the reportable allegation.

There are two stages of reporting.

The Commission must be notified by the Principal in writing of:

- the reportable allegation as soon as possible, and in any event within three business days of being notified (**Stage One Report**) and
- the proposed next course of action (see below), as soon as practicable, and within 30 days of becoming aware of the reportable allegation (**Stage Two Report**).

Stage One Report

The report to the Commission must state:

- that a reportable allegation has been made against a staff member
- the name (including any former name and alias, if known) and date of birth, if known, of the staff member
- whether the Victoria Police has been contacted about the reportable allegation
- the name, address and telephone number of the School
- the name of the Principal

An online form available on the Commission's website must be used for the Stage One Report.

If the staff member is a registered teacher and the misconduct involves a charge, conviction or finding of guilt of a sexual offence, the School must notify the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) immediately under Conduct that is Reportable to the Victorian Institute of Teaching. **The timing of making a Stage One Report to the Commission under this policy will coincide with the timing of a report made to the VIT.**

Stage Two Report

The report to the Commission must state:

- detailed information about the reportable allegation
- whether or not the School proposes to take any disciplinary or other action in relation to the staff member and the reasons why it intends to take, or not to take, that action
- any written submissions made to the Principal concerning the reportable allegation that an employee wished to have considered in determining what, if any disciplinary or other action should be taken in relation to the staff member

Any allegation of child abuse, including physical violence, significant emotional or psychological abuse, sexual offences or significant neglect, must be reported to the Victorian Police. A Police investigation will take priority over any investigation conducted by the School under this policy.

What Happens After a Report to the Commission is made?

After the Principal or the Deputy Principal has made a report to the Commission, they must ensure that an appropriate investigation of the reportable allegation is conducted.

The investigation can be conducted by the Principal or the Deputy Principal (if authorised by the Principal) or where the allegation involves the Principal. Alternatively, the School can appoint a regulator (for example the Victorian Institute of Teaching) or an independent investigator. A regulator engaged by the School for the purposes of an investigation may also appoint an independent investigator.

The Principal or the Deputy Principal must notify the Commission of who will be conducting the investigation.

The investigation must be conducted in accordance with the rules of procedural fairness and natural justice. For example, the investigation should be conducted without bias and the person against whom the allegation is made should be given the right to respond.

Refer to the CCYP's Information Sheet 4 Investigation overview for more information on what to consider when conducting an investigation.

A Police investigation into any matter takes priority over an investigation by the School. On becoming aware that the Police are investigating a reportable allegation:

- the Principal should consult with the Police before commencing an investigation to find out if the Police are, or will be, conducting an investigation
- the School's investigation should be put on hold until the Police investigation is complete.

Upon the conclusion of the investigation, the Principal or Deputy Principal must give the Commission:

- a copy of the findings of the investigation and the reasons for those findings
- details of any disciplinary or other action that the School proposes to take in relation to the staff member and the reasons for that action
- if the School does not propose to take any disciplinary or other action in relation to the staff member, the reasons why no action is to be taken

Under the Act, a staff member may seek a review by the Commission of a finding made at the conclusion of an investigation.

Information Sharing: Children and Parents/Guardians

Under the Act, the Principal or Deputy Principal (if authorised by the Principal) may disclose:

- information about the progress of the investigation
- the findings, reasons for the findings and the recommendations made at the conclusion of the investigation
- an action taken in response to those findings

to:

- the child who is the subject of the reporting allegation
- a parent of the child
- a guardian of the child
- the DHHS if the child is under its care

Information Sharing: Schools, the Commission and Others

Under the Act, the Principal or Deputy Principal (if authorised by the Principal) may disclose information in relation to:

- a reportable allegation
- a concern that reportable conduct has been committed
- the investigation of a reportable allegation or concern about reportable conduct
- the findings of an investigation and the reasons or recommendations made at the conclusion of the investigation
- any action taken in response to those findings

to:

- the Commission
- the head of another entity governed by the Act, such as another school

- a regulator
- the Chief Commissioner of Police
- if necessary for the purposes of an investigation, an independent investigator
- if necessary for the purposes of a Working with Children Check, the Secretary to the Department of Justice and Regulation
- a relevant Minister

Publication of Information

The School must not publish information that would enable the identification of:

- a person or who notified the Commission
- a child in relation to whom a reportable allegation was made or a finding of reportable conduct was made

The Act provides more information on the meaning of 'publish', which includes making the information publicly available in writing or email.

Powers of the Commission

The Commission has broad powers under the Act in relation to investigating a reportable allegation at the School. The Commission may visit the School, inspect documents and interview staff members or children involved in the reportable allegation.

The School must assist the Commission in all reasonable aspects of its investigation.

Record Keeping

The School maintains records of these reportable allegations, written reports and reportable conduct investigation findings indefinitely.

Records relating to a child protection incident are only disposed of in accordance with our Records Management Policy.

This Policy will be reviewed in January 2021