



FIVE CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

YOU MUST TAKE ACTION

As a Mernda Hills staff member, you play a **critical role** in protecting children in your care.

- You **must** act, by following the 5 critical actions, as soon as you witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a reasonable belief that a child has, or is at risk of being abused.
- You **must** act if you form a suspicion/reasonable belief, even if you are unsure and have not directly observed child abuse (e.g. if the victim or another person tells you about the abuse).
- You **must** use the *Responding to Suspected Child Abuse* template to keep clear and comprehensive notes.

*A reasonable belief is a deliberately low threshold. This enables authorities to investigate and take action.

1 RESPONDING TO AN EMERGENCY

If there is no risk of immediate harm go to **Action 2**.

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 and/or police assistance** to respond to immediate health or safety concerns
- identifying a contact person at the school for future liaison with Police.

Where necessary you may also need to maintain the integrity of the potential crime scene and preserve evidence.

2 REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed you **must** report all incidents, suspicions and disclosures of child abuse as soon as possible. Failure to report physical and sexual child abuse may amount to a criminal offence.

Q: Where does the source of suspected abuse come from?

WITHIN THE SCHOOL

VICTORIA POLICE

You **must** report all instances of suspected child abuse involving a school staff member, contractor or volunteer to Victoria Police.

You **must also** report **internally** to Mernda Hills Christian College Child Protection Officers:

PRINCIPAL who will inform:

HEAD OF PRIMARY and/or

HEAD OF SECONDARY and/or

SAFETY OFFICER and/or

WELLBEING OFFICER

The Principal will also inform the

ADVENTIST SCHOOLS VICTORIA CEO

For suspected student sexual assault, please follow the *Five Critical Actions: Student Sexual Offending*.

WITHIN THE FAMILY OR COMMUNITY

DFFH CHILD PROTECTION

You **must** report to DFFH Child Protection if a child is considered to be:

- in need of protection from child abuse
- at risk of being harmed (or has been harmed) and the harm has had, or is likely to have, a serious impact on the child's safety, stability or development.

VICTORIA POLICE

You **must also** report all instances of suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police.

You **must also** report internally to Mernda Hills Christian College Child Protection Officers:

PRINCIPAL who will inform:

HEAD OF PRIMARY and/or

HEAD OF SECONDARY and/or

SAFETY OFFICER and/or

WELLBEING OFFICER

The Principal will also inform the

ADVENTIST SCHOOLS VICTORIA CEO

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 (now Orange Door) (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support), or to DFFH - Child Protection or Victoria Police.

3 CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

Mernda Hills Christian College Principal or designee **must** consult with DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers. They may advise:

- not to contact** the parents/carer (e.g. in circumstances where the parents are alleged to have engaged in the abuse, or the child is a mature minor and does not wish for their parent/carer to be contacted)
- to contact** the parents/carers and provide agreed information (this must be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion).

CONTACT

DFFH CHILD PROTECTION AREA

North & West Division 1300 664 977

After Hours weekends, public holidays 13 12 78

CHILD FIRST (Now Orange Door)

www.dffh.vic.gov.au
North & West Division

1800 319 355

VICTORIA POLICE 000 or
Mernda Police Station
(03) 9216 1200

ADVENTIST SCHOOLS VICTORIA
(03) 9264 7730

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL VICTORIA
(03) 9825 7200

4 PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

Mernda Hills Christian College **must** provide support for children impacted by abuse. This should include the development of a *Student Support Plan* in consultation with wellbeing professionals. This is an essential part of our duty of care requirements. Strategies may include development of a safety plan, direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals.

5 RECORDING, RETAINING SECURING

You **must** record all instances of abuse or suspected abuse, using the *Responding to Suspected Child Abuse* digital template. This is an essential part of our duty of care requirements. A copy of the template is found in SEQTA Teach: Documents.

The completed recording document will be **retained and securely stored** in the affected student's records on SEQTA.

Only the executive leadership team will have access to the child or young person's record.

You **must** follow the *Five Critical Actions* every time you become aware of a further instance or risk of abuse. This includes reporting new information to authorities.

