



## ISLAMIC COLLEGE OF MELBOURNE

### **14.3.5. Responding to and reporting allegations of child abuse**

#### **1) Context**

Child abuse can take many forms. The abuser may be a parent, carer, staff member, volunteer, another adult or even another child. Unfortunately, the nature of child abuse is complex. The abuse may occur over time and potential risk indicators are often difficult to detect. Even our legal obligations for reporting allegations of child abuse can vary depending on the circumstances of the incident.

Child abuse as defined in the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 includes:

- physical or sexual abuse
- serious emotional or psychological harm
- serious neglect

The Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) defines reportable conduct as:

- sexual offences (including grooming), whether or not a criminal offence has been committed or alleged
- sexual misconduct
- physical violence with, against, or in the presence of a child
- any behaviour causing significant emotional or psychological harm to a child
- significant neglect of a child.

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

Islamic College of Melbourne has established simple and accessible procedures for anyone to report a child abuse concerns internally to the college's Child Safety Officers.

Islamic College of Melbourne has developed and implemented procedures for Council members, staff and volunteers for responding to allegations and disclosures of child abuse, or suspected child abuse, including procedures for support following a disclosure by a student.

This policy and the procedures apply to all members of staff, visitors and other persons connected to the school environment.

#### **2) Implementation**

This section describes our work systems, practices, policies and procedures for responding to and reporting allegations of child abuse both internally and externally (refer to the steps of reporting in the Code of Conduct, section 5 – Reporting or Raising Concerns about Staff or Volunteer Conduct).

These include:

- Managing Your Initial Response to a Child Protection Incident
- Reporting a Child Abuse Concern Internally
- Mandatory Reporting
- Conduct that is Reportable to the Victorian Institute of Teachers (VIT)
- Record Keeping
- Confidentiality & Privacy

All of the School's procedures for reporting and responding to allegation of child abuse are designed and implemented taking into account the diverse characteristics of the School community.

A summary of these procedures is made available on the Parent and student Portal and Staff Intranet Share point and are accessible to all children, school staff and the wider community.

The college will respond to all allegations of child abuse in an appropriate manner including:

- informing the appropriate authorities and fully cooperating with any resulting investigation;
- protecting any child connected to the allegation until it is resolved and providing ongoing support to those affected;
- taking particular measures in response to an allegation that concerns a culturally diverse child or a child with a disability; and
- securing and retaining records of the allegation and the School's response to it

### **3) Responsibilities**

It is the responsibility of the Principal and Heads of school to monitor ICOM's compliance of the handling and allegations of child abuse.

#### **School Board**

To meet and ensure policies are reviewed every 2 years and are compliant with legislation.

#### **Principal**

The Principal and Heads of School are responsible, and will be accountable for, taking all practical measures to ensure that policies and procedures are followed and updated.

In the event an individual cannot perform his role, the School Board or the Principal will appoint another individual to ensure that duty is fulfilled when responding to and reporting allegations of child abuse.

Fulfilling the roles and responsibilities in this procedure does not displace or discharge any of their obligations that arise if an individual believes that a child is at risk of child abuse.

### **4) Observation of Risk Indicators**

The process of identifying child abuse 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.

If you form a concern that a child may be being abused, you should make written notes of your observations recording both dates and times. You should also report the matter internally to college's Child Safety Officers.

### **5) Private Disclosure by a Child**

If a student discloses a situation of abuse or neglect 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 is not the child'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 student 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 internally to the college's Child Safety Officers 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 neglect by a student, staff should follow the steps set out in the college's policy and procedures that are related to child safety issues.

## **6) Public Disclosure by a Child**

Public disclosure occurs where you observe a child disclosing abuse to another child, or group of children.

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

The aim of "protective interrupting" is to prevent a child from disclosing details of abuse in front of other children, 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.

Following a disclosure of abuse or neglect by a student, staff should follow the steps set out in the college's policy and procedures that are related to child safety issues.

## **7) 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.

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; and
- 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 internally to the college's Child Safety Officers as soon as possible. You should also make written notes of the circumstances of the disclosure recording both dates and times.

## **8) Support Following Disclosure**

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

The range of measures employed will depend on:

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

After a disclosure is made:

- do not promise the child 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 Child Safety Officers who will be able to assist you in developing additional support strategies; and
- Whenever there are concerns that a child is in immediate danger the Police should be called on 000.

## **9) Reporting a Child Abuse Concern Internally**

Child abuse 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 the child are paramount.

Therefore, if you have a concern that a child may be experiencing abuse, whether or not you have formed a belief on reasonable grounds that the abuse has occurred, you should immediately raise your concerns with one of the college's Child Safety Officers. The college's Child Safety Officers will be able to assist you in clarifying your concerns and managing the next steps.

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

- The Obligation to Report a Sexual Offence
- The Obligation to Act to Protect; and
- The Obligation to Make a Mandatory Report.

## a) Reporting

**Step 1-** In case of emergency or if a child is in immediate danger contact triple Zero (000) or the local police station. Alternatively, to report concerns about the immediate safety of a child to DFFH (Child Protection), call the Child Protection Crisis Line on 13 12 78 (24 hours 7 days, toll free)

**Step 2-** Keep comprehensive notes that are dated and include the following information: a description of the concerns (e.g. physical injuries, student behaviour) the source of those concerns (e.g. observation, report from child or another person). The actions taken as a result of the concerns (e.g. consultation with principal, report to DFFH Child Protection etc.).

**Step 3-** Discuss any concerns about the safety and wellbeing of students with one of the Child Safety Officers. The individual staff member should then make their own assessment about whether they should make a report about the child or young person and to whom the report should be made.

**Step 4-** Gather the relevant information necessary to make the report. This should include the following information:

- Full name, date of birth, and residential address of the child or young person
- The details of the concerns and the reasons for those concerns
- The individual staff member's involvement with the child and young person
- Details of any other agencies who may be involved with the child or young person.

**Step 5-** Make a report to the relevant agency

To report concerns that are life threatening phone 000 or the local police station. To report concerns about the immediate safety of a child within their family unit to DFFH Child Protection, call the Child Protection Crisis Line on 13 12 78 (24 hrs 7 days, toll free)

**Step 6-** Make a written record of the report which includes the following information:

- The date and time of the report and a summary of what was reported.
- The name and position of the person who made the report and the person who received the report.

**Step 7-** Notify the relevant Child Safety Officer of the report to DFFH Child Protection or Child FIRST.

In the case of international students, the principal must notify the Department's International Education Division on (03) 9637 2990 to ensure that appropriate support is arranged for the student.

In the case of Koorie students, the principal must notify the Regional Office to ensure that the regional Koorie support officer can arrange appropriate support for the student.

## Reportable Conduct Policy

Please refer to the Policy 14.3.7 Reportable Conduct Policy If the allegation of child abuse raised is against those that work in the school.

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