

Suspected Child Abuse

H1

RATIONALE:

All children have a right to physical, emotional and social well-being and it is the responsibility of our staff to report any suspected abuse of this right.

PURPOSE:

1. To ensure the safety of the child is paramount.
2. To provide a procedure for all staff to follow when abuse of a child is suspected, including a support system for that staff member.

GUIDELINES:

1. The School staff will be receptive and sensitive to children so they feel listened to and believed.
2. Staff members/s should always discreetly discuss any concerns with syndicate leader or Principal as soon as abuse is suspected or disclosed.
3. The School will use appropriate agencies for sexual abuse, physical abuse and/or neglect, i.e. Police and the Department of Oranga Tamariki.
4. In the case of a report from a third party (not related to the school), the first course of action will be to direct that third party to the appropriate agency without the school becoming involved. The school may be involved at a later date.
5. The *'Keeping Ourselves Safe'* programme will be taught as part of the Health programme to increase the child's assertiveness skills in dealing with uncomfortable situations, and to raise teachers' awareness of the issues.
6. Management may choose to consult with the Department of Oranga Tamariki or the NZ Police before further action is taken.
7. Parents/caregivers will be informed except where the pupil's welfare is likely to be threatened. It will then be the responsibility of the agency involved to inform the parents as they have the skills to handle such situations and to offer the appropriate support for the child.
8. The pupil's teacher, the Principal and other staff (where appropriate) will be the resource people in this area. A teacher with a concern should first discuss this with the Principal, Associate Principal, Deputy Principal or Syndicate Leader. No outside agency will be involved without the prior knowledge of the Principal (or in the case of the principal being the suspected abuser – then the Associate Principal or Deputy Principal). Mandatory reporting of suspected abuse must be followed.
9. The Principal (or senior management) makes an official report of the suspected abuse to the Department of Oranga Tamariki or to the police, who will notify the family as appropriate.
10. Staff member(s) could be required to provide information or participate in Family Group Conference/witness in court proceedings.

CONCLUSION:

As a school, we have a concern for all children's state of physical, mental and social well-being.

Paul Suisted
Board Presiding Member

Date of Review: 17th May 2023
Next review date: Term 2 2027

Procedures:

Reporting Process for Suspected or Disclosed Child Abuse

Child abuse is either suspected or disclosed
Ensure the child or young person is safe from immediate harm.

- Physical/behavioural observations and anything said by the child should be carefully documented (include date, time, who was present).
- Consult immediately with the principal or nominated person in charge, or other staff member if the allegation concerns the principal.
- The principal or their nominated person in charge that received the information should contact Oranga Tamariki (0508 326 459) or local police.
- The board chair should be advised.
- If there is disruption to the school or community, negative impacts on other children and/or staff, media interest or a public profile, seek support from Special Education Traumatic Incident Coordinator (0800 84 8326)

Alleged abuse by a Board employee, including the principal. *Note that there are two separate procedures to be followed at the same.*

Alleged abuse by non-staff.
The principal or nominated person should then

Follow the advice of Oranga Tamariki /Police.

(1) The reporting procedure in respect of the child/young person:

- Follow the advice of Oranga Tamariki /Police.
- Avoid further risks to the child(ren), or young person(s). Ensure there is no contact between the child and the person whom the allegation is against.

(2) Process for employee investigation.

- Initiate an initial employment investigation.
- Maintain close liaison with police and avoid any action that may compromise their investigation.
- Immediately seek advice from the NZSTA or another approved employment advisor and advise you insurer.
- It is important that no one person has responsibility for dealing with both the reporting issues and employment issues as there is potential for there to be tension between the two.
- Notify the employee of the allegation and advise of the potential consequences.
- Consider whether it is appropriate for the employee to remain in the school (follow advice).
- Advise the employee of the right to seek support from union or other representatives.
- The board needs to determine whether they will defer their process while the police to their preliminary investigation, or whether they will proceed. Criminal investigations are separate from any employment investigation that the employer will follow.
- Ensure records are kept of any comments or event relating to the complaint(s) and/or allegations, and follow up action is taken.

Deciding when and who will inform the parent(s) and/or caregiver will be determined by CYF and Police in consultation with the school.

WHEN A CHILD TELLS OF HIS OR HER ABUSE

Listen: Do not put words into a child's mouth. Allow them to tell only as much as they want. Do not formally interview the child. Obtain only the necessary facts for clarification when it is needed.

Five Basic Rules:

- Believe what they say
- Say you're glad they told you
- Say you're sorry it happened
- Let them know it's not their fault
- Let them know you'll help

Let them know to that they're not the only one.

This sort of thing happens to other children too sometimes.

Do not over react.

A child's initial disclosure of abuse is a critical moment. He or she will be monitoring every reaction.

Do not panic.

If the child judges you unable to handle the situation, he or she may not disclose any more of the story.

Do not criticise.

Don't say: "You should have told me sooner." or "Why did you let him?"

Ensure the child's immediate safety.

Try not to alert the alleged abuser.

Seek advice and assistance.

The people who are running the 'Keeping Ourselves Safe' programme will have an up to date list of support services in your area.

Find support for yourself

Dealing with abuse is hard, especially when it involves someone you care about. Discuss the matter with someone you feel comfortable with, someone you trust, someone who will respect the confidentiality of the situation.

TYPES OF ABUSE

There are four main forms of child abuse - sexual, physical, emotional and neglect.

Sexual Abuse involves dependent children in sexual activities that they do not fully comprehend, to which they are unable to give informed consent. While children usually display symptoms of sexual abuse some display no symptoms and the problem surfaces at a later date.

Apart from the usual types of sexual abuse, it should also be considered when a child describes or mimics sexual activities inappropriate for their age. Young children viewing pornographic material may be classified as being abused.

Symptoms include: sexual provocativeness, promiscuity, and specific physical problems as genital or urinary infections. They may abscond from home or may refuse or be reluctant to go home.

A child may have psychosomatic complaints, behavioural problems, be hostile, depressed, have poor concentration and poor relationships. Self-image may be low. **Of course, a child may have some of these symptoms and not be a victim of abuse.**

Physical Abuse takes many forms. Symptoms include bruises, black eyes, abrasions, burns, scalds, bites and fractures.

Emotional Abuse is also regarded as very damaging to a child and can, in the long term, be more handicapping to a person.

Emotional abuse can be a passive, neglectful thing or involve rejection, denigration and verbal abuse.

Signs of emotional abuse include: disorders of infant/parent bonding, stunted growth, retarded development (especially speech or social interaction), apathy, listlessness, motor inhibition, behavioural problems, impaired school performance, low self-esteem, depression, sleep disturbances and anti-social behaviour.

Neglect is often related to malnourishment. Other issues may include leaving a child without reasonable supervision, inadequate clothing etc. Half of the children who fail to thrive in the absence of obvious physical troubles, are suffering from parental neglect.