



'Quality Education in a Friendly, Caring and Supportive Environment'

Child Protection Policy

Reviewed: July, 2021

Review: 18th May, 2023

Bridgewater On-Loddon Primary School has zero tolerance for child abuse. Everyone working at the school is responsible for the care and protection of the children within our care and reporting information about suspected child abuse.

Child protection is a shared responsibility between the Bridgewater On-Loddon Primary School, all employees, workers, contractors, associates, and members of the school community.

Bridgewater On-Loddon Primary School will consider the opinions of children and use their opinions to develop child protection policies.

Bridgewater On-Loddon Primary School supports and respects all children, staff and volunteers. We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, and those from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children living with a disability.

If any person believes a child is in immediate risk of abuse, telephone 000.

Procedures Responsibilities

The **School Council** of Bridgewater On-Loddon Primary School has oversight responsibilities for the detection and prevention of child abuse in all school environments and is responsible for ensuring that appropriate and effective internal control systems are in place to prevent child abuse. The School Council is also responsible for ensuring that appropriate policies and procedures and a Child Protection Code of Conduct are in place.

The **Principal** of Bridgewater On-Loddon Primary School is responsible for:

- Dealing with and investigating reports of child abuse;
- Ensuring that all staff, contractors, and volunteers are aware of relevant laws, organisational policies and procedures, and the organisation's Code of Conduct;
- Ensuring that all adults within the Bridgewater On-Loddon Primary School community are aware of their obligation to report suspected sexual abuse of a child in accordance with these policies and procedures;
- Ensuring that all staff, contractors and volunteers are aware of their obligation to observe the Code of Conduct (particularly as it relates to child safety);
- Providing support for staff, contractors and volunteers in undertaking their child protection responsibilities.

All **teachers** must ensure that they:

- Promote child safety at all times;
- Assess the risk of child abuse within their area of control and eradicate / minimise any risk to the extent possible;
- Support colleagues in regards to the prevention and detection of child abuse; and
- Facilitate the reporting of any inappropriate behaviour or suspected abusive activities.

Teachers should be familiar with the types of abuse that might occur within their area of responsibility and be alert for any indications of such conduct.

All **staff/volunteers/contractors** share in the responsibility for the prevention and detection of child abuse, and must:

- Familiarise themselves with the relevant laws, the Code of Conduct, and Bridgewater On-Loddon Primary School's policy and procedures in relation to child protection, and comply with all requirements;
- Report any reasonable belief that a child's safety is at risk to the relevant authorities (such as the police and / or the state-based child protection service) and fulfil their obligations as mandatory reporters;
- Report any suspicion that a child's safety may be at risk to their supervisor (or, if their supervisor is involved in the suspicion, to a responsible person in the organisation); and
- Provide an environment that is supportive of all children's emotional and physical safety.

Definitions

Child means a person below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

Child protection means any responsibility, measure or activity undertaken to safeguard children from harm.

Child abuse means all forms of physical abuse, emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse and exploitation, neglect or negligent treatment, commercial (e.g. for financial gain) or other exploitation of a child and includes any actions that results in actual or potential harm to a child.

Child sexual assault is any act which exposes a child to, or involves a child in, sexual processes beyond his or her understanding or contrary to accepted community standards. Sexually abusive behaviours can include the fondling of genitals, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or any other object, fondling of breasts, voyeurism, exhibitionism, and exposing the child to or involving the child in pornography. It includes child grooming, which refers to actions deliberately undertaken with the aim of befriending and establishing an emotional connection with a child to lower the child's inhibitions in preparation for sexual activity with the child.

Reasonable grounds for belief is a belief based on reasonable grounds that child abuse has occurred when all known considerations or facts relevant to the formation of a belief are taken into account and these are objectively assessed. Circumstances or considerations may include the source of the allegation and how it was communicated, the nature of and details of the allegation, and whether there are any other related matters known regarding the alleged perpetrator.

A reasonable belief is formed if a reasonable person believes that:

- (a) The child is in need of protection,
- (b) The child has suffered or is likely to suffer "significant harm as a result of physical injury",
- (c) The parents are unable or unwilling to protect the child.

A 'reasonable belief' or a 'belief on reasonable grounds' is not the same as having proof, but is more than mere rumour or speculation.

A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds. For example, a 'reasonable belief' might be formed if:

- a) A child states that they have been physically or sexually abused;
- b) A child states that they know someone who has been physically or sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves);
- c) Someone who knows a child states that the child has been physically or sexually abused;
- d) Professional observations of the child's behaviour or development leads a professional to form a belief that the child has been physically or sexually abused or is likely to be abused; and/or
- e) Signs of abuse lead to a belief that the child has been physically or sexually abused.

Employment of New Personnel

Bridgewater On-Loddon Primary School undertakes a comprehensive recruitment and screening process for all workers and volunteers which aims to:

- Promote and protect the safety of all children under the care of the organisation:
- Identify the safest and most suitable people who share Bridgewater On-Loddon Primary School's values and commitment to protect children
- Prevent a person from working at Bridgewater On-Loddon Primary School if they pose a risk to children.

Bridgewater On-Loddon Primary School requires all workers/volunteers to pass through the organisation's recruitment and screening processes prior to commencing their engagement at the school.

For schools:

Persons applying for a role as a teacher with the Bridgewater On-Loddon Primary School must be registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching. The school may require applicants to provide a police check in accordance with the law and as appropriate, before they commence work and, during their time at the school, at regular intervals. Bridgewater On-Loddon Primary School will undertake thorough reference checks as per the approved internal procedure. Once engaged, workers/volunteers must review and acknowledge their understanding of this Policy.

Risk Management

Bridgewater On-Loddon Primary School will ensure that child safety is a part of its overall risk management approach. Bridgewater On-Loddon Primary School will have a risk and compliance sub-committee committed to identifying and managing risks at the school. Risk and compliance sub-committee members will receive regular training in relation to child safety.

Reporting

Any staff member, volunteer or contractor who has grounds to suspect abusive activity must immediately notify the appropriate child protection service or the police. They should also advise their supervisor about their concern. In situations where the supervisor is suspected of involvement in the activity, or if the person having the suspicion does not believe that the matter is being appropriately addressed or dealt with, the matter should be reported to the next highest level of supervision. Supervisors must report complaints of suspected abusive behaviour or misconduct to the Principal and also to any external regulatory body such as the police.

Victorian mandatory/voluntary reporting requirements:

Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)

Mandated Reporters

Registered medical practitioners, midwives and registered nurses, teachers registered or granted permission to teach under the Education, Training and Reform Act 2006, Principals & police

A mandated reporter must make a report if:

- They form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse;
- The parents cannot or will not protect the child; and
- The belief is formed in the course of practising his/her position of employment.

NB: exceptions may apply.

The Victorian definition of a child is any person under 17 years old

Investigating

If the appropriate child protection service or the police decide to conduct an investigation of this report, all employees, contractors or volunteers must co-operate fully with the investigation.

Whether or not the authorities decide to conduct an investigation, the Principal will consult with the authorities to determine whether an internal investigation is appropriate. If it is decided that such an investigation will not conflict with any proceeding of the authorities, the Principal may decide to conduct such an investigation. All employees, contractors and volunteers must co-operate fully with the investigation.

Any such investigation will be conducted according to the rules of natural justice.

The Principal will make every effort to keep any such investigation confidential; however, from time to time other members of staff may need to be consulted in conjunction with the investigation.

After an initial review and a determination that the suspected abuse warrants additional investigation, the Principal shall coordinate the investigation with the appropriate investigators and / or law enforcement officials. Internal or external legal representatives will be involved in the process, as deemed appropriate

Responding

If it is alleged that a member of staff, contractor or a volunteer may have committed an offence or have breached the organisation's policies or its Code of Conduct the person concerned may be stood down (with pay, where applicable) while an investigation is conducted. If the investigation concludes that on the balance of probabilities an offence (or a breach of the organisation's policies or Code of Conduct) has occurred then disciplinary action may follow, up to and including dismissal or cessation of involvement with the organisation. The findings of the investigation will also be reported to any external body as required.

Privacy

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved unless there is a risk to someone's safety. Bridgewater On-Loddon Primary School will have safeguards and practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected. Everyone is entitled to know how the personal information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will be able to access it.

Reviewing

Every two years, and following every reportable incident, a review shall be conducted to assess whether the school's child protection policies or procedures require modification to better protect the children under the organisation's care.

Related Documents

Confidentiality Policy

Legislative Compliance Policy

Risk Management Policy

Staff Recruitment Policy

Staff Induction Policy

Whistleblower Policy

This policy must be read in conjunction with:

- The law of the Commonwealth or of the relevant state or territory;
- The organisation's Code of Conduct;
- Termination of Employment Policy and Misconduct Procedures

Appendix 1: Supporting Students of Abuse

Providing support to address the trauma and wellbeing issues associated with child abuse, including exposure to family violence, is best achieved through careful planning and working in partnership with wellbeing professionals, parents/ carers and educators. If a student is impacted by suspected abuse, and it is deemed appropriate, school staff must:

- Follow the procedures and guidelines as outlined in the Bridgewater Primary School '**Child Protection Policy**' and the '**Mandatory Reporting & Procedures Policy**'.
(PROTECT Four Critical Actions: 1. Responding to an Emergency 2. Reporting to Authorities 3. Contacting Parent/Caregivers 4. Providing Ongoing Support.)
- Ensure that the child's immediate physical & emotional wellbeing is safeguarded
- validate and reassure the student:
 - Provide non-judgmental, validating statements if a student discloses information. Sample statements include "That must have been scary" or "It must be difficult to see that happening."
- If a student discusses exposure to abuse, make it clear to them that they are safe with you and that you will not judge or question their report. Students must know that you will believe them in order to feel safe in disclosing abuse.
- If a student discloses any abuse, respond positively and with care – make it clear that you take the student seriously. Students whose teachers react positively and with sincerity are more likely to fully disclose any potential abuse.
- Staff need to help the child understand that that they need to seek assistance for them and cannot keep the discussion and/or their disclosure confidential. Staff should use language appropriate to the student's age and stage of development.
- When reporting, all staff must report the incident to the Principal/leadership team, in all instances.
- Establish regular communication between staff and the child's parent/guardian/carer, if this is safe and appropriate, to discuss the child's progress, wellbeing and the effectiveness of planned strategies. This may be undertaken through convening a Student Support Group to plan ongoing monitoring, support, and follow-up of the child's health and wellbeing. Student Support Groups usually comprise school wellbeing staff, teachers, allied health professionals and where appropriate the student and/or their parent/carer.
- In consultation with **DET Regional Student Support Services**, develop and implement a Student Support Plan, which documents the planned support strategies and includes timeframes for review. Where appropriate, the following supports can be involved:
 - Allied health and wellbeing professionals engaged by the student and families.
 - Respectful Relationships Liaison Officers (in instances of family violence)
 - School wellbeing staff members, including School Chaplain