



## **POLICY AND GUIDELINES**

### **CHILD PROTECTION & SAFETY**

#### **Introduction**

Huntingtower has a primary responsibility for the care, welfare and safety of all children and young people in our charge and we will carry out this duty through our Pastoral Care Policy, Anti-Bullying Policy, Responsible Behaviour Policy and the Teaching and Learning Policy. We aim to provide a caring, supportive and safe environment, valuing individuals for their unique talents and abilities, in which all children and young people can learn and develop to their full potential. One way in which we seek to protect the students is by helping them learn about the risks of possible abuse, helping them to recognise unwelcome behaviour in others and acquire the confidence and skills they need to keep themselves safe.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of the procedures on Child Protection is to protect the students by ensuring that everyone who works in our School - teachers, non-teaching staff and volunteers, have a clear guidance on the action which is required where abuse or neglect of a child/young person is suspected. The overriding concern of all caring adults must be the care, welfare and safety of the child/young person and the welfare of each child/young person is our paramount consideration.

#### **Principles**

In the best interests of the child/young person, the Child Protection strategies and procedures to be followed are based on the following principles:

- Every child and young person has a right to be safe
- As a school we have a pastoral responsibility towards the children/young people in our care and take all reasonable steps to ensure that their welfare is safeguarded and their safety is preserved
- Each child/young person has the right to be heard, listened to and taken seriously and to be consulted depending on his/her age and understanding about the proposed action
- Respect the primary role of families; their values and expectations will be considered but the care and protection of the child/young person is utmost
- Provide access to resources and opportunities for learning; families will be provided with information about Child Protection and Safety
- Educate employees, students and volunteers about Child Protection and Safety and ensure all adhere to the legislation and policies
- Appropriate confidentiality will be maintained, with information being provided to those who have a right or a need to be informed either legally or pastorally
- In all matters relating to Child Protection Procedures and Policies, the best interests of the child are of paramount consideration.

## Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

**Bullying:** Repeated verbal, physical, social or psychological behaviour that is harmful and involves the misuse of power by an individual or group towards one or more persons. Bullying may involve cyberbullying, which refers to bullying through information and communication technologies. Conflict or fights between equals and single incidents are not defined as bullying. (Safe Schools Hub, 2015)

**Child Abuse:** Any non-accidental behaviour by parents, caregivers, other adults or older adolescents that is outside the norms of conduct and entails a substantial risk of causing physical or emotional harm to a child or young person. Such behaviours may be intentional or unintentional and can include acts of omission (i.e. neglect) and commission (i.e. abuse). Child abuse is commonly divided into five main subtypes: physical abuse; emotional maltreatment; neglect; sexual abuse; and the witnessing of family violence. (Safe Schools Hub, 2015)

**Child Neglect:** The failure by a parent or caregiver to provide a child (where they are in a position to do so) with the conditions that are culturally accepted as being essential for their physical and emotional development and wellbeing. This can be:

- physical neglect, i.e. lack of safety, cleanliness, adequate clothing, housing, food and health care;
- emotional neglect, i.e. a lack of caregiver warmth, nurturance, encouragement and support;
- educational neglect, i.e. failure to provide appropriate educational opportunities for the child; and
- environmental neglect, i.e. failure to ensure environmental safety, opportunities and resources. (Safe Schools Hub, 2015)

**Child Physical Abuse:** Generally, child physical abuse refers to the non-accidental use of physical force against a child that results in harm to the child. Physically abusive behaviours include shoving, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, punching, kicking biting, burning, strangling and poisoning. The fabrication or induction of an illness by a parent or carer (previously known as Munchausen syndrome by proxy) is also considered physically abusive behaviour. (Safe Schools Hub, 2015)

**Child Protection:** Statutory services designed to protect children who are at risk of serious harm. (Safe Schools Hub, 2015)

**Child Sexual Abuse:** Any sexual activity between a child under the age of consent (16) and an adult or older person (i.e. a person five or more years older than the victim) is child sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse can also be:

- Any sexual behaviour between a child and an adult in a position of power or authority over them (e.g. a teacher). The age of consent laws does not apply in such instances due to the strong imbalance of power that exists between young people and authority figures, as well as the breaching of both personal and public trust that occurs when professional boundaries are violated.
- Any sexual behaviour between a child and an adult family member is always sexual abuse regardless of issues of consent, equality or coercion.
- Sexual activity between peers that is non-consensual or involves the use of power or coercion.
- Non-consensual sexual activity between minors (e.g. a 14-year-old and an 11-year-old), or any sexual behaviour between a child and another child or adolescent who, due to their age or stage of development, is in a position of power, trust or responsibility over the victim. Sexual activity between adolescents at a similar developmental level is not considered abuse. (Safe Schools Hub, 2015)

**Grooming:** The term 'grooming' refers to actions deliberately undertaken with the aim of befriending and influencing a child, and, in some circumstances, members of the child/young person's family, for the purpose of sexual activity with the child/young person. These actions are designed to establish an emotional connection in order to lower the child/young person's inhibitions and gain access to the intended victim. In this respect, grooming involves psychological manipulation that is usually very subtle, drawn out, calculated, controlling and premeditated' (Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry 2013). Grooming can also occur online.

**Mandatory Reporting:** The legal requirement to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect is known as mandatory reporting. Mandated persons include teachers, nurses, police, psychologists, psychiatrists and medical practitioners. (Safe Schools Hub, 2015)

**Witnessing of Family Violence:** The witnessing of family violence has been broadly defined as 'a child being present (hearing or seeing) while a parent or sibling is subjected to physical abuse, sexual abuse or psychological maltreatment, or is visually exposed to the damage caused to persons or property by a family member's violent behaviour' (Higgins, 1998:104). Research has shown that children who witness domestic violence tend to experience significant disruptions in their psychosocial wellbeing, often exhibiting a similar pattern of symptoms to other abused or neglected children. (Safe Schools Hub, 2015)

## Procedures

- All Huntingtower staff who identify concerns regarding the sexual, physical, psychological and emotional abuse or neglect of a child must respond according to Mandatory Reporting, Grooming, Failure to Disclose and Failure to Protect legislation and policies.
- When an allegation is directed against school employees (teachers, administrative staff, grounds staff or any other staff member), staff are to inform the Child Protection Officer.
- Matters relating to child protection are to be treated as confidential and only shared with individuals within the school who 'need to know'. All staff should be aware that they should not promise a child/young person that 'they will keep a secret'
- The Principal shall ensure that staff receive induction and ongoing professional learning in relation to the child safety and protection policies and procedures, inclusive of mandatory reporting, on an annual and ongoing basis
- The Principal shall ensure the school's pastoral care structures reflect the Child Protection and Safety Policy
- The school operates safe recruitment practices including ascertaining the suitability of employed staff and volunteers in regulated activities. Checks will be generated through the disclosure of Victorian Institute of Teaching registration or through a Working with Children Check which is in line with current legislation
- All Huntingtower staff and volunteers will also be required to follow the school's Code of Conduct Policy.

## Child Protection Officers

The Counsellors at Huntingtower are the nominated Child Protection Officers (CPOs) and will report on behalf of the School and ensure that adequate records are maintained. CPOs are available to listen, discuss and clarify issues confronting individual teachers, students or families in relation to child physical and sexual abuse.

### **Expected Outcomes (Prevention)**

- A thorough and systematic education in personal safety will be provided to all children and young people
- Ensure that all children and young people know there is someone (CPOs) in the school they can approach if they are worried or in difficulty
- All employees are informed of Child Protection and Safety and are expected to be self-aware and adhere to their professional obligations and responsibilities
- Approved professional learning in providing education in personal safety will be provided to all employees
- All allegations of abuse will receive a prompt response and be clearly documented.

### **Communication**

This policy will be available to staff on the School Intranet and to parents and students via the parent portal. In addition, relevant aspects will be raised with students at meetings, highlighted in Bulletins and newsletters and discussed at Staff meetings.

### **Related Policies**

- Pastoral Care Policy
- Grooming Policy
- Child Protection – Failure to Protect Policy
- Child Protection – Failure to Disclose Policy

### **Evaluation**

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's review cycle or as required.

### **Authorisation**

This policy was authorised by the Principal May 2016