



POLICY AND GUIDELINES

GROOMING

Introduction

Grooming is when someone builds an emotional connection with a child/young person to gain their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse or exploitation.

Protecting children and young people against sexual abuse is a community wide responsibility. Huntingtower has a moral and legal responsibility to ensure children and young people are safe in their care and to ensure that all forms of abusive behaviours towards children and young people are prevented.

The *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)* and the *Crimes Amendment (Grooming) Act 2014* comprises the offence for grooming for sexual conduct with a child aged 16 years and under. The new grooming offence became law in July 2014.

A grooming offence is committed if the offender communicates by words or conduct with a child aged 16 years and under, or the child's carer or supervisor, and intends to commit a sexual offence involving the child.

Children and young people can be groomed online, or in the real world, by a stranger or by someone they know. A groomer may be male or female and be of any age. Many children and young people don't understand that they are being or have been groomed, or that what has happened is abuse.

It is imperative to prevent, reduce and minimise child abuse and exploitation in all their forms.

Purpose

This policy outlines the specific behaviours and actions of an offender grooming a child/young person, and the impact it will have on these victims.

This policy acknowledges the duty Huntingtower employees have towards children and young people in their care. It respects the dignity of children, young people and employees and it outlines their rights and responsibilities.

Principles

- A safe environment is required to protect children and young people from harm and to prevent staff from abusing their position of authority and trust
- Grooming is a serious offence. Staff need to be informed of the criminal intent in grooming behaviours and be fully self-aware of their professional obligations and responsibilities
- All children and young people have the right to a thorough and systematic education in personal safety, including safety in relationships
- Abuse of children/young people by persons in positions of trust or authority is a serious matter. All allegations must receive a response and be dealt with promptly
- After a disclosure, any ongoing harm to the child/young person and the employee is minimised by:
 - adherence to agreed procedures
 - provision of appropriate social and emotional support and pastoral care
 - appropriate confidentiality
- The child/young person's ongoing safety and wellbeing should be the primary focus of decision making.

Definitions

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

Child and Young Person: A child is legally defined as a person aged 16 years and under. A young person is any person who comes under or may come under the care, supervision or authority of the school.

Confidential: Being entrusted with private and restricted information that must be treated as such, both in written and verbal form.

Grooming: The term 'grooming' refers to actions deliberately undertaken with the aim of befriending and influencing a child/young person, 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.

Grooming Behaviours: There is no one set of actions or behaviours that are used to groom a child/young person. Grooming behaviours include:

- persuading a child/young person or group of children/young people that they have a special relationship, for example by:
 - spending inappropriate special time with a child/young person
 - inappropriately giving gifts
 - inappropriately showing special favours to one child/young person but not other children/young people
 - inappropriately allowing the child/young person to over step the rules
 - testing boundaries, for example, by undressing in front of the child/young person.
- Grooming occurs both before the offence in order to access the child/young person, and after the offence to maintain that access for future abuse and ensure the child/young person's silence.

Duty of Care: Staff or volunteers working at Huntingtower have a duty of care to support and protect the children and young people with whom they are professionally involved.

When staff members form a reasonable belief that a child or young person has been harmed or is at risk of harm, they are ethically bound to take action to protect the safety and wellbeing of that child or young person.

Duty of care is breached if a person:

- does something that a reasonable person in that person's position would not do in a particular situation
- fails to do something that a reasonable person in that person's position would do in the circumstances
- acts or fails to act in a way that causes harm to someone to whom the person owes a duty of care
- fails to report when mandated.

Reasonable belief: A 'reasonable belief' is not the same as having proof. 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 when:

- a child/young person states that they have been sexually abused
- a child/young person states that they know someone who has been sexually abused (sometimes the child/young person may be talking about themselves)
- someone who knows a child/young person states that the child/young person has been sexually abused
- professional observations of the child/young person's behaviour or development leads a mandated professional to form a belief that the child/young person has been sexually abused
- signs of sexual abuse leads to a belief that the child/young person has been sexually abused.

Procedures

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Pastoral Care and Child Protection Policies.

The successful implementation of this policy will include the following:

- Regular communication of this policy to employees
- Educating children and young people in personal safety and about grooming
- Educating school employees in identifying possible grooming behaviours
- Taking action that is timely, respectful and coordinated when an employee forms a belief that a child/young person is at risk of being harmed through grooming. The matter must be reported to the Police and the Principal. Victoria Police has primary responsibility for conducting investigations into the alleged matter
- If a mandated staff member, reporting to DHS unless otherwise advised by the police
- Ensuring the child/young person and the child's/young person's family have access to appropriate services in order to reduce any long-term effects of the grooming abuse
- Documenting all allegations and retaining records in a secure area, ensuring their confidentiality.

Expected Outcomes

- Employees are informed of the criminal intent in grooming behaviours and expected to be self-aware of their professional obligations and responsibilities
- A thorough and systematic education in personal safety, including safety in relationships, will be provided for all children and young people
- Approved professional learning in providing education in personal safety will be provided to all employees
- All allegations of grooming 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
- Child Protection and Safety 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