

**Procedures for Dealing with Child
Abuse, Guidelines for Schools
(SACCS May 2002)_RC0403-01**



Catholic Education
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH

CHILD ABUSE

**GUIDELINES FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS
IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

MAY 2002

1. Introduction

This document should be read in conjunction with:

- SACCS Child Protection Policy
- Child Protection Interagency Guidelines
- Interview of Students
- Towards Healing

2. Child Abuse – General Comments

- 2.1 All personnel in schools are mandated notifiers. Mandated notifiers include anyone who works with or cares for children in a paid or voluntary capacity by providing children with health, welfare, education, child care or residential services. Such people are legally obliged to notify the Department of Family & Youth Services (FAYS) if, in the course of their paid or voluntary work, they suspect on reasonable grounds that a child has been or is being abused or neglected. Although mandated notifiers have a legal responsibility to notify, everyone has a moral responsibility to report suspected child abuse or neglect.
- 2.2 All school personnel (ie all teachers and all education support officers and volunteers), involved in or associated with the delivery of educational, health, welfare, child care or residential care services should participate in a training course for mandated notifiers of suspected child abuse.
- 2.3 The Family and Youth Services booklet 'Reporting Child Abuse – guidelines for those people required by law to report child abuse' (1994) needs to be readily accessible to all school personnel
- 2.4 The SACCS Child Protection Policy (2000) is available on the CEO website www.ceo.adl.catholic.edu.au/SACCS/Policies/chiprot.pdf

3. Introduction

- 3.1 The Children's Protection Act (SA) 1993 and its Regulations are the relevant legislative documents relating to the issue of child abuse.
- 3.2 Schools are required to observe the agreed practices laid out in 'Child Protection: Interagency Guidelines' (1997)
- 3.3 When school principals, deputy principals, teachers, education support officers and other school personnel, including volunteers, have suspicions of child abuse, these procedures are to help them carry out their obligations under the Act.

4. Children's Protection Act

- 4.1 Under Section 11 (1) & (2) of the Children's Protection Act 1993 principals, teachers and other school personnel (including volunteers) are obliged by law to notify FAYS if they suspect on reasonable ground that a child (ie. person under eighteen years of age) has been or is being abused or neglected

5. Recognition of Abuse

- 5.1 The term 'abuse' refers to sexual, physical, emotional psychological abuse and neglect.

- 5.2 The following definitions are used by FAYS in determining whether child abuse has occurred.

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| Physical abuse: | Any non accidental act inflicted upon a child which results in physical injury to the child |
| Sexual abuse: | Any sexual behaviour imposed on a child. |
| Emotional abuse: | A chronic attitude or behaviour directed at a child, or, a creation of an emotional environment, which is detrimental to or impairs the child's psychological and/or physical development. |
| Neglect. | Neglect refers to any serious omission or commission by a person that jeopardises or impairs the child's psychological, intellectual or physical development. |

6. Legal Requirements

- 6.1 It is important to remember that it is not the role of school personnel to prove that abuse occurred. It is the role of FAYS to determine whether abuse occurred.
- 6.2 The Law requires school personnel to report reasonable suspicions of abuse. School personnel have reasonable grounds to suspect abuse and to contact FAYS when:
- a child tells you them he or she has been abused;
 - a child tells them he or she knows someone who has been abused (a child could possibly be referring to himself or herself);
 - someone else tells them (eg. sibling, relative, friend, neighbour, or acquaintance of the child) that a child has been abused,
 - their own observations of the child's physical condition and/or behaviour lead them to suspect that the child has been abused;
 - other circumstances lead them to suspect that a child has been abused.
- 6.3 If in doubt school personnel are advised to consult the FAYS Central Intake Team – Child Abuse Report Line (Ph 131478)
- 6.4 Notifying suspected abuse can be the first step in helping both the abused child and the adult causing the abuse
- 6.5 There is no civil or criminal liability for notifying in good faith a suspicion of abuse.
- 6.6 There is a penalty of \$2,000 (max fine) for failure to report (section 11 (1) (b))

7. Notification Procedures

- 7.1 To consult and make a notification, phone the Child Abuse Report Line on 131478 as soon as possible.
- 7.2 This is a 24 hour, 7 day a week line and can be rung from anywhere in the state for the cost of a local call.
- 7.3 The calls will be received by the Central Intake Team workers during business hours. At all other times the line is operated by Crisis Care staff.
- 7.4 Under Section 11(3) of the Children's Protection Act, 1993, the school personnel making notification will be required to provide the Department "a statement of the observations, information and opinions upon which the suspicion is based". This can be done verbally.
- 7.5 When making a notification, school personnel must advise:
- 7.5.1 the child/young person's name, age and address
 - 7.5.2 the reason for suspecting that the injury to, or behaviour of, or the condition of the child/young person is the result of abuse or neglect
 - 7.5.3 the notifier's assessment of immediate danger to the child or young person (information may be sought about the whereabouts of the alleged abuser/s)
 - 7.5.4 what arrangements, if any, exist for the care and protection of the child/young person
 - 7.5.5 what involvement, if any, other agencies have in dealing with the abuse or neglect issues
 - 7.5.6 the notifier's description of the injury, the behaviour or condition observed
 - 7.5.7 the current whereabouts of the child/young person.
(the notifier is not required to have all of the above information in order to make a notification)
- 7.6 The onus to notify FAYS rests with the person who suspects abuse. It is recommended that school personnel advise the principal when making a FAYS notification.
- 7.7 Following the FAYS investigation a number of interventions may occur, including, for example:
- counselling for the family and/or individual
 - referral to other agencies
 - emergency foster care to relieve the immediate stress on the family and remove the risk to the child
 - the service of a parent aide (trained volunteer)
 - practical assistance eg. help with housing, finance, child care
 - an assessment that the student is safe and hence no further action.
- 7.8 In all cases of sexual abuse, serious physical abuse, or serious neglect, the Police and the FAYS consult to determine the respective roles of the two departments.
- 7.9 FAYS gives priority to child protection matters.

8. Further Information

The Human Resource Services Team at the Catholic Education Office can give you further information about child abuse. Note, however, that contacting a Human Resource Services Team member about a suspected case of child abuse does not release a person from his/her obligation to report under the Children's Protection Act 1993.

Guidelines relating to allegations of child abuse by school staff are available on the CEO website: www.ceo.adl.catholic.edu.au