

Child Protection - Detecting, Reporting and Addressing Grooming Behaviours

Grooming behaviour	<p>All children have the right to be protected from abuse, maltreatment and harm.</p> <p>Grooming behaviours can precede sexual abuse in many, but not all, cases.</p> <p>The *School/College* expects a staff member, or any person engaged by the *School/College* to provide services to children, including volunteers, to observe the highest standards of ethical behaviour and integrity in their conduct.</p> <p>St Alice School's Code of Conduct sets out our key values and how they should be applied within our workplace and in our dealings with those outside of our *school/college*.</p> <p>The *school/college* has a duty of care which entails protecting all students from foreseeable risks while at school or engaging in school-related activities.</p> <p>In addition, the procurement or grooming of a child for the purpose of engaging in sexual conduct is a criminal offence in all jurisdictions in Australia, and at a Federal level where the conduct in question may not be prohibited under the state or territory law.</p>
Source of obligation	<p>In Tasmania, section 125C 'Procuring unlawful sexual intercourse with person under 17 years etc' and section 125D 'Communications with intent to procure person under 17 years etc' of the Criminal Code Act 1924 (Tas) applies.</p> <p>Under the Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cth) 'Using a carriage service to procure persons under 16 of age' and 'Using a carriage service to "groom" person under 16 years of age' are prohibited.</p> <p>St Alice School is committed to providing a safe environment for all our students.</p> <p>It is our policy that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all staff are trained with respect to the identification of grooming behaviours and relevant procedures; • all suspected cases of grooming are reported to the Principal, or TCEO Child Safe Officer as soon as practicable; • we maintain effective procedures to assist staff in identifying and reporting grooming behaviours at the *school/college*; • we work collaboratively with relevant external agencies that are involved in child protection; • the *School/College* remains well-informed of relevant government inquiries that can provide further guidance on identifying and reporting grooming behaviours; • we act immediately to ensure the safety of students believed or
St Alice School's policy	

suspected to be at risk of abuse;

- we provide ongoing support and assistance to the students identified as having been exposed to grooming behaviours or abuse;
- we provide students with age-appropriate training of what constitutes inappropriate behaviour; and
- we create an environment at the *school/college* conducive to staff members making reports about the behaviour of other staff members.

Grooming refers to predatory conduct undertaken to prepare a child for sexual activity at a later time.

Grooming behaviour typically involves a graduation from attention giving and non-sexual touching to increasingly more intimate and intrusive behaviours.

What is grooming?

Grooming is not a single act of unprofessional or inappropriate conduct, but rather a pattern of behaviour where the trust of a child is gained and a 'special relationship' is developed between the adult and the child.

Grooming involves making the child feel important and special, often by giving the child extra attention, privileges and gifts. In many cases, the child's family is engaged by the adult to gain access to the child outside of *school/college* hours and the child is encouraged to see the adult as a friend.

This policy provides a general overview of what grooming behaviour typically involves.

The nature of grooming behaviour is that it usually occurs when a student and adult are alone. As with other forms of abuse, students may have promised the abuser that they will not tell anyone, or they may be afraid to speak out.

Indicators of grooming behaviours include an adult:

What are indicators of grooming behaviour?

- attempting to keep a special relationship with a student a secret;
- manoeuvring to get or insisting on uninterrupted time alone with a student;
- buying a student gifts;
- insisting on physical affection such as hugging, wrestling or tickling even when the student clearly does not want it;
- being overly interested in the sexual development of a student;
- taking a lot of photos of a student;
- engaging in inappropriate or excessive physical contact with a

student;

- sharing alcohol or drugs with a student;
- making inappropriate comments about a student's appearance or excessive flattery;
- using inappropriate pet names;
- making jokes or innuendo of a sexual nature;
- making obscene gestures or using obscene language;
- sending correspondence of a personal nature via any medium;
- inviting, allowing, or encouraging students to attend a staff member's home;
- entering change rooms or toilets occupied by students when supervision is not required or appropriate; or
- photographing, audio recording, or filming students via any medium without authorisation or having parental consent to do so.

Certain behaviours or acts will not in isolation constitute grooming behaviour. However where there is a repeating pattern of indicative behaviour, or several incidents of indicative behaviour, it may constitute grooming behaviour.

Grooming behaviour is repeated behaviour

For example, the grooming behaviours listed above, in isolation will usually not constitute grooming behaviour but when repeated or escalated over a period of time, may be reportable as grooming behaviour.

Where the above acts or behaviours do not constitute grooming behaviour, they may be a violation of the *school/college*'s Code of Conduct or constitute professional misconduct and if so should be reported to the Principal, or TCEO Child Safe Officer.

Not all physical contact between a student and a staff member or any person engaged by the *school/college* to provide services to children, including a volunteer, will be inappropriate and/or an indicator of possible grooming behaviour.

The following physical contact with students is not grooming behaviour:

What is not grooming behaviour?

- administration of first aid;
- supporting students who have hurt themselves;
- non-intrusive gestures to comfort a student who is experiencing grief, loss or distress, such as a hand on the upper arm or upper back; and
- non-intrusive touching i.e. shaking a student's hand or a pat on the

back to congratulate a student.

What is the connection between grooming behavior and abuse?

It is an offence in Tasmania under the Criminal Code 1924 to procure a young person (aged under 17) to have unlawful sexual intercourse with another person or to commit an indecent act. It is also an offence to communicate by any means with the intention of procuring a young person to engage in an unlawful sex act.

These offences are examples of grooming behaviour recognised by Tasmanian legislation.

These forms of behaviour can lead to further sexual offences and abuse of children.

If you have a reasonable suspicion or belief that grooming behaviour is occurring, or have witnessed repeated indicators of grooming behaviour, a report should be made to the Principal, or TCEO Child Safe Officer.

If the matter involves the Principal, staff should report suspicions or beliefs to the TCEO Child Safe Officer.

In Tasmania grooming behaviour is recognised as criminal conduct but it is not expressly recognised as a form of child sexual abuse or sexual offence that is subject to mandatory reporting obligations under child protection mandatory reporting legislation.

Reporting grooming behaviours

While grooming behaviours identified in this policy may not be recognised as conduct which must be mandatorily reported, St Alice School treats the commission of grooming behaviour on its premises, online, using school equipment, or during its extra-curricular activities as conduct which threatens the safety of students and action must be taken under our child protection program.

All staff should be aware that grooming behaviour committed by a staff member will constitute a breach of the *School/College*'s [Code of Conduct](#), and may amount to professional misconduct. Any concern a staff member has about whether a situation may compromise or breach the Code of Conduct should be reported to the Principal or TCEO Child Safe Officer.

Refer to our [Misconduct by Staff, Volunteers & Others](#) policy.

If the allegations are substantiated the *School/College* will notify the Department of Justice and the Teachers Registration Board that a staff member at the *school/college* has been accused of behaviour that may affect their clearance to work with children.

Managing a student's disclosure of grooming

Where a student discloses information about grooming behaviour or behaviour that is indicative of grooming to a staff member, the staff member should follow the same management of disclosure guidelines as in the *School/College*'s [Child Protection – Abuse, Grooming & Neglect Identification & Notification policy](#).

Where the student discloses grooming behaviour by directing the staff member to electronic communications such as email, internet chat rooms, SMS messages or real time audio/video between the student and the adult

who is the subject of the allegation, the staff member should report the matter to the Principal or TCEO Child Safe Officer. In these circumstances appropriate steps should be taken to preserve the electronic evidence of the grooming behaviour that has been disclosed.

Reports that are made honestly and without recklessness to the *school/college* will not constitute a breach of confidence, professional ethics or a rule of professional conduct.

The *School/College* is committed to encouraging and facilitating reports of suspicions or beliefs of child abuse, neglect or grooming behaviours and providing an environment that is conducive to staff members making reports about the behaviour of other staff members.

Staff should feel safe to report all concerns including those that involve a fellow staff member.

The identity of the reporter can be protected if necessary however it may be disclosed in the event of a future criminal or civil investigation.

What will happen if I make a report against a fellow staff member?

The reporting staff member will not be civilly or criminally liable for providing information when the report is made honestly and without recklessness.

Where allegations or suspicions of grooming behaviour are reported, the *School/College* will first act to ensure the safety of the student who is the alleged victim of the grooming behaviour.

The *School/College* will then notify the staff member who is the subject of the report and provide an opportunity to respond to the allegations, in accordance with the principles of natural justice. If the allegation involves the Principal the report should be made to TCEO Child Safe Officer.

The TCEO Child Safe Officer will ensure an investigation is conducted. If the allegations are of a serious nature and require further investigation, the *School/College* may refer the matter to the Police and relevant child protection agencies.

Any relevant evidence should be preserved.

The *School/College* may suspend the staff member while the allegation is being investigated.

Where a staff member suspects grooming behaviour but does not have enough information to make a report, they should keep written and dated records of their observations and concerns until they are prepared to make a report. It should be noted that allegations of grooming are taken very seriously by the *School/College* and dishonest reports will result in disciplinary action.

Record keeping

All verbal and written communications regarding child protection matters (including notes of observations, meetings and telephone calls) must be properly documented.

The documented records should include dates, times and enough detail to record key conversations, especially those relating to a student's disclosure.

The records of child protection matters must be stored securely.

For the purposes of any current or future internal or external investigations into grooming allegations, the *School/College* maintains records of any and all evidence or notes relating to the allegations made. This may include:

- notes taken during a meeting with a staff member who is the subject of a grooming allegation;
- reports made by a staff member about the behaviour of a colleague;
- notes taken during a disclosure by a student of grooming behaviour;
- copies of any reports made to police or regulatory bodies about the matter; and
- digital copies of correspondence between the student and the staff member who is the subject of the allegation, if the allegation includes claims of inappropriate online activity.

It is St Alice School's policy that all staff are encouraged to declare any interactions with students outside school hours. These interactions may include instances where the staff member is:

- related to the student;
- friends with the student's parents or family; or
- has parental consent to interact with the student for academic purposes outside of school hours and has notified the *school/college*.

Recording
staff/student
interaction disclosures

St Alice School maintains records of all declarations made by staff members related to their interactions with students, or relationships with students, that exist outside of school hours or *school/college* premises.

These records are kept for a period of seven years.

Staff who have access to information regarding suspected or disclosed child abuse, including grooming behaviour, must keep such information confidential and secure and must not disclose this information unless required to do so as part of an ongoing investigation, by law, or when it is necessary to disclose the reasons for removing a child from a class or activity where the grooming behaviour occurred. This should only be done where absolutely necessary.

Confidentiality

Staff must not provide undertakings that are inconsistent with their reporting obligations under this policy. For example, as with other forms of abuse, students who disclose that they have been subject to grooming behaviours may attempt to elicit a promise that a staff member not tell anyone about the disclosure. Staff members must not make this promise.

Students and any other parties who become involved in the investigation (this may include other students) should be informed of the reporting

process and be requested to maintain confidentiality.

Inappropriate disclosure of confidential information will be subject to disciplinary action.

All workers are responsible to ensure that:

- Workers' responsibility
- reports of grooming behaviour or repeated incidents of indicators of grooming behaviour are made as soon as practicable;
 - confidentiality is maintained throughout the process;
 - immediate support is given to students making disclosures;
 - records of all verbal and written communication are maintained and stored securely; and
 - all staff participate in training.

Signage

Posters of grooming behaviour indicators, mandatory reporting processes that may apply, and the Department of Justice the Teachers Registration Board and contact details will be displayed strategically in staff rooms within the *school/college* where possible.

This policy is implemented through a combination of:

- Implementation
- risk identification and reporting procedures;
 - the provision of counselling services;
 - staff training;
 - signage;
 - effective communication and incident notification procedures;
 - effective record keeping procedures; and
 - initiation of corrective actions where necessary.

Discipline for breach of policy

Where a staff member breaches this policy St Alice School will take disciplinary action, including in the case of serious breaches, summary dismissal.

Related Policies

[Child Protection - Working with Vulnerable People Registration](#)
[Child Protection - Abuse, Grooming & Neglect Identification & Initial Notification](#)
[Child Protection - Mandatory Reporting of Abuse & Neglect Policy](#)

Relevant legislation

Criminal Code Act 1924 (Tas)

