

# Professional Boundaries in Teacher-Student Relationships

# Agenda

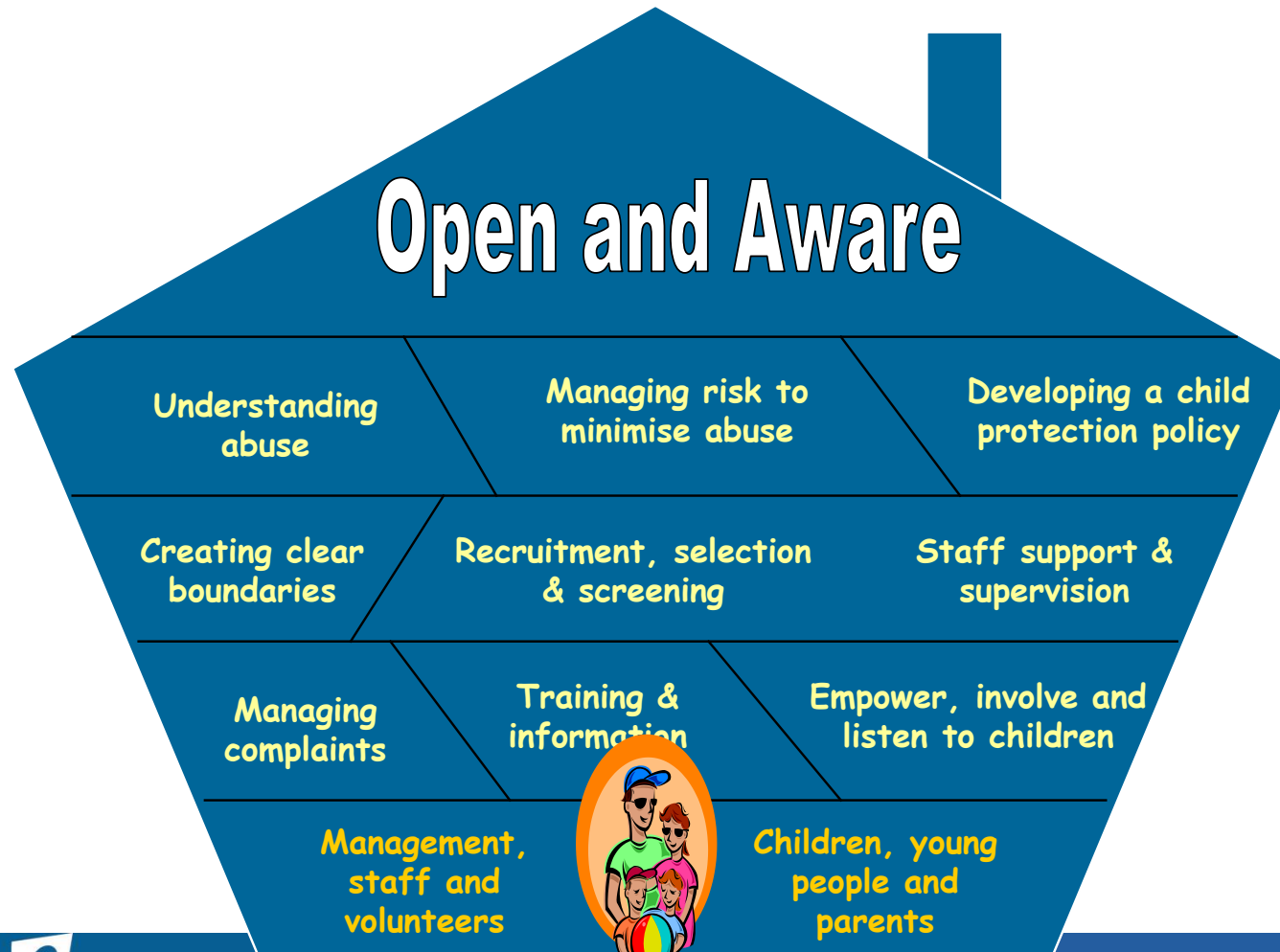
- Who is Child Wise
- What is 'Child Safe'
- Dynamics of sexual offending against children (half hour DVD)
- Review 'Professional Boundaries'
- Introduce the new Code of Conduct
- Protective Practices for teachers

## Who is Child Wise?

- Child Wise is an international child protection charity *protecting children's futures* working to prevent the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in Australia and overseas.
- The organisation was launched in 1993 as part of the international ECPAT network of 80 member groups in 70 countries.



# A Child Safe Organisation



## Why become more 'Child Safe'?

- Harm to children, including sexual abuse is preventable
- Offenders target children's organisations in order to 'access' children
- The 'grooming' of children will have a visible component

## Why become more 'Child Safe'?

- The vast majority of those who sexually offend do **NOT** have criminal convictions for their abuse of children
- The vast majority of these are known to the victim
- The psychological, emotional, social and financial costs of sexual abuse are immeasurable

## Duty of Care

- Duty of Care is a common law concept that refers to the responsibilities of organisations to provide children with an adequate level of protection against harm.
- It is the duty of the organisation to protect children from all reasonably foreseeable risk of injury.
- Reasonable care in any given case will be determined objectively by a court.

## Negligence

For someone to succeed in an action of negligence against an organisation they must establish:

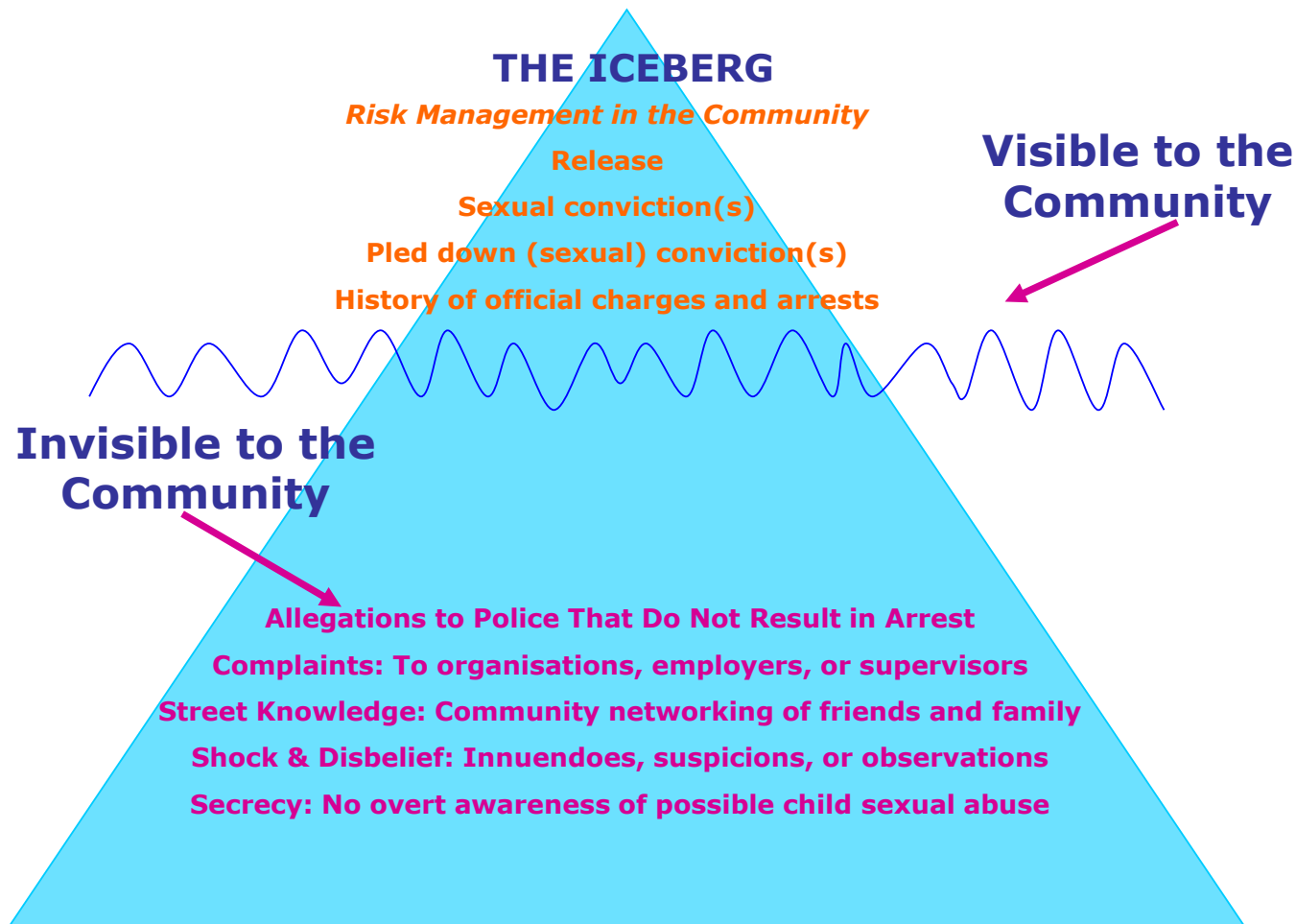
1. The organisation owed a duty of care to the person
2. The standard of care was breached
3. The act occurred
4. This breach has caused the person to suffer some form of damage.



# Dynamics of Child Sex Offending

(show 1/2hr DVD)

## Community Awareness



## The Hidden Epidemic of Child Sexual Abuse

- The Savi Report (EIRE 2002) revealed that only 3.5% of girls and 5.6% of boys reported sexual abuse to police.  
(Sullivan, UK)
- A UK study found that from a random sample of 2869 young people of the 11% who had been sexually abused as children, 75% did not report the abuse.  
(NSPCC 2000)
- A NSW Department of Community Services child protection study found that one in three people in NSW suspect a child they know has been abused, but 43% of them do not report it to authorities.

## The Hidden Epidemic of Child Sexual Abuse

- In Victoria, only 15% of child sexual abuse cases investigated by police result in a court case – 8% result in a guilty verdict.
- In NSW, only 5% of child sex offenders are prosecuted. (Dr K, Gelb, Vic Sentencing Commission)
- In South Australia, only 1.8% of child sex offenders are prosecuted and punished. (Unpublished report by Dr. F. Briggs)
- Those who sexually offend against children may be convicted in only 1 or 2 out of every 100 cases of suspected abuse. (Bolen, 2001)

## Who are sexually abusing children?

### Males

- 90 to 95% of offenders are male.  
(Crime statistics / victim reports, British Crime Survey)

### Females

- Up to 6% of all reported child sexual abuse in Australia is perpetrated by females.  
(Child Wise, 2006)

### Adolescents

- At least 33% of all offending against children in Australia is committed by another child or young person.  
(P.Tidmarsh, MAPPS, 2005)

## Characteristics of those who sexually Offend against children

- Sexual offending usually begins in adolescence. (Abel and Osborn 1988)
- Many adult men who sexually offend against children report experiences of childhood physical abuse or neglect. Self reports of child sexual abuse range from 22% to 82% (Salter, A 2003 p73)
- More than three quarters of offenders reported an exclusively heterosexual orientation. (Smallbone & Wortley, 2001)
- 71% of offenders reported that the child's parents usually knew the offender was spending time alone with the child.

## Four Preconditions Model of Sexual Abuse

David Finkelhor (1984)

A potential offender needs to have some motivation to abuse a child sexually.

**Why do I want to offend?**

The potential offender has to overcome internal inhibitions against acting on that motivation.

**What do I say to myself to make it Ok?**

The potential offender has to overcome external impediments to committing sexual abuse.

**How do I get the child alone?**

The potential offender or some other factor has to undermine or overcome a child's possible resistance to the sexual abuse.

**How do I get my victim to cooperate?**

# Professional Boundaries

## Definition of Boundary:

The edge of appropriate behaviour

(Ingram DH, 1991)

Boundaries are the limits that allow for safe connections between individuals

([http://www.dconline.cc/SDCA\\_%20PB\\_Training2.htm](http://www.dconline.cc/SDCA_%20PB_Training2.htm))



# Professional Boundaries

- The framework within which the teacher/student relationships occurs
- Make the relationship professional
- Set the parameters within which services is delivered
- Acknowledge power imbalance

# The Code of Conduct states

What:

*'Teachers are responsible for setting up appropriate boundaries with students'*

Why:

*'children and young people should develop skills in building positive relationships based on those modeled by our employees'*

# Nature of Teacher-Student Relationships

- Teacher always has more power
- Teacher is in the position of authority
- Age, gender and experience
- Culture and traditions of school

# Creating Clear Boundaries

The establishment of clear boundaries is critical to ensure the environment is safe and predictable.

# Toowoomba Catholic Education Office Code of Conduct

The new Code of Conduct outlines the do's and don'ts of behaviour and relationships with students.

Staff members are responsible for maintaining a professional role with students, which means establishing clear professional boundaries that serve to protect everyone from misunderstandings or a violation of the professional relationship.

# Professional Boundaries

- Rationale – Best interests of student
- Require careful thinking and self monitoring
- Acknowledge student's lack of developmental capacity to know what is in their best interest.
- Clarity on unequal balance of power and issues of consent
- Respectful and proactive behaviours when students "initiate" or blur boundaries

# Scenario One

You are a male teacher of Year 8 students. A student's mother (recently separated) invites you to dinner at their home to "thank you" for supporting her son during the separation.

## Scenario Two

You are a female teacher of Year 10 students. You receive a text message from one of your male students saying

“u looked hot 2day miss :) U know who”.



# Scenario Three

You are an experienced female teacher. A Year 11 female student from a “complex background” confides in you regularly.

You have provided her with a lot of support in and outside of the classroom during school hours. Today she tells you she is in love with you.

# Scenario Four

You are a first year male teacher at an all girls' college. A Year 9 female has brushed against you and leaned on you.

Today she made a suggestive gesture when leaving the classroom.

## Scenario Five

You notice one of your colleagues who teaches Year 9 girls is very tactile and “hands on” during P.E classes.

The girls do not appear uncomfortable and parents speak very highly of this teacher as does the principal.

# Scenario Six

A teaching colleague whom you respect enormously has recently experienced a personal tragedy. After a brief period of leave they have returned to work. On one occasion you witness them crying in front of the Year 12 students.

On another occasion you overhear them discussing details of the tragedy with the class. When you approach the matter, the teacher dismisses it saying they are Ok!

# Problem Areas

- Verbal Communication ie. Sexualized, intimate, humiliation
- Personal Disclosure
- Favouritism giving/receiving gifts, privileges
- Dual / Overlapping relationships eg. parent/family friend/coach/neighbour/counsellor and teacher
- Physical contact with objects or directly
- Sexual activity between teacher and student is never acceptable
- Being alone with students in any place(s)

(The Bulletin, No.25 No.1, July 1998)

# Cognitive strategies to justify unethical behaviour or boundary crossing

“It came from the heart”...

“I listened to my soul”...

“I went with my gut”...

“I’m only human”...

“I was just stuck between a rock and a hard place”... “it was for them”

(Pope, K and Vasquez, M 2007)

# Cognitive strategies to justify unethical behaviour or boundary crossing

“what else could I do” ...

“another person would have done the same thing” ...

“it was common sense” ...

“it worked before”

“they left me no choice” ...

(Pope, K and Vasquez, M 2007)

# Challenges for Teachers

- Teaching is by nature a tactile profession
- Media exposure of historical abuse heightened sensitivity
- Teachers touch students to comfort, validate, encourage, reassure, assist, coach and guide
- Achieving a balance

([www.nzplc.massey.ac.nz](http://www.nzplc.massey.ac.nz), 2006)



# Warning Signs

- Attraction
- Sexualising
- Treats differently
- Offering extra help
- Out of hours contact

## Questions to consider.....

- Is this in the student's best interest?
- Whose needs are being met?
- What impact will this have?
- How would X's family/friends view this?
- Would I tell a colleague/friend about this?
- Am I treating X differently to other students?
- Is X 'special' to me?
- Am I taking advantage of my position?
- Will I make a note of this on X's file?
- Will I report this to my supervisor?
- Does this breach the Code of Conduct?

# Protective Practices for Teachers

# The Professional Teacher

- Functions within the boundaries defined and accepts responsibility for the consequences of their actions
- Monitors personal well being and effectiveness
- Strives to maintain professional competence
- Is proactive in seeing personal growth and development
- Seeks help when necessary

# Protective Practices of Teachers

- Abide by Codes of Conduct
- Self assessment of personal behaviour
- Personal awareness of physical contact and that of colleagues
- Attention to professional presentation (clothing, language, informality)
- Transparency and accountability
- Authorised v. unauthorised student contact
- Whose needs are being met? Mine or the students?
- Best interests principle
- Speaking up, reporting

# Institutional Protection

- Teacher training - reflect reality of life inside and outside classroom – personal and professional
- Acknowledge nurturing element and protect teachers
- Implement Codes of Conduct to protect teachers and students
- Employers need to “screen” for undesirable characteristics
- Supervision and accountability
- Support – the best teachers give from within and need the support and protective frameworks to educate and empower their students

# Thank You

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You can contact us for:

- Child Protection Policy development & audits
- Training and Child Safe Consultancy
- Advice about children at risk of abuse



# **Responding to Harm to Students from Someone Outside Brisbane Catholic Education Schools**

2009



# Learning Objectives

Participants will be able to:

- **Understand the definitions of different “harms”**
- **List and explain signs that may indicate a student is suffering from or is at risk of harm from a source outside the school environment**
- **Understand the role of government agencies involved in child protection**
- **Understand confidentiality and privacy provisions under the *Child Protection Act 1999*.**

# Harm to children and young people

- **Over 85% of children/young people who are harmed are harmed by someone they know and trust - a parent, caregiver, sibling, other relative, family friend or care giver.**
- **The harm caused to children/young people ranges from mild to life threatening.**
- **The younger the child, the more vulnerable they are and the more serious the consequences are likely to be.**

# Seeing the signs

Employees should be aware of signs of harm:

- **physical**
  - **emotional**
  - **behavioural**
- 
- **These signs may indicate that a student is at risk of harm or may actually be suffering harm**
  - **These indicators are more significant if they are severe and/or continue over a period of time**
  - **The younger the child the greater the risk**
  - **Look out for a pattern of signs**

# Seeing the signs

- **It is important to keep an open mind when encountering signs of harm to a child**
- **The presence of these signs does not necessarily mean that harm has occurred**
- **All indicators need to be considered taking into account the child's circumstances and family context**
- **They may suggest a student could be at risk and that further assessment, monitoring and an appropriate response is required.**

**(See handout for signs of abuse)**

# Physical abuse

Behaviour by a parent or caregiver, which may cause significant harm to a child and therefore is considered physical abuse includes:

- Excessive hitting with either hand or other implements
- Biting
- Shaking (particularly young children, babies)
- Pushing severely
- Use of sharp implements to jab a child's skin
- Punching
- Throwing
- Burning
- Administering poison/non-prescribed drugs
- Suffocating
- Drowning

(See handout for signs of physical abuse)

# Neglect

## Neglect includes:

- **Continued failure to provide a child with the basic necessities of life and adequate supervision and protection needed for the child's optimal growth and development, and failure to use available resources to meet those needs**
- **In its extreme form, abandonment**

**(See handout for signs of neglect)**

# Emotional abuse

**Emotional abuse includes:**

- **Constant criticism, belittling, teasing of a child or ignoring or withholding praise and affection;**
- **Failure to provide the psychological nurturing necessary for a child's physical, cognitive and emotional growth and development.**

**(See handout for signs of emotional abuse)**



# Sexual Abuse

**Sexual abuse includes:**

- **The exploitation of a child by an older person, a peer or an adult for the sexual stimulation and/or gratification of that person**
- **Secrecy, misuse of power and distortion of adult-child relationships**
- **Abusive behaviours within a family may include behaviours from one or more of these groupings**

**(See handout for signs of sexual abuse)**

# Domestic violence

**Domestic violence is violence, abuse and intimidation perpetrated by one person against another in a personal, intimate relationship, causing fear, physical and/or psychological harm.**

## **What is the impact on children?**

- **Domestic violence has a profound effect on children and constitutes a form of child abuse**
- **Children are at significant risk of being physically and psychologically harmed in households where there is domestic violence**
- **There is significant evidence to suggest that prolonged exposure to stress and trauma affect brain development and attachment**
- **Much child abuse and neglect occurs within a context of domestic violence.**
- **Current practice in the Queensland Police Service is to report all incidents of domestic violence to the Department of Child Safety where children are known to be part of the family unit**

# Reasonable grounds to suspect harm or risk of harm

- **A student makes a disclosure of harm or risk of harm, either directly to a staff member or indirectly through written/art work.**
- **A student tells a staff member that they know a student that has been harmed (often the student is referring to themselves).**
- **Someone else informs a member of staff that they suspect harm or risk of harm to a student.**
- **Observations made by a staff member of student's behaviour, physical appearance, knowledge of family circumstances, help to form a suspicion that a student has been harmed or is at risk of harm.**

# Reporting of harm or risk of harm caused by someone outside BCE schools

- **Employees to report to principal or student protection contact.**
- **Principal or student protection contact to report to State authority.**
- **The principal or student protection contact may choose to discuss the matter with a Student Protection Officer.**
- **In all matters the principal should be made aware of the concerns and should be consulted in all possible reports of harm or risk of harm to the relevant State authority.**

# Reporting - key points to consider

- **Document your concerns, observations or any disclosures made as soon and as accurately as possible.**
- **Report your concerns to the principal or student protection contact as soon as possible.**
- **Do not inform the parents or carers that a report has been made.**

# Case scenario

Jessica, an eleven year old girl in your class, is regularly without books and generally does not perform to her ability. Though often sad, she is noticeably more withdrawn of recent times. She often has fading bruises on her arms and occasionally on her face. She says she is just clumsy and runs into things at home. Her mother works shift work and her step-father is at home most of the time with the children. She has two younger half sisters who present well at school.

Today the girl came to school with a large fresh bruise around her eye. She will not tell you what happened and became tearful when questioned and spoke about wanting to run away from home. At a recent parent /teacher interview the teacher noticed that the mother was quiet and left much of the discussion to the step-father who, at times, presented as being aggressive in his manner. He was reluctant to discuss any family issues which may be impacting on the child's behaviour and academic performance.

# Scenario questions

- **What information raises concern for Jessica?**
- **Has harm or risk of harm been identified?**
- **What are the reasonable grounds to suspect this?**
- **What are your responsibilities in this case?**
- **If you were Jessica's teacher how would you support her in your classroom?**

# Agencies Involved in Child Protection in Queensland

- **Department of Child Safety**
- **Queensland Police Service (Specialist Units e.g. CPIU (Child Protection Investigation Unit), Child and Sexual Assault Investigation Unit)**
- **SCAN Teams (Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect)**



# Notifier Legal Protection

- The identity of individuals who notify the Department of Child Safety and/or Queensland Police Service of their concerns about a child is kept confidential in most cases and they are protected from civil liability. That is, the person is protected from legal action being taken against him/her. (Confidentiality provisions are covered in Sections 22, 186, 187 and 188 in the *Child Protection Act 1999*).
- However the identity of a notifier might have to be disclosed in some court processes but only as a last resort.

# **DVD Segment**

*(DVD Main Menu – Section One)*

**EXPERT COMMENTS  
& SCENARIOS**

**RESPONDING TO HARM  
OF STUDENTS  
BY SOMEONE OUTSIDE  
BRISBANE CATHOLIC EDUCATION SCHOOLS**