

Mandatory Reporting - Abused children

From the start of 1994 it will be mandatory for preschool, primary and secondary school teachers and principals, to notify Child Protection Victoria if they have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical or sexual abuse, and the child's parents are unlikely to protect the child. Many other professionals are required to do the same.

Research indicates that long term negative effects of abuse are reduced if the abuse is detected and stopped during childhood, and the child receives assistance and support. Reporting increases the likelihood that children will receive the best possible help and protection.

Physical and sexual abuse are criminal offences. Perpetrators may be liable to criminal charges as a result of their actions.

Specific training materials are being developed by the Protective Services Branch to help teachers in this task.

"Reasonable grounds" occur when:

- (a) a child tells a teacher (or other professional) that he or she has been physically or sexually abused;
- (b) someone else, such as a relative, friend, acquaintance or sibling of a child, tells a teacher that a child has been abused;
- (c) the teacher's observations of a child's behaviour, or knowledge of children generally, leads him or her to believe that the child has been abused;
- (d) the teacher observes signs or indicators of abuse.

The signs or indicators of physical abuse may be:

- (a) bruises or welts, often of different ages;
- (b) burns, scalds, sprains, fractures, dislocations, bites, cuts;
- (c) lacerations or abrasions;
- (d) poisoning.

Some signs or indicators of sexual abuse:

- (a) sexual behaviour inappropriate to the child's age, development and vocabulary level;
- (b) sexual themes and fears in the child's conversation, artwork, stories or play;
- (c) complaints of pain or itching in the genital area;
- (d) injury to the genital area;
- (e) reluctance to go to a certain place or be with a certain person.

If you suspect child abuse speak, as soon as possible, and confidentially, to the Head of Campus.

The identity of the teacher who notifies the abuse is not revealed subsequently by any social worker unless written permission is given by the notifier.