



Procedures for Responding to and Reporting Allegations of Child Abuse

Child abuse includes sexual offences, grooming, physical violence, serious emotional or psychological harm, serious neglect and a child's exposure to family violence.

Holy Trinity Lutheran School has zero tolerance for child abuse and is committed to the protection of all children from all forms of child abuse.

"In the Lutheran school the gospel is to inform all programs, relationships and activities" (LCA and Its School statement). The love of God in Jesus Christ is to govern all that is done, in response to this love, people in the school community are directed to their fellow human beings. Where they love others, they love him. Christ's promise is that whatever is done for others is done for him. Informed and transformed by God's creative, redemptive and sanctifying love, God's people are concerned with the total needs of their fellow human beings (Industrial Relations and the Lutheran school).

The Child Safe program in place at Holy Trinity Lutheran School defines power as the capacity to set and care for boundaries. Boundaries are the structures which support human development within community; boundaries may be personal, communal, spiritual, psychological or physical. In Christ, there is an empowerment by the gospel to recognise boundaries and prevent their destructive crossing and to care for those who have been violated. Our responsibility of leadership is to care for professional boundaries through the establishment of structures that protect them. Structures provide for support, examination, and action to ensure that school leaders, staff and students act according to boundaries that help, protect and uphold the dignity, worth and safety of each individual. (Valuing Safe Communities: statement of values)

This Child Protection Program is made up of work systems, practices, policies and procedures designed to maintain a child safe environment and to embed an organisational culture of child safety within the School community. The Program deals specifically with child protection issues and is designed to ensure compliance with the Victorian Child Safe Standards and related child protection laws. Broader child safety issues arising from our common law duty of care are dealt with through our **Student Duty of Care Program**.

Who is Responsible for Child Protection?

Society as a whole shares responsibility for promoting the safety and protection of children from abuse. In the School context, all members of the School community have their role to play – teachers, staff, administrators, parents/carers, volunteers and students. That said, the school's management team are committed to leading from the front and engaging in a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to child protection issues.

Students are encouraged to take an active role in developing and maintaining a child safe environment at the School and are provided with opportunities to contribute and give feedback in the development of the School's policies and practices. Students are also made aware of the avenues available to them to report or disclose abuse or concerns for their safety or the safety of others.

Welfare Team

The School's Welfare Team is your first point of contact for reporting child protection issues within the School. They receive special training that allows them to deal with child protection concerns both sensitively and effectively.

If you have any concern that a child may be experiencing any form of abuse, whether or not you have formed a belief on reasonable grounds that the abuse has occurred, you should immediately raise your concerns with one of our Welfare Team.

The welfare and best interests of the child are paramount. Whenever there are concerns that a child is in immediate danger the Police should be called on 000.

The Welfare Team comprises of:

Principal	Daniel Weller	principal@htls.vic.edu.au
School Counsellor	Anne Penny	anne.penny@htls.vic.edu.au
Head of Senior School	Sally Kuchel	sally.kuchel@htls.vic.edu.au
Head of Middle School	Jason Przibilla	jason.przibilla@htls.vic.edu.au
Head of Junior School	Fiona Friberg	fiona.friberg@htls.vic.edu.au

Key responsibilities for the School's Welfare Team include:

- having a good working knowledge of the School's Child Protection and Safety Policy and Child Protection Program
- promptly managing the School's response to an allegation or disclosure of child abuse, and ensuring that the allegation or disclosure is taken seriously
- ensuring that the School's Child Protection and Safety Policy is clearly communicated to all key stakeholders including students, parents, staff and volunteers
- ensuring that the School's Child Protection Safety Policy and Child Protection Programs are being implemented effectively
- ensuring that there are clear procedures to allow people to report child protection concerns within the School
- review and assess the effectiveness of the School's response to a child protection incident
- promoting child protection issues within the School community and responding to general queries with respect to the School's Child Protection and Safety Policy and Child Protection Program
- acting as "*Child Protection Champions*" and ensuring a strong and sustainable child protection culture is embedded within the School
- ensuring that all staff and **Volunteers** undertake child protection training so that they are able to identify signs of abuse, understand how to respond and when to make a referral either internally or to an external agency
- being the first point of contact for staff, or other members of the School community, raising child protection concerns within the School
- coordinating appropriate responses to child protection incidents including liaising with the Police and other external agencies and responding to a child who makes, or is affected by, an allegation of child abuse
- ensuring the School's Child Protection and Safety Policy and Child Protection Program are reviewed on a regular basis by an appropriate member of staff

In the event that one of the School's Welfare Team cannot perform their role, for example due to conflicts of interest or absence, these duties must be performed by either another member of the School Welfare Team or the Principal.

Managing Your Initial Response to a Child Protection Incident

The following sections outline the four ways that you may become aware that a child may be experiencing abuse and strategies for managing each situation, and information on supporting and assisting children involved in the disclosure or report.

Observation of Risk Indicators

The different types of child abuse and their key risk indicators are set out in detail in the earlier section of this program [Child Abuse – Definition and Key Risk Indicators](#).

The process of identifying child abuse purely through observation of risk indicators can be complex and may occur over time. The complexity is magnified by the fact that many of the key risk indicators described may also occur as a result of other factors, not related to child abuse.

If you form a concern that a child may be being abused you should make written notes of your observations recording both dates and times. You should also **report the matter internally** to a member of the School **Welfare Team**.

Private Disclosure by a Child

If a student discloses a situation of abuse or neglect to you privately, you should stay calm and not display expressions of panic or shock.

You should reassure and support the child. You can do this by:

- stating clearly that the abuse is not the child's fault;
- reassuring the child that you believe them; and
- telling the child that disclosing the matter is the right thing to do.

You should be patient, and allow the child to talk at their own pace. When responding you should use the child's language and vocabulary.

Sometimes a student may try to elicit a promise from you that you will not tell anyone about the allegation. You **must not** make this promise, as you are responsible for reporting the matter.

Finally remember that your role is not to investigate the allegation. You should not interrogate the child and pressure them to tell you more than they want to.

Once a disclosure is made you must report the matter internally to a member of the School [Welfare Team](#) as soon as possible. You should also make written notes of the circumstances of the disclosure recording both dates and times and pass this information onto a member of the Welfare Team

Following a disclosure of abuse or neglect by a student, staff should follow the steps set out in the School's [Support Following Disclosure](#) policy.

Third Party Disclosure

A third party such as a friend of the child, a relative or another parent may provide you with information relating to child abuse.

In this situation you should:

- listen to the person's concerns seeking clarification where required;
- thank the person for raising their concern;
- advise the person that we have procedures for dealing with situations like this; and
- advise the person that you will discuss their concerns with the relevant authorities.

As with [Private Disclosure](#) you should reassure and support the person providing the information.

Sometimes a person may try to elicit a promise from you that you will not tell anyone about the allegation. You **must not** make this promise, as you are responsible for reporting the matter.

Finally remember that your role is not to investigate the allegation. You should not interrogate the third party and pressure them to tell you more than they want to.

Once a third party disclosure is made you must report the matter internally to a member of the School [Welfare Team](#) as soon as possible. You should also make written notes of the circumstances of the disclosure recording both dates and times.

Support Following Disclosure

You should take the following steps to support and assist a child after a disclosure of child abuse or neglect is made.

The range of measures employed will depend on:

- the degree of severity of the situation;
- the risk of harm to the child; and
- the capability and willingness of the parent to protect the child from harm.

After a disclosure is made:

- do not promise the child that you will not tell anyone about the allegation;
- reassure the child that it was the right thing to do to tell an adult;
- tell the child what you plan to do next;
- do not confront the person believed to be the perpetrator;
- report the matter to one of the School's [Welfare Team](#) who will be able to assist you in developing additional support strategies; and
- whenever there are concerns that a child is in immediate danger the Police should be called on 000.

Reporting a Child Abuse Concern Internally

Child abuse situations can be very complex, not only from the perspective of ascertaining whether abuse has occurred but also in understanding what steps to take to protect a child.

It is important to remember at all times that the safety and welfare of the child are paramount.

Therefore, if you have a concern that a child may be experiencing abuse, whether or not you have formed a belief on reasonable grounds that the abuse has occurred, you should immediately raise your concerns with one of the School's Welfare Team. The School's Welfare Team will be able to assist you in clarifying your concerns and managing the next steps.

Please note that reporting the matter internally does not release you from other legal and regulatory reporting obligations you may have, namely:

- The Obligation to Report a Sexual Offence
- The Obligation to Act to Protect; and
- The Obligation to Make a Mandatory Report.