

# SAFEGUARDING OUR CHILDREN

## Student Protection in Anglican Schools

### A Guide for Parents and Students



Through a series of questions and answers, this Guide provides information on key definitions and concepts, child protection reporting processes and options for referring families to local support services.

**As you read the Guide, it's important to be aware of your reactions to the content. Information about abuse and neglect can be very confronting. If, at any time, the information in the Guide causes you distress, it's important to discuss this with a support person or member of staff, such as a Student Protection Officer.**

## INTRODUCTION

For most children, childhood is a positive time in their lives. They grow up in loving families that care for and nurture them and help them develop into healthy young adults. However, for a small proportion of children, this is not their experience.

Because of their regular contact with children and families, schools play an important role in helping families access support services and identifying and responding to suspected child abuse and neglect.

Parents also play an important part in helping children feel safe and supported. For some children, the first person they will trust enough to talk to about abuse or neglect may be a friend or the parent of a friend. When this happens, it can be very stressful and you will need to know what to do and who you can turn to for help.

This Guide tells you about the policies and procedures our school has to protect children from child abuse and neglect, and inappropriate behaviour by a school employee or volunteer, and what you need to do if you have concerns for a child.

## OUR STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

Like all Anglican Schools, we support the rights of all children and we are committed to the safety and wellbeing of children attending our school.

Our school will provide a safe and supportive living and learning environment for children and we will support staff, volunteers and visitors to model and encourage behaviours that uphold the dignity, safety and wellbeing of children.

Our school will also respond to all allegations of harm to a child resulting from the conduct, action or inaction of any person, including staff, volunteers and visitors and will support any individuals affected by child protection matters, including children, parents, staff, volunteers and visitors.

## HOW DOES OUR SCHOOL PROTECT CHILDREN?

Our school recognises that child protection is everyone's business and we encourage all members of our community, including staff, students, parents, volunteers and visitors, to understand child protection and play their part, if and when they need to.

Our school will provide information about child protection, including policies, procedures, resources and training, to help guide staff, students, parents, volunteers and visitors to our school and will develop and implement a Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy. If you would like to read our policies, our Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy, or other relevant documents, you can find these on our website or you can ask our school for a copy.

By providing this information, our staff, students, parents, volunteers and visitors will be able to recognise suspected harm to a child as a result of abuse, identify inappropriate behaviour by an employee or volunteer to a child, respond to the ongoing support needs of children and families, and report concerns for a child, when required.

## LAWS IN RELATION TO CHILD PROTECTION AND FAMILY SUPPORT

Because the safety and wellbeing of our children is so important, there are several pieces of state and federal legislation, including the *Child Protection Act 1999* and the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006*, that contain provisions to help us protect children from abuse, or inappropriate behaviour, and support families when they need assistance.

These laws stipulate when and how suspected child abuse or neglect must be reported to the Police or the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (Child Safety), how professionals can better support families, and other actions our school must take to protect children, including screening employees and volunteers and having a Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy.

If you would like more information about the legislation that helps us all protect children from harm, please speak to a Student Protection Officer or review our policies.

## POLICIES THAT HELP OUR SCHOOL PROTECT CHILDREN AND SUPPORT FAMILIES

When we suspect child abuse, neglect or inappropriate behaviour by a staff member or volunteer, our actions and decisions, and what we do when you talk with us about concerns for a child or family, will be guided by the Student Protection in Anglican Schools Policy and Procedures.

If you would like to know more about this policy and procedures, please speak with a Student Protection Officer or another member of staff or visit our school's website.





## WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

There are four different types of child abuse.

**Physical abuse** occurs when a child has suffered, or is at risk of suffering, non-accidental physical trauma or injury.

**Emotional or psychological abuse** occurs when a child's social, emotional, cognitive or intellectual development is impaired or threatened and may include emotional deprivation due to persistent rejection, hostility, teasing or bullying, yelling, criticism and exposure to domestic and family violence.

**Neglect** occurs when a parent or other caregiver doesn't adequately provide for a child's needs. This may include the child's need for food, clothing, hygiene, supervision, housing or healthcare/treatment or precautions to ensure the child's safety.

**Sexual abuse** includes sexual behaviour involving a child and another person where the other person bribes, coerces, exploits, threatens or is violent toward the child, the child has less power than the other person or there is a significant disparity between the child and the other person in terms of intellectual capacity or maturity.

Sexual abuse can happen suddenly or after a period of **grooming**. Sexual abusers and victims often know each other for significant periods of time before the first abuse incident.

Research by Professor Stephen Smallbone indicates that grooming typically involves a graduation from attention-giving and non-sexual touching to increasingly more intimate behaviours. Much of this will appear ambiguous, both to the victim and others who may observe it.

## WHAT IS HARM TO A CHILD?

The *Child Protection Act 1999* defines harm as any detrimental effect of a **significant** nature on a child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing and can include harm to an unborn child<sup>1</sup> after he or she is born.

Harm can be caused by physical abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, neglect and sexual abuse or exploitation. Harm can also result from a single incident or several different incidents that take place over time (also known as cumulative harm).

Any action or inaction by an individual that harms a child or unborn child or places a child or unborn child at significant risk of harm is NOT acceptable.

1. Child protection laws in relation to an unborn child refer to concerns a person may have before a child is born about the child's safety and wellbeing after birth. These laws are intended to be preventative and allow Child Safety to offer the pregnant woman and her family support before the baby is born.

## WHAT IS INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR BY AN EMPLOYEE OR VOLUNTEER?

School staff and volunteers are expected to behave in a manner that is supportive of the safety and wellbeing of students.

Behaviour of a sexual, physical or psychological/emotional nature which exploits the special position of trust and authority between the staff member or volunteer and a student is unacceptable and a breach of the obligations of that employee or volunteer and is NOT acceptable.

## WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF ABUSE OR INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR ON A CHILD?

All forms of abuse and inappropriate behaviour can have significant impacts on children's development and functioning. Children may experience a range of emotional, psychological and physical impacts including:

- permanent physical injuries or death;
- long-term medical and health conditions, including eating disorders;
- low self-esteem and behaviour that leads to them being singled out, bullied or victimised;
- increased fear, guilt and self-blame and distrust of adults;
- depression, anxiety, attachment disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder;
- suicidal thoughts and self-harming;
- developmental delay and learning disorders, including poor language and cognitive development;
- aggressive and other behavioural problems;
- delinquency and criminal behaviour, including violence towards others;
- drug and alcohol abuse and high-risk sexual behaviour; or difficulty forming relationships with other adults in later life.





## WHEN SHOULD I BE CONCERNED FOR A CHILD?

You might suspect a child has been harmed or is at risk of harm when:

- the child tells you about something that happened to them, or should have happened and didn't, which led to the child being harmed;
- someone else, such as the child's friend or another parent, tells you about an incident when the child was harmed or about a situation that is likely to happen in the future which will place the child at risk of harm;
- the child tells you about a friend or someone else they know who has been harmed – sometimes the child may actually be talking about themselves but they may not feel comfortable telling you yet; or
- you are worried about changes you've noticed in the child's behaviour or unexplained and suspicious injuries.

These are just a few of the possible indicators of harm but every child will be affected differently. Some children show no observable signs of abuse, while others show multiple indicators.

If you're uncertain about what you've seen or heard, it's best to talk about your concerns with a Student Protection Officer or another member of our staff.

## WHO ARE STUDENT PROTECTION OFFICERS?

Student Protection Officers are designated school staff who receive specialist training annually so they are best placed to respond to queries from students, parents, staff or volunteers about concerns for a child's safety or wellbeing. You can find information about our school's Student Protection Officers, including who they are and how you can contact them, on our school's website, or by contacting the school's main reception.

## WHAT SHOULD A STUDENT DO IF CONCERNED FOR A CHILD OR FAMILY?

If at any time you have concerns for your own safety and wellbeing, or that of another child or young person, you can discuss your concerns with one of the school's Student Protection Officers or the Principal/Head of School. You can also talk to another staff member, such as a counsellor, teacher or Chaplain, if you are comfortable approaching them with your concerns.

## WHAT SHOULD A PARENT DO IF CONCERNED FOR A CHILD OR FAMILY?

If you ever have any concerns for the safety or wellbeing of a child or unborn child, or are concerned that your family or another family may need some support, you can discuss your concerns with a Student Protection Officer or another member of our staff, including the Principal/Head of School.

## WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

The Student Protection Officer will listen to your concerns, ask questions to help them understand the situation and who is involved, and will make notes about what you've said. A staff member will listen to your concerns and assist you in accessing a Student Protection Officer.

When it's required by law or our policy, the Student Protection Officer or staff member may report your concerns to the Principal/Head of School, Child Safety or the Police.

When Child Safety or the Police receive a report about suspected child abuse or neglect, they'll review all the information and make a decision about whether further action is required, including gathering more information or starting an investigation.

No matter what action is taken by Child Safety or the Police, our school will continue to support children and help to ensure their ongoing safety and wellbeing.

The school may speak with the student and their family and offer them help, including referral to local counselling, health or support services.

## WHO WILL KNOW I TALKED TO STAFF ABOUT MY CONCERNS?

If you decide to talk with staff about concerns for a child, under Queensland law, this information must be kept confidential and only certain professionals can be given the information.

For example, you talk to a Student Protection Officer about suspected sexual abuse and the Principal/Head of School decides that a report must be made to the Police and to Child Safety. When this happens, the Principal/Head of School will need to give the officers your name, contact details and the information about the suspected abuse.

If Child Safety and the Police are going to do everything they can to protect children, they need to gather as much information as possible about concerns. This might include speaking directly with any person who has seen or heard things about the child or the suspected abuse.

Under Queensland law, the identity of any person who notifies Child Safety or the Police of suspected child abuse or neglect will be protected. In addition, any person who gives information to Child Safety or the Police about suspected child abuse or neglect will not be liable civilly, criminally or under any administrative process.

## DO STAFF HAVE TO REPORT CHILD ABUSE?

Our student protection policy and procedures state that all staff, volunteers and visitors must tell a Student Protection Officer or the Principal/Head of School when they suspect harm or risk of harm to a child or unborn child. After talking with the Student Protection Officer, the staff member may report the concerns to Child Safety and/or the Police, if required by the law or policy, or the Principal/Head of School may make the report.

## WHEN ARE CONCERNS NOT REPORTED TO THE POLICE OR CHILD SAFETY?

At times, children may suffer harm but a report will not be required to Police or Child Safety. Generally this could include bullying by another student, student self-harm or harm to a student over the age of 18 years.

When incidents like this occur, our staff will immediately respond to ensure all students are safe, follow our policy and procedures and speak with the students involved and their parents. Our staff may also offer families help, such as information about local counselling, health or support services, and may inform students or parents of their right to make a complaint about an incident to the Police.

## CAN CHILD SAFETY OR THE POLICE TALK TO STUDENTS WITHOUT PARENTAL PERMISSION?

The *Child Protection Act 1999* does, in certain circumstances, give Child Safety and Police the authority to interview any child at our school without a parent's permission.

The investigating officers are allowed to take this action when they are investigating suspected abuse or neglect, they believe it's in the child's best interests to interview them before the parent is told and they believe that informing the parents beforehand could adversely affect their investigation.

After the interview, the Police or Child Safety must tell the parent about the contact with their child at our school.

## WHAT WILL THE SCHOOL DO IF YOU REPORT SUSPECTED INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR?

Our policy and procedures also state that, when staff become aware of alleged inappropriate behaviour by an employee or volunteer towards a child, they must discuss this with a Student Protection Officer or Principal/Head of School. When the concerns relate to the Principal/Head of School, the concerns must be reported to the Director of Professional Standards (ACSQ) or Chair of the School Council/Board.

Once aware of the alleged inappropriate behaviour, the Principal/Head of School or Director/Chair must follow our policy and procedures including informing the parents of the concerns and commencing an investigation.

## WHAT ELSE WILL OUR SCHOOL DO TO HELP STUDENTS WHO MAY HAVE BEEN HARMED?

To help students affected by abuse or inappropriate behaviour, our staff will also:

- provide security through regular routines;
- provide opportunities for the child to talk with someone, if they want to;
- keep an eye on how the child is coping, interactions and general behaviour;

- provide extra support if needed;
- give them opportunities to feel good about themselves and their achievements; and
- work with their family to ensure their ongoing safety and wellbeing.

## HOW CAN STUDENTS AND FAMILIES GET SUPPORT WHEN THEY NEED IT?

At times, families face challenging situations that may stretch their resources and require more than their usual coping strategies. At these times, families may need some extra support from services within the local community to help them work through the issues and develop new strategies and capabilities they can use again in the future.

If our school learns that families are having difficulties, we will, wherever possible, try to help families by linking them with support services within the local community.

If, at any time, you feel your family needs some extra support or information, please speak with any of our staff.

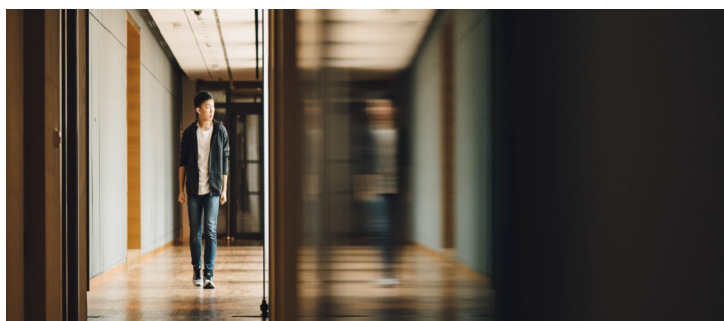
We will always be sensitive to your needs, keep your personal information confidential and will try to help you get the support or information you require.

## IF I ASK FOR HELP, WILL THE INFORMATION ABOUT MY FAMILY REMAIN PRIVATE?

If you decide to speak to any of our staff about getting support, under Queensland law, this information must be kept confidential and only those services or professionals who assist your family will be given information.

## WHAT IF I'M CONCERNED ABOUT THE SCHOOL'S RESPONSE?

If you believe our school hasn't complied with child protection legislation or our student protection policy you can, in the first instance, speak with a Student Protection Officer or Principal/Head of School, or you can make a complaint to the Chair of the School Council/Board, the Executive Director of the Anglican Schools Commission, or the Director of Professional Standards (ACSQ). Information about: the Chair can be obtained from our School; the Anglican Schools Commission through [ascqld.org](http://ascqld.org); or the Director of Professional Standards through [anglicanchurchsq.org.au](http://anglicanchurchsq.org.au).



## FURTHER INFORMATION

Information about child protection and support services is also available from the following sites:

Child Safety Services at

<https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/childsafety/child-safety-services>

Domestic and family violence support services at

<https://www.qld.gov.au/community/getting-support-health-social-issue/domestic-family-violence/>

Family and Child Connect on 13 32 64 or at

<http://www.familychildconnect.org.au/index.asp>

Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800 or at

<https://kidshelpline.com.au>

Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner at

<https://www.esafety.gov.au/>

OnePlace Community Services Directory at

<https://www.oneplace.org.au>

ParentLine on 1300 30 1300 or at

<https://www.parentline.com.au>

Queensland Family and Child Commission at

<http://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au>



This Parent Guide was published by the Anglican Schools Commission, Diocese of Brisbane (The Corporation of the Synod of the Diocese of Brisbane - ABN 32 025 287 73) in **September 2018 as v1.0**. Should additional information, material or assistance be required please email the Anglican Schools Commission at [ASC@anglicanchurchsq.org.au](mailto:ASC@anglicanchurchsq.org.au) or write to GPO Box 421, Brisbane QLD 4001.

