



Student Protection: Information for Volunteers

1. Introduction

Catholic Education - Toowoomba is committed to the protection of children and young people and upholding their right to a safe and secure environment. In addition, staff members working within schools operated by the Diocese of Toowoomba have various legislative and policy obligations to report suspected abuse and harm to students, and inappropriate behaviour by staff members or volunteers.

To give effect to these requirements, staff members working within our schools are required to follow the *Student Protection Policy and Procedure*, which provides information and guidance around reporting suspicions of abuse, harm and inappropriate behaviour to students.

In Queensland, volunteers are not bound by the legislative mandatory reporting obligations, however it is the policy of the Catholic Education - Toowoomba that volunteers report an awareness or suspicion of harm or the risk of harm or inappropriate behaviour to a student by any person in accordance with this document.

This document seeks to clarify how volunteers contribute to the safety and well-being of students.

2. Guiding Principles

- The welfare and best interests of the child/student are paramount
- Every child/student has a right to protection from harm
- All adults have a responsibility to care for children and young people, to positively promote their welfare and to protect them from any kind of harm
- Sexual, physical, psychological or emotional harm to children/students by persons in positions of trust and authority is a serious matter
- Catholic Education - Toowoomba is committed to the implementation of child/student protection strategies and processes in our schools in accordance with legislative and church requirements
- All instances of known abuse or harm to a student will be referred to the Police and/or the Department of Communities, Child Safety Services according to statutory and Diocesan policy obligations
- Catholic Education - Toowoomba will respond immediately to any allegation or report of suspected or actual abuse or harm, or risk of harm to a student by another person or self harm by the student himself or herself
- Catholic Education - Toowoomba will seek to ensure that a person who honestly reports a student protection matter in good faith will not be disadvantaged for doing so
- All persons involved in situations where harm is suspected or disclosed must be treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect
- Catholic Education - Toowoomba will act fairly and reasonably towards a staff member or volunteer who is the subject of an allegation of improper conduct and will provide access to support services as appropriate
- Catholic Education - Toowoomba will support a staff member or volunteer who is the subject of a proven false allegation of causing harm to a student

- Support of the student and the staff member or volunteer against whom the allegation is made is assisted by ensuring:
 - confidentiality
 - transparency of processes and procedures
 - adherence to processes, both at the school and at the Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Education Office
 - reporting to and involving Police and or the Department of Communities, Child Safety Services
 - provision of appropriate emotional support and pastoral care
- Where there is any doubt about an allegation or report of abuse or harm to a student, the decision must be in favour of reporting the allegation

3. What are the types of Harm?

Harm includes any **significant** and detrimental effect on a child’s or a student’s physical, psychological or emotional well-being. It can be caused by physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse or neglect by a parent, caregiver or other person including staff members and volunteers at the school.

Children and young people being exposed to domestic violence situations can be harmed or be at risk of harm as a result. Harm can be caused by other children, students or young people by, for example, the use of electronic/cyber mediums, bullying, physical assault and problem sexual behaviour. Students can also self-harm.

Examples of signs for the specific types of harm you may see include:

<p>PHYSICAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facial, head, neck bruises or lacerations • Burns/scalds • Multiple injuries or bruises, especially over time • Fractures, dislocations, twisting injuries • Explanation offered by child not consistent with the injury • Repeated injuries with the same explanation e.g. “I fell off my bike” 	<p>NEGLECT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delay in achieving developmental milestones • Untreated physical problems • Poor personal hygiene leading to social isolation • Scavenging for/stealing food; lack of adequate school lunches • Self-comforting behaviour • Extreme seeking of adult affection • Flat and superficial way of relating 	<p>DOMESTIC VIOLENCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties in eating and sleeping • Regressive behaviour • Developmental delays • Child is over-protective of the mother • Abuse of siblings/parent
<p>EMOTIONAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to value self and others • Lack of trust in people • Statements from the child e.g. “I’m bad” or “I was born bad” • Extreme attention seeking behaviours 	<p>SEXUAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct or indirect disclosures of abuse • Age-inappropriate sexual behaviour and knowledge • Use of threats, coercion or bribery to force other children into sexual acts • Sexual themes/fears expressed in artwork, written work or play • Repeated urinary tract infections, especially in girls • Physical trauma to buttocks, breasts, genitals, lower abdomen, thighs • Unexplained accumulation of money/gifts 	

Examples of **inappropriate behaviour by staff or volunteers** you may see include:

- yelling at a student
- allowing a student to over-step rules
- discussing personal details of lifestyle of self or others
- making inappropriate personal comments about a student's behavior that may have a psychological impact on a student including targeted and sustained criticism, belittling or teasing
- using inappropriate locations or social isolation outside of the school's behaviour support policy as punishment
- any form of corporal punishment
- restraining a student for any purposes other than a student's actions causing imminent harm to self or others
- hitting or kicking a student
- holding a student
- pushing, pulling, shoving, grabbing, pinching or poking a student

4. How might a volunteer form a reasonable suspicion of harm or risk of harm?

"Reasonably suspects" means:

- a student reports or discloses information to a volunteer that leads the volunteer to suspect that the student has been harmed or is at risk of harm
- a student reports or discloses information to a volunteer that leads the volunteer to suspect that the student knows a student who has been harmed or is at risk of harm
- someone else gives a volunteer information that leads the volunteer to suspect that a student has been harmed or is at risk of harm (this information may come from a relative, friend, acquaintance of the student, or sometimes could be anonymous)
- a volunteer 's own observation of a particular student's behaviour or physical appearance, or knowledge of children generally, leads the volunteer to suspect that the student has been harmed or is at risk of harm

5. Summary of *staff member* reporting obligations

1. The requirement to report sexual abuse, suspected sexual abuse or likely sexual abuse of a student by another person in compliance with sections 366 and 366A of the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* (a category 1 mandatory report)
2. The requirement to report significant harm or risk of significant harm to a student, where there may not be a parent willing and able to protect the student from harm, to Child Safety Services under the *Child Protection Act 1999* (a category 1 mandatory report)
3. The requirement to report significant harm or risk of significant harm to a student caused by a staff member or volunteer to Police (a category 1 mandatory report)
4. The requirement to report staff member inappropriate behaviour - professional misconduct (a category 2 report)
5. The requirement to report staff member inappropriate behaviour - minor incidents (a category 3 report)

In addition, schools have processes for responding to concerns of student self-harm, and harm between students, with a focus on maintaining the safety of the students involved.

As noted above, volunteers are not bound by these legislative reporting requirements. However a volunteer may form a suspicion that a student has been harmed, or is at risk of harm or inappropriate behaviour, and in these circumstances it is important that the concerns are responded to immediately. See section 6 for the processes to follow in responding to these concerns.

6. What should a *volunteer* do if they have a reasonable suspicion of harm or inappropriate behaviour by a staff member or volunteer?

The primary concern is always the safety of the student. Therefore in responding to a student concern, safety should be the first consideration.

When receiving information directly from a student, it is important to:

- listen attentively, actively and be non-judgemental
- react calmly to the information the student provides
- reassure them they are not to blame
- provide pastoral support to the student and be aware of the privacy issues involved
- be honest about your responsibility to take action

Volunteers must not:

- react emotionally or make accusations
- seek any more information than is absolutely necessary
- ask leading or probing questions or put words in the student's mouth

When a volunteer becomes aware or reasonably suspects harm or risk of harm or inappropriate behaviour to a student by any person, or where there are any concerns whatsoever regarding a student, **the responsibility of the volunteer is to immediately advise the School Principal or the School Student Protection Contact.** Where the concerns involve the School Principal, the volunteer must contact the Catholic Education Office directly with their concerns. The volunteer may be required to provide a written account of their concerns, in order to accurately capture the information.

Once the concerns are received by the Principal, the Student Protection Contact or by the Catholic Education Office, the *Student Protection Policy and Procedure* reporting processes will be followed.

More information about these processes can be found at:
<http://www.twb.catholic.edu.au/Board/Pages/GuidelinesSP.aspx>.

Remember: “student protection is everyone’s responsibility”