

MATER DEI CHILD PROTECTION – Abuse, Grooming & Neglect Identification & Initial Notification Policy

All children have the right to be protected from abuse, maltreatment and harm.

Child abuse or maltreatment occurs when a child (being a person under the age of 16, or a young person (aged 16-17 years) has been subjected to:

- Sexual offence;
- Sexual misconduct;
- Physical assault;
- Psychological harm;
- Neglect; or
- Ill-treatment.

which has resulted or is likely to result in harm to the child's wellbeing.

Child abuse may involve ongoing, repeated or persistent abuse, or it may arise from a single incident. It is possible for a child to be maltreated by a parent/guardian, another adult person or another child who may or may not be older.

Mater Dei School is committed to providing a safe environment for all our students.

It is our policy that:

- All staff are trained with respect to identification of child abuse and relevant procedures;
- All suspected cases of child abuse are reported to the Department of Community Services (DoCS) and/or the Police;
- We maintain up-to-date procedures to assist staff in identifying and reporting child abuse;
- We work collaboratively with relevant external agencies that may be involved in child protection;
- We act immediately to ensure the safety of abused students; and
- We provide ongoing support and assistance to students who have been abused.

Indicators of Child Abuse (Maltreatment)

Children in need of care and protection may show indicators of harm and maltreatment in their school environment. The following indicators may assist staff who are concerned about children in their care:

- **Sexual Offence** - The term 'sexual offence' encompasses all criminal offences involving a sexual element that are 'committed against, with or in the presence of a child'.

These offences include (but are not limited to) the following:

- indecent assault
- sexual assault
- aggravated sexual assault
- sexual intercourse and attempted sexual intercourse
- possession/ dissemination/ production of child pornography or child abuse material
- using children to produce pornography
- grooming or procuring children under the age of 16 years for unlawful sexual activity
- deemed non-consensual sexual activity on the basis of special care relationships.

Indicators of a sexual offence include:

- Bruising or bleeding in the genital area;
 - Sexually transmitted diseases;
 - Bruising to breasts, buttocks, lower abdomen or thighs;
 - Child or child's friend telling you about it, directly or indirectly;
 - Describing sexual acts;
 - Sexual knowledge or behaviour inappropriate for the child's age;
 - Going to bed fully clothed;
 - Regressive behaviour e.g. sudden return to bed-wetting or soiling;
 - Self-destructive behaviour e.g. drug dependency, suicide attempts, self-mutilation;
 - Child being in contact with a known or suspected paedophile;
 - Anorexia or over-eating;
 - Adolescent pregnancy;
 - Unexplained accumulation of money and gifts;
 - Persistent running away from home; and/or
 - Risk taking behaviours including self harm, suicide attempts.
- **Sexual misconduct** - The term 'sexual misconduct' includes conduct that does not necessarily equate to a criminal offence.

There are three categories of sexual misconduct in addition to sexual offences:

- crossing professional boundaries - includes behaviour that can reasonably be construed as involving an inappropriate and overly personal or intimate relationship with, conduct towards, or focus on a child or young person, or a group of children or young persons.
- sexually explicit comments and other overtly sexual behaviour - sexualised behaviour with or towards a child (including sexual exhibitionism, inappropriate conversations of a sexual nature, comments that express a desire to act in a sexual

manner, unwarranted and inappropriate touching involving a child personal correspondence and communications (including emails, social media and web forums) with a child or young person in relation to the adult's romantic, intimate or sexual feelings for a child or young person, exposure of children and young people to sexual behaviour of others including display of pornography, watching children undress in circumstances where supervision is not required and it is clearly inappropriate), and

- grooming behaviour - Grooming is the means by which a person creates or exploits opportunities to safely engage in sexual contact with a particular child or children. Grooming behaviour typically involves a graduation from attention giving and non-sexual touching to increasingly more intimate and intrusive behaviour.

The types of behaviours that may lead to a suspicion of grooming would include:

- Persuading a child or group of children that they have a 'special' relationship, for example by spending inappropriate special time with a child, inappropriately giving gifts, inappropriately showing special favours to them but not other children, inappropriately allowing the child to overstep rules or asking the child to keep this relationship to themselves.
- Testing boundaries, for example by undressing in front of a child, encouraging inappropriate physical contact (even where it is not overtly sexual), talking about sex or 'accidental' intimate touching.
- Inappropriately extending a relationship outside of work (except where it may be appropriate - for example where there was a pre-existing friendship with the child's family or as part of normal social interactions in the community).
- Inappropriate personal communication (including emails, telephone calls, text messaging, social media and web forums) that explores sexual feelings or intimate personal feelings with a child.

An adult requesting that a child keep any aspect of their relationship secret or using tactics to keep any aspect of the relationship secret, would generally increase the likelihood that grooming is occurring.

Mater Dei School treats the commission of grooming behaviours on its premises, online, using school equipment or during its extra-curricular activities as conduct which threatens the safety of students and action must be taken as part of our child protection program. See our Detecting, Reporting and Addressing Grooming Behaviours Policy and Reportable Conduct of Staff, Volunteers and Others.

- **Physical assault** - Physical of a child includes any act by which a person intentionally inflicts unjustified use of physical force against a child. An assault can also occur if a person causes a child to reasonably fear that unjustified force will be used against them. Even if a person who inflicts, or causes the fear of, physical harm does not intend to inflict the harm or cause the fear, they may still have committed an assault if they acted recklessly (i.e. the person ought to have known that their actions would cause physical harm or the fear of such harm).

Assaults can include hitting, pushing, shoving, throwing objects, making threats to physically harm a child, injuries which are caused by excessive discipline, severe beatings or shakings, cigarette burns, attempted strangulation and female genital mutilation. Injuries include bruising, lacerations or welts, burns, fractures or dislocation of joints.

Hitting a child around the head or neck and/or using a stick, belt or other object to discipline or punish a child (in a non-trivial way) is a crime.

Indicators of physical abuse include:

- Bruising to the face, head or neck, other bruising and marks which may show the shape of the object that caused it e.g. belt buckle, hand print;
 - Lacerations and welts;
 - Drowsiness, vomiting, fits or pooling of blood in the eyes, which may suggest head injury;
 - Adult bite marks and scratches;
 - Fractures of bones, especially in children under three years old;
 - Dislocations, sprains, twisting;
 - Burns and scalds (including cigarette burns);
 - Multiple injuries or bruises;
 - Explanation of injury offered by the child is not consistent with the injury;
 - Abdominal pain caused by ruptured internal organs, without a history of major trauma;
 - Swallowing of poisonous substances, alcohol or other harmful drugs; and/or
 - General indicators of female genital mutilation e.g. having a 'special operation'.
- **Ill-treatment** - Ill-treatment captures those circumstances where a person treats a child or young person in an unreasonable and seriously inappropriate, improper, inhumane or cruel manner.

Ill-treatment can include disciplining or correcting a child in an unreasonable and seriously inappropriate or improper manner; making excessive and/or degrading demands of a child; hostile use of force towards a child; and/or a pattern of hostile or unreasonable and seriously inappropriate, degrading comments or behaviour towards a child.

- **Neglect** - includes either an action or inaction by a person who has care responsibilities towards a child. Neglect may be:

- Supervisory neglect where there is an intentional or reckless failure to adequately supervise a child that results in the death of, or significant harm to, a child, or an intentional or reckless failure to adequately supervise a child, or a significantly careless act or failure to act, that involves a gross breach of professional standards, and has the potential to result in the death of, or significant harm to, a child;
- Carer neglect is grossly inadequate care that involves depriving a child of the basic necessities of life: such as the provision of food and drink, clothing, critical medical care or treatment, or shelter;
- Failure to protect from abuse is where there is an obvious or very clearly unreasonable failure to respond to information strongly indicating actual or potential serious abuse of a child;
- Reckless acts (or failure to act) that involves a gross breach of professional standards, and has the potential to result in the death of, or significant harm to, a child.

Neglect can be an ongoing situation of repeated failure by a caregiver to meet a child's physical or psychological needs, or a single significant incident where a caregiver fails to fulfill a duty or obligation, resulting in actual harm to a child or where there is the potential for significant harm to a child.

Key indicators of neglect are:

- Low weight for age and/or failure to thrive and develop;
 - Untreated physical problems e.g. sores, serious nappy rash and urine scalds, significant dental decay;
 - Poor standards of hygiene i.e. child consistently unwashed;
 - Poor complexion and hair texture;
 - Child not adequately supervised for their age;
 - Scavenging or stealing food with a focus on basic survival;
 - Extended stays at school, public places, other homes;
 - Longs for or indiscriminately seeks adult affection;
 - Rocking, sucking, head-banging; and/or
 - Poor school attendance.
- **Psychological harm** - Psychological harm can occur where the behaviour of their parent or caregiver damages the confidence and self esteem of the child or young person, resulting in serious emotional deprivation or trauma. Psychological harm can include the exacerbation or aggravation of an existing psychological condition, such as anxiety or depression.

Although it is possible for 'one-off' incidents to cause serious harm, in general it is

the frequency, persistence and duration of the parental or carer behaviour that is instrumental in defining the consequences for the child.

This can include a range of behaviours such as excessive criticism, withholding affection, exposure to domestic violence, intimidation or threatening behaviour.

Indicators of psychological abuse or harm include:

- Constant feelings of worthlessness about life and themselves;
- Unable to value others;
- Lack of trust in people;
- Lack of people skills necessary for daily functioning;
- Extreme attention-seeking behaviour;
- Obsessively eager to please or obey adults;
- Takes extreme risks, is markedly disruptive, bullying or aggressive;
- Highly self critical, depressed or anxious;
- Suicide threats or attempts; and/or
- Persistent running away from home.

Managing a Student's Disclosure of Abuse

A student may disclose information about abuse or neglect privately to a staff member. Alternatively a child may make a public disclosure such as making a disclosure in class or to a group of other students.

Private Disclosure - If a student discloses a situation of abuse directly to a staff member their role is to reassure the student and support the student in their decision to disclose. The teacher must assure students that they have the right to feel safe and must listen actively to what the student is saying.

Disclosure of abuse can cause strong feelings in the person to whom the disclosure is being made. It is important for the staff member to be aware of, and control, their feelings.

Sometimes students may try and elicit a promise that a staff member not tell anyone about the disclosure. Do not make this promise.

The teacher is responsible for reporting the matter (refer to our Child Protection - Mandatory Reporting of Abuse & Neglect (NSW)) and is not responsible for investigating the matter.

Public Disclosure - It is possible that a student may start to disclose in class or with a group of other students. In this circumstance, a teacher should use a strategy of "protective interrupting" and:

- Acknowledge that you have heard the student and stop further disclosure whilst

- maintaining support and encouraging the student to discuss the matter in a more private situation;
- Quietly arrange to see the student as soon as possible away from other students; and
- Do not allow other students to ask questions and discourage them from making judgements.

Mandatory Reporting of Abuse & Neglect

Under the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW), in NSW all teachers and teacher assistants are Mandatory Reporters of child abuse (including physical, sexual or psychological/emotional abuse and/or neglect).

Abuse and neglect must be reported where a teacher or teacher assistant forms a belief, on reasonable grounds, that a child is at risk of significant harm from abuse or neglect.

For details of the process of mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect refer to our Child Protection – Mandatory Reporting of Abuse & Neglect Policy.

In addition to their obligation as Mandatory Reporters, all Mater Dei teachers and teacher assistants are required under Mater Dei Child Protection Policies to report all suspected cases of a sexual offence, sexual misconduct, physical assault, ill-treatment, neglect, or psychological harm.

Initial Reporting of Abuse

The identification of child abuse can be difficult especially where it is based upon the observation of multiple risk indicators that may often occur over a period of time.

Where a Mater Dei staff member suspects, observes or receives a report of **any** incident of student abuse/neglect, inclusive of those that may not meet the threshold of 'Reasonable Grounds that a Child is at Risk of Significant Harm', they **MUST** immediately make a report to the Assistant Principal, CEO/Principal or the Chair of the Board of Directors if the matter involves the CEO/Principal. This report is to be made on Part A Student at Risk Report. This Form can be accessed on the school website. Alternatively a copy can be requested via email or hard copy by contacting the Executive Assistant to the CEO/Principal. Hard copies will also be available for staff to access at various locations in the school.

Where a Mater Dei parent/guardian suspects, observes or receives a report of **any** incident of student abuse/neglect, inclusive of those that may not meet the threshold of 'Reasonable Grounds that a Child is at Risk of Significant Harm', they **are encouraged to** make a report to the Assistant Principal, CEO/Principal or the Chair of the Board of Directors if the matter involves the CEO/Principal. This report is to be made on Part A Student at Risk Report. This Form can be accessed on the school website. Alternatively a copy can be requested via email or hard copy by contacting the Executive Assistant to the CEO/Principal.

Where a Mater Dei student wishes to report **any** incident of abuse/neglect they **are encouraged to** make a report using either Part A Student at Risk Report or the Tell Someone Form. Students can access both Forms from the school website or as hard copies at various locations throughout the school (School Psychologist Office, Primary and Secondary Break Out areas, Pastoral Care Coordinator's office, School Reception). Students will be educated in all areas of self-advocacy, how to get help and who they can talk to in their Pastoral Program titled 'Right to Know'. In addition to this Mater Dei students will participate in training programs such as Speak Up (NSW Ombudsman) and Y-PEP (YWCA NSW).

Initial Action Following Disclosure

Upon receiving a Part A Student at Risk Report, the staff member leading the response (CEO/Principal, Assistant Principal, Chair of the Board) will be responsible for completing Part B, C and D of the Student at Risk Report.

Safety of students is paramount. Once disclosure has been made the Assistant Principal, or appropriate person, may consult with the school psychologist, as the particular circumstances demand, and will determine a strategy to ensure the student's immediate safety. This process must be documented (refer to the "Records" section below).

Allegations against a Staff Member / Volunteer/ Others

Where a matter that is subject to mandatory reporting also involves an allegation against a staff member or any person engaged by the school to provide services to children, including volunteers, it must also be reported to the NSW Ombudsman.

Allegations against a staff member or volunteer that are not subject to Mandatory Reporting because the child is not at "significant risk of harm" but still involves sexual misconduct (including child pornography) or "behaviour that causes psychological harm to a child" must also be reported to the NSW Ombudsman.

For details refer to our Child Protection – Reportable Conduct of Staff, Volunteers & Others Policy.

Ongoing Management Plan

Together with DoCS and/or the police the school shall develop and implement a management plan designed to provide ongoing support to the student who has been the subject of abuse or neglect. See Part C Student at Risk Report

Record Keeping

Where a staff member suspects child abuse but does not have enough information, written and dated records of their observations and concerns should be kept until reasonable belief is formed.

All verbal and written communications regarding child protection matters (including notes of observations, meetings and telephone calls) must be properly documented. The documented

records should include dates and times and enough detail to record key conversations, especially those relating to the student's disclosure.

The records of child protection matters at Mater Dei will be stored securely in the HR Filing Cabinet. An electronic spread sheet of all past and present Child Protection cases stored in the HR Filing Cabinet will be maintained and will only be accessed by the CEO/Principal, Assistant Principal, Director of Services and the EA to the CEO/Principal. A current hard copy of the spread sheet will be stored in the HR Filing Cabinet.

Confidentiality

Staff who have access to information regarding suspected or disclosed child abuse must keep such information confidential and secure and must not disclose this information unless required to do so as part of the ongoing investigation or by law.

Staff must not provide undertakings that are inconsistent with their reporting obligations under this policy. In particular, staff must not promise a student that they will not tell anyone about the student's disclosure.

Students and any other parties who become involved in the investigation (this may include other students) should be informed of the reporting process and be requested to maintain confidentiality.

Inappropriate disclosure will be subject to disciplinary action.

Employee Responsibilities

All Mater Dei employees are responsible to ensure:

- Reports of child abuse are made as soon as practicable to the CEO/Principal or Assistant Principal;
- They comply with their obligation for mandatory reporting of abuse or neglect;
- Confidentiality is maintained throughout the process;
- Immediate support is given to students making disclosures;
- Records of all verbal and written communication are maintained and stored securely;
- No attempts to investigate the incident are made; and
- Participation in training.

Signage

Posters of child abuse indicators, mandatory reporting processes and Department of Community Services (DoCS) contact details are displayed strategically in staff rooms within the school.

IMPLEMENTATION

This policy is implemented through a combination of:

- Development of risk identification and reporting procedures;
- The provision of counselling services;
- Staff training;
- Signage;
- Effective communication and incident notification procedures;
- Effective record keeping procedures; and
- Initiation of corrective actions where necessary.

DISCIPLINE FOR BREACH OF POLICY

Where a staff member breaches this policy Mater Dei School will take disciplinary action, including in the case of serious breaches, summary dismissal.

RELATED POLICIES/STATEMENTS

MATER DEI Child Protection Incident Management Overview Flow Chart

MATER DEI Child Protection - Mandatory Reporting of Abuse & Neglect

MATER DEI Child Protection – Detecting, reporting and Addressing Grooming Behaviours

MATER DEI Child Protection - Reportable Conduct of Staff, Volunteers & Others

MATER DEI Child Protection - Working With Children Checks

MATER DEI Child Safety Code of Conduct

MATER DEI Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

MATER DEI Student at Risk Report

MATER DEI Tell Someone Form

Approved at Leadership Team YES / NO / NA	Signed	Date
Approved at Board YES / NO / NA	Signed	Date
Staff Briefed YES / NO	Signed	Date
Review Date December 2018		