



Thomastown West Primary School motto is **Together Working on Pathways to Success**. At Thomastown West Primary School, we want every child to achieve their full potential and we know that parents share this goal. Thomastown West Primary School is committed to providing a safe, secure and stimulating learning environment for all students. We understand that students reach their full potential only when they are happy, healthy and safe, and that a positive school culture helps to engage students and support them in their learning. Our school acknowledges that student wellbeing and student learning outcomes are closely linked.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all staff and members of our school community understand the various legal and other reporting obligations related to child safety that apply to Thomastown West Primary School. The specific procedures that are applicable at our school are contained at Appendix A.

## SCOPE

This policy applies to all school staff, volunteers and school community members. It also applies to all staff and students engaged in any school and school council-run events, activities and services such as the Thomastown West Hub and Outside School Hours Care.

## DEFINITIONS

- **Physical abuse:** Physical abuse occurs when a child suffers or is likely to suffer harm from a non-accidental injury or injuries inflicted by another person. Physical violence can be inflicted in many ways, including beating, shaking, burning or use of objects.

Physical indicators include (but are not limited to):

- unexplained bruises, burns or welts
- fractured bones, sprains or dislocation
- cuts, grazes or scratches
- ligature or bite marks
- bald patches or hair missing in tufts
- missing or loosened teeth
- poisoning or medication overdose.

***Behavioural indicators include (but are not limited to):***

- inconsistent, vague or unlikely explanations of an injury
- wariness, fear or distrust of adults
- avoidance of physical contact
- disproportionate reactions or limited emotion displayed when hurt or threatened
- wearing clothing that is unsuitable for the weather conditions (to hide injuries)
- unexplained absences and decline in academic performance
- substance abuse, self-harm or suicide attempts.

- **Sexual abuse (including sexual exploitation):** A child or young person is sexually abused when any person uses their power over the child to involve that child in sexual activity. When parents or caregivers are unwilling or unable to protect a child from further abuse, it becomes a child protection concern requiring statutory intervention.

**Behavioural indicators include (but are not limited to):**

- wariness, fear or distrust of adults
  - avoidance of physical contact
  - hiding messages or reasons for outings from parents, friends, teachers
  - disproportionate reactions or limited emotion displayed when hurt or threatened
  - wearing clothing that is unsuitable for the weather conditions (to hide injuries)
  - unexplained absences and decline in academic performance
  - substance abuse, self-harm or suicide attempts.
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- **Family violence:** Family and domestic violence is any violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behaviour that occurs in current or past family, domestic or intimate relationships. This includes not only physical injury but direct or indirect threats, sexual assault, emotional and psychological torment, economic control, damage to property, social isolation and any behaviour which causes a person to live in fear. The term "family violence" encompasses violence that might occur between family members, such as violence between siblings or across generations, in addition to violence between partners. Use of the term family violence also reflects indigenous communities' preference for the term because it more accurately reflects extended kinship ties and how the impact of violence affects all members of a family.
  
  - **Emotional abuse:** Emotional abuse can feel as destructive and damaging as physical abuse, and can severely impact mental health. It's often used as a way to maintain power and control over someone. Emotional abuse may be accompanied by other kinds of abuse: sexual, financial or physical. However, it doesn't need to include other kinds of abuse to count as abuse; it's serious enough on its own to be a concern. Emotional abuse can involve any of the following:
    - **Verbal abuse:** yelling at you, insulting you or swearing at you.
    - **Rejection:** Constantly rejecting your thoughts, ideas and opinions.
    - **Gas lighting:** making you doubt your own feelings and thoughts, and even your sanity, by manipulating the truth. For more information on how gas lighting works, visit the National Domestic Violence Hotline.
    - **Put-downs:** calling you names or telling you that you're stupid, publicly embarrassing you, blaming you for everything. Public humiliation is also a form of social abuse.
    - **Causing fear:** making you feel afraid, intimidated or threatened.
    - **Isolation:** limiting your freedom of movement, stopping you from contacting other people (such as friends or family). It may also include stopping you from doing the things you normally do – social activities, sports, school or work. Isolating someone overlaps with social abuse.
    - **Financial abuse:** controlling or withholding your money, preventing you from working or studying, stealing from you. Financial abuse is another form of domestic violence.
    - **Bullying and intimidation:** purposely and repeatedly saying or doing things that are intended to hurt you
  
  - **Neglect (including medical neglect):** All forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.



- **Grooming:** The offence of grooming concerns predatory conduct undertaken to prepare a child for sexual activity at a later time. The offence applies where an adult communicates, by words or conduct, with a child under the age of 16 years or with a person who has care, supervision or authority for the child with the intention of facilitating the child's involvement in sexual conduct, either with the groomer or another adult. Grooming does not necessarily involve any sexual activity or even discussion of sexual activity – for example, it may only involve establishing a relationship with the child, parent or carer for the purpose of facilitating sexual activity at a later time.

## POLICY

All children and young people have the right to protection in their best interests.

Thomastown West Primary School understands the important role our school plays in protecting children from abuse including:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse (including sexual exploitation)
- Family violence
- Emotional abuse
- Neglect (including medical neglect)
- Grooming

The staff at Thomastown West Primary are required by law to comply with various child safety reporting obligations. For detailed information about each obligation, please refer to [Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#).

At Thomastown West Primary School we also recognise the diversity of the children and young people at our school and take account of their individual needs and backgrounds when considering child safety.

### Mandatory Reporting

Principals, registered teachers, school counsellors and psychologists, registered medical practitioners, nurses and all members of the police force are mandatory reporters under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic). At Thomastown West Primary School we believe that it is the responsibility of all staff onsite, including Educational Support Staff to notice and report concerns of child safety.

All mandatory reporters must make a report to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Child Protection as soon as practicable if, during the course of carrying out their professional roles and responsibilities, they form a belief on reasonable grounds that:

- a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical abuse and/ or sexual abuse, and
- the child's parents have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from harm of that type.

A mandatory reporter who fails to comply with this legal obligation may be committing a criminal offence. It is important for **all staff** at Thomastown West Primary School to be aware that they are legally obliged to make a mandatory report on each occasion that they form a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection and they must make a mandatory report even if the principal does not share their belief that a report is necessary.



At our school, all mandated school staff must undertake the *Mandatory Reporting and Other Obligations eLearning Module* annually. In line with our strong commitment to child safety, we also require all other staff to undertake this module, even where they are not mandatory reporters.

For more information about Mandatory Reporting see the Department's *Policy and Advisory Library: [Protecting Children — Reporting and Other Legal Obligations](#)*.

### **Child in need of protection**

Any person can make a report to DHHS Child Protection (131 278 – 24 hour service) if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection. At Thomastown West Primary School, we work closely with members of School Council to educate parents on the risk factors of abuse their legal and responsibilities to report suspected child abuse.

The policy of the Department of Education and Training (DET) requires **all staff** who form a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection to report their concerns to DHHS or Victoria Police, and discuss their concerns with the school leadership team.

For more information about making a report to DHHS Child Protection, see the Department's *Policy and Advisory Library: [Protecting Children — Reporting and Other Legal Obligations](#) and [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse](#)*.

At Thomastown West we also encourage all staff to make a referral to Child FIRST/The Orange Door when they have significant concern for a child's wellbeing. For more information about making a referral to Child FIRST/The Orange Door see the School Policy and Advisory Guide: Child Protection – Reporting Obligations.

### **Reportable Conduct**

Our school must notify the Department's Employee Conduct Branch (9637 2594) if we become aware of an allegation of 'reportable conduct'.

There is an allegation of reportable conduct where a person has formed a reasonable belief that there has been:

- a sexual offence (even prior to criminal proceedings commencing), sexual misconduct or physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of a child;
- behaviour causing significant emotional or physical harm to a child;
- significant neglect of a child; or
- misconduct involving any of the above.

The Department, through the Employee Conduct Branch, has a legal obligation to inform the Commission for Children and Young People when an allegation of reportable conduct is made.

Our principal must notify the Department's Employee Conduct Branch of any reportable conduct allegations involving current or former teachers, contractors, volunteers (including parents), allied health staff and school council employees.

If school staff become aware of reportable conduct by any person in the above positions, they should notify the school principal immediately. If the allegation relates to the principal, they should notify the Regional Director.



For more information about Reportable Conduct see the Department's *Policy and Advisory Library*: [Reportable Conduct](#).

### **Failure to disclose offence**

Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults (i.e. persons aged 18 years and over, our parents, carers and members of the School Council), not just professionals who work with children, have a legal obligation to report to Victoria Police, as soon as practicable, where they form a 'reasonable belief' that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under the age of 16 by another person aged 18 years or over.

Failure to disclose information to Victoria Police (by calling 000 or local police station) as soon as practicable may amount to a criminal offence unless a person has a 'reasonable excuse' or exemption from doing so.

"Reasonable belief" is not the same as having proof. A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds.

For example, a 'reasonable belief' might be formed when:

- a child states that they have been sexually abused
- a child states that they know someone who has been sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves)
- someone who knows a child states that the child has been sexually abused
- professional observations of the child's behaviour or development leads a mandated professional to form a belief that the child has been sexually abused
- signs of sexual abuse leads to a belief that the child has been sexually abused.

"Reasonable excuse" is defined by law and includes:

- fear for the safety of any person including yourself or the potential victim (but not including the alleged perpetrator or an organisation)
- where the information has already been disclosed, for example, through a mandatory report to DHHS Child Protection.

For more information about this reporting obligation, see the Department's *Policy and Advisory Library*: [Failure to disclose offence](#).

### **Failure to protect offence**

This reporting obligation applies to school staff in a position of authority. This can include principals, assistant principals and campus principals. Any staff member in a position of authority who becomes aware that an adult associated with their school (such as an employee, contractor, volunteer or visitor) poses a risk of sexual abuse to a child under the age of 16 under their care, authority or supervision, must take all reasonable steps to remove or reduce that risk.

This may include removing the adult (i.e. persons aged 18 years and over) from working with children pending an investigation and reporting your concerns to Victoria Police.

If a school staff member in a position of authority fails to take reasonable steps in these circumstances, this may amount to a criminal offence.



For more information about this reporting obligation, see the Department's *Policy and Advisory Library*: [Failure to protect offence](#).

### Grooming

Grooming is a criminal offence under the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic). This offence targets predatory conduct undertaken by an adult to prepare a child, under the age of 16, to engage in sexual activity at a later time. Grooming can include communicating and/or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent/carer.

For more information about this offence and reporting obligations see: [Protecting Children – Reporting and Other Legal Obligations](#).

### Making a Mandatory Report: Our Processes

Our school will follow the [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse](#) (Four Critical Actions) when responding to incidents, disclosures and suspicions of child abuse. Please refer to **Appendix A** for a detailed outline of the process, as explained for our students. Please refer to **Appendix B** for a detailed outline of the process, as explained for our staff.

All staff at our school who believe that a child is in need of protection, even if it doesn't meet the threshold required for mandatory reporting or the staff member is not a mandatory reporter, should in the first instance, speak to a member of the Wellbeing Team or should make the required reports to DHHS Child Protection and/or Victoria Police as necessary.

At our school Assistant Principal and Principal will be responsible for monitoring overall school compliance with this procedure.

Nothing in this procedure prevents a staff member or any other person from reporting to the relevant authorities if they form a reasonable belief that a child is at risk of abuse.

### Reporting suspicions, disclosures or incidents of child abuse

#### *Responsibilities of all school staff*

If a school staff member reasonably suspects or witnesses an incident of child abuse or receives a disclosure of child abuse, they must:

- If a child is at immediate risk of harm, separate alleged victims and others involved, administer first aid and call 000.
- Speak to a member of the Wellbeing Team or Principal Class Team as soon as possible, who will follow the [Four Critical Actions](#).
- Make detailed notes of the incident or disclosure using Compass and ensure that those notes are kept and stored securely as a Confidential Note. See Appendix C for support.
- If the staff member is a mandatory reporter and reasonably believes that a student has suffered physical and/or sexual abuse from which the child's parents have not protected the child, they must ensure that a report to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police has been made by member of the Wellbeing Team or a Principal Class member. If the report has not been made by another staff member, the mandatory reporter must make the report.



- If the staff member has formed a 'reasonable belief' that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child, they must ensure that a report to Victoria Police has been made by a member of the Wellbeing Team or a Principal Class member. If the report has not been made by another staff member, the staff member must make the report.

In circumstances where a member of the leadership team disagrees that a report needs to be made, but the staff member has formed a 'reasonable belief' that the child is in need of protection and/or has been the victim of sexual abuse, the staff member must still contact DHHS Child Protection and/or Victoria Police to make the report.

### **Responsibilities of Wellbeing and Principal Class members**

The Wellbeing Team and Principal Class Team are responsible for promptly managing the school's response to an incident, suspicion or disclosure of child abuse, and ensuring that the incident, suspicion or disclosure is taken seriously. The Wellbeing Team and Principal Class Team is also responsible for responding appropriately to a child who makes or is affected by an allegation of child abuse.

If the Wellbeing Team and/or Principal Class Team receives a report from a school staff member or member of the school community of a suspicion, disclosure or incident of child abuse, they must:

- Follow the [Four Critical Actions](#) as soon as possible, including:
  - Responding to an emergency
  - Reporting to authorities/referring to services
  - Contacting parents/carers and
  - Providing ongoing support.
- Make detailed notes of the incident or disclosure, including actions taken using the [Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: Template](#) as a guide and ensure that those notes are kept and stored securely on Compass as a Confidential Note They are also responsible for ensuring that any staff member who reported the incident, disclosure or suspicion to them also makes and keeps notes of the incident.
- At Thomastown West Primary School, the Wellbeing Team and Principal Class Team will be responsible for ensuring that there is a prompt response to the disclosure and that the child is appropriately supported.

If the principal/other nominated staff member responsible above is unavailable, our Leading Teacher and Learning Specialist will take on the role and responsibilities described in this section.

### **Duty of care and ongoing support for students**

Fulfilling the requirements in this procedure does not displace or discharge any other obligations that arise if a person reasonably believes that a child is at risk of abuse.

All staff have a duty of care to take reasonable steps to prevent reasonably foreseeable harm to students. All staff must ensure that the Wellbeing and Principal Class Teams are aware of any incidents, suspicions or disclosures of child abuse as soon as possible after they occur. This will allow appropriate supports to be put in place for the student affected.

### **For school visitors, volunteers and school community members**



All community members aged 18 years or over should be aware of their legal obligations – see *Failure to disclose offence* above, in this Policy.

Any person can make a report to DHHS Child Protection if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection. For contact details see the Four Critical Actions - <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/protect/FourCriticalActions/ChildAbuse.pdf>

There is no requirement for community members to inform the school if they are making a disclosure to DHHS Child Protection or the Victoria Police. However, where a community member is concerned about the safety of a child or children at the school, and where disclosure of that concern will not compromise any potential police investigation, the community member should report this concern to the principal so that appropriate steps to support the student can be taken.

### MORE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- Statement of Commitment to Child Safety
- Child Safety Policy
- Appendix A- Student Support Flow Chart
- Appendix B- Child Safety Reporting Process Flowchart
- Appendix C- Managing Disclosures: A Support Tool for Staff

### REVIEW CYCLE

This policy was last updated in September 2020 and is scheduled for review in September 2024.

### EVALUATION

- Appropriate written records of reports and disclosures will be logged on Compass using the Child Safety Reporting Template in Confidential notes on Compass.
- This policy will be reviewed as part of the Thomastown West Primary School four year policy review cycle.

<b>Date Implemented</b>	2016; 2020
<b>Author</b>	Principal Assistant Principal TWPS Wellbeing Team
<b>Approved By</b>	School Council
<b>Date Reviewed</b>	October 2016; September 2020
<b>Responsible for Review</b>	Assistant Principal
<b>Review Date</b>	17/09/2024
<b>References</b>	Victorian Government Schools Policy Advisory Guide

## APPENDIX A

### CHILD SAFETY RESPONDING AND REPORTING PROCEDURES AT THOMASTOWN WEST PRIMARY SCHOOL



#### Feeling Safe at School: A flowchart for students

I have the right to learn and feel safe at school

IF I feel **WORRIED** or **CONCERNED** about my **SAFETY**,  
or another person's **SAFETY**...  
**WHO CAN I TALK TO?**

Mrs Young  
or Mrs Allan

Mr P or Miss V

My classroom  
teacher

Mrs Sheehan or  
Mrs Najkoski



What happens next?

*The staff member you have spoken to will take further steps so that you and other students are safe*



**Sandi Young**  
Principal



**Terri Allan**  
Assistant Principal



**Mike Palfrey**  
Primary SWO



**Angel Yardis**  
SWO (Tues & Weds)



**Margot Sheehan**  
Leading Teacher



**Sally Nejkoski**  
Learning Specialist



## THOMASTOWN WEST PRIMARY CHILD SAFETY REPORTING PROCESS

**CALL 000 IF A CHILD IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER**

### FOR HELP OR SUPPORT CONTACT

Principal	Sandi Young	Ext. 202	Mob. 0408 355 885
Assistant Principal	Terri Allan	Ext. 203	Mob. 0414 384 672
Primary Welfare Officer	Mike Palfrey	Ext. 275	Mob. 0404205591
Student Wellbeing	Angel Vardis	Ext. 260	Mob. 0448 525 179 (Tues/Wed)

**Who must make a report if they believe a child is at risk?**

All TWPS staff

CRTs, psychologists  
Mentors, Counselors

Hub staff and  
volunteers

**What to report?**

You are obligated to report if you believe a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer significant harm as a result of:

- Physical injury
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional or psychological harm
- Neglect



**Sandi Young**  
Principal



**Terri Allan**  
Assistant  
Principal



**Angelique Vardis**  
Wellbeing Team  
Member Tues-Wed



**Mike Palfrey**  
Primary  
Welfare Officer



**Margot Sheean**  
Leading  
Teacher



**How?**

1. If you form a belief of suspicion that a child is at risk
2. Seek immediate consultation with the **Principal, Assistant Principal, Student Wellbeing Officer or Leading Teacher**
3. Depending on the nature of the disclosure or risk communicate with the following agencies:

DHHS (Northern Division)	1300 664 977
VIC Police (Mill Park)	03 9407 3333
DET Incident Support	1300 126 126
Employee Conduct Branch	03 9637 2595

**Who can support me?**

At Thomastown West Primary School at least one of the following staff members is to be consulted when a student has been identified as at risk  
Student Wellbeing Officer, Assistant Principal, Principal, Leading Teacher

**What happens next?**

**The Principal, Assistant Principal, Student Welfare being Officer or Leading Teacher will:**

- offer to support to the child
- decide, in accordance with legal requirements and duty of care, whether the matter should/must be reported to the police or Child Protection and make report as soon as possible if required,
- offer support to and engage with the family (where and when appropriate)
- offer support to you
- contact DET Security Services 1800 126126 (and Principal, Assistant Principal, Student Welfare Officer or Leading Teacher and/or other relevant agency) to notify them of a report
- complete necessary confidential documentation on Compass

**Outcome**

Report made to DHHS. It is recommended that the staff member who raised concerns completes the phone call with the Principal, Assistant Principal, Student Wellbeing Officer or Leading Teacher.

**Follow up**

Follow up will be directed by DHHS intake. Refer to FLOW CHART for more specific follow up procedure. Note follow up comments on Compass.

## APPENDIX C

### MANAGING DISCLOSURES: SUPPORT TOOLS FOR STAFF

#### Managing disclosures made by students

*When managing a disclosure you should:*

- listen to the student and allow them to speak
- stay calm and use a neutral tone with no urgency and where possible use the child's language and vocabulary (you do not want to frighten the child or interrupt the child)
- be gentle, patient and non-judgmental throughout
- highlight to the student it was important for them to tell you about what has happened
- assure them that they are not to blame for what has occurred
- do not ask leading questions, for example gently ask, "What happened next?" rather than "Why?"
- be patient and allow the child to talk at their own pace and in their own words
- do not pressure the child into telling you more than they want to, they will be asked a lot of questions by other professionals and it is important not to force them to retell what has occurred multiple times
- reassure the child that you believe them and that disclosing the matter was important for them to do
- use verbal facilitators such as, "I see", restate the child's previous statement, and use non-suggestive words of encouragement, designed to keep the child talking in an open-ended way ("what happened next?")
- tell the child in age appropriate language you are required to report to the relevant authority to help stop the abuse, and explain the role of these authorities if appropriate (for a young child this may be as simple as saying "I will need to talk to people to work out what to do next to help you").

*When managing a disclosure, you should AVOID:*

- displaying expressions of panic or shock
- asking questions that are investigative and potentially invasive (this may make the child feel uncomfortable and may cause the child to withdraw)
- record the discussion with the young person, either audio or video
- going over the information repeatedly (you are only gathering information to help you form a belief on reasonable grounds that you need to make a report to the relevant authority)
- making any comments that would lead the student to believe that what has happened is their fault
- making promises to the child about what will occur next or that things will be different given the process can be unpredictable and different for each child depending on their circumstances (instead reassure them that you and others will do your best to help).