



**Diocese of Toowoomba
Catholic Schools**

Student Protection

**INFORMATION FOR
VOLUNTEERS**



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Student Protection

PURPOSE

Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Schools are 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 Toowoomba Catholic schools have a number of legislative and policy obligations to report suspected abuse and harm to students, and inappropriate behaviour by staff members or volunteers towards students.

To give effect to these requirements, staff members working within Toowoomba Catholic schools are required to follow the **Student Protection Processes and Guidelines**, which provides information and guidance around reporting suspicions of abuse, harm and inappropriate behaviour to students. The Student Protection Processes and Guidelines includes

- processes for how Toowoomba Catholic Schools will respond to **harm**, or allegations of harm, to students
- a process for the reporting by a student to a stated staff member of behaviour of another staff member that the student considers is **inappropriate**, and how this information must be dealt with
- a process for reporting **sexual abuse** or **suspected sexual abuse** in compliance with the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006, section 366; and a suspicion of **likely sexual abuse** in compliance with the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006, section 366A; and
- a process for reporting a reportable suspicion under the *Child Protection Act 1999*, section 13E.

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

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- The welfare and best interests of the child are paramount.
- Every child 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.
- Toowoomba Catholic Schools will respond immediately to any allegation or report of abuse, harm or inappropriate behaviour towards a student.
- All instances of abuse or harm to a student will be referred to the Police and/or the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services according to statutory and policy obligations.
- All persons involved in situations where harm is suspected or disclosed must be treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect.
- Where there is any doubt about an allegation or report of abuse, harm or inappropriate behaviour to a student, the decision must be in favour of reporting the allegation.

What is abuse or harm?

Abuse is the action towards a student, harm is the consequence of that action.

Generally, the types of abuse can be summarised as listed.

**Sexual Abuse
Physical Abuse
Emotional and
Psychological abuse
Neglect**

These types of abuse can cause the following types of harm to a student.

**Physical harm
Psychological harm
Emotional harm**

Students can be abused, or experience harm from a number of sources. These include the following.

Person associated with the school

(staff member, visiting service provider, volunteer or another student at the school)

Family member/Relative of the student

(parent/carer, sibling, grandparent, other relative)

Other person in the community

(family friend, neighbour coach, tutor, stranger)

Self-harming by a student

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ABUSE AND HARM

Understanding abuse, harm and inappropriate behaviour

Sexual abuse of a student occurs where a person engages in sexual behaviour with a student, and

- the other person bribes, coerces, exploits, threatens or is violent toward the student; and/or
- the student has less power than the other person; and/or
- there is a significant disparity between the student and the other person in intellectual capacity or maturity.

Likely sexual abuse is where it is more probable than not that a student will be sexually abused in the future. One situation where a reasonable suspicion of likely sexual abuse could be formed is where grooming behaviours towards a student are identified.

Sexual abuse may not necessarily involve physical contact with a student, for example taking images of students. It is also important to note that sexual behaviour between students can be abusive.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Sexual activity between staff members and students

The involvement of any staff member or volunteer within a school in sexual activity with, or sexual exploitation of, a student attending that school is always to be regarded as sexual abuse.

It is a criminal offence to engage in sexual activity with a child aged 16-17 years of age if you are an adult who is in a position of care. This includes teachers, teacher aides, sports coaches and religious leaders. Penalties for this offence are up to 14 years in prison for single offence and life in prison for repeated offences.

SUSPICION OF HARM

Physical abuse

Physical abuse refers to non-accidental use of physical force against a child by another person that results in significant harm to the child.

Emotional abuse

Emotional or psychological abuse is the persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child which causes severe and persistent adverse effects on a child's emotional development.

Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to provide the basic physical and emotional necessities of life to a child such that the child's health and development are affected.

Harm

Harm includes any **significant** and detrimental effect on a child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing. It can be caused by physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse or neglect. Harm can be caused by a single act, omission or circumstance; or a series or combination of acts, omissions or circumstances.

Inappropriate behaviour

Inappropriate behaviour includes (though is not limited to) any behaviour, including words, towards a student that is contrary to what is required under Toowoomba Catholic Schools Code of Conduct, including the **Volunteer Code of Conduct**.

Forming a 'reasonable suspicion'

A reasonable suspicion of abuse or harm is a suspicion that would be formed by a reasonable person based on a reasonable view of the evidence available to them. In other words, a reasonable suspicion is an objectively justifiable suspicion that is based on specific facts or circumstances. When a reasonable suspicion of abuse, harm or inappropriate behaviour is formed, we must act.

Generally, the ways in which a volunteer may form a reasonable suspicion are as follows.



A student makes a direct disclosure about another person's behaviour.

A parent or any person reports information of concern about a student and/or another person's behaviour (this information may come from another student, relative, friend, acquaintance of the student, or sometimes could be anonymous).



Direct observation of abusive or inappropriate behaviour towards a student.

Relevant observations (appearance, behaviours, and situations) are witnessed, or other relevant firsthand knowledge is gained.

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SIGNS OF ABUSE

Recognising the signs of abuse, harm and inappropriate behaviour

Examples of signs for the specific types of abuse, harm and inappropriate behaviour you may see include, though are not limited to, are listed below.

PHYSICAL <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, for example, "I fell off my bike."	NEGLECT <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
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE <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	EMOTIONAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL <ul style="list-style-type: none">• inability to value self and others• lack of trust in people statements from the child, for example, "I'm bad." or "I was born bad."• extreme attention seeking behaviours
SEXUAL <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 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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 behaviour 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 plan 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

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REPORTING AND CONTACTS

Responding to and reporting concerns of abuse, harm or inappropriate behaviour

The primary concern is always the immediate safety and wellbeing 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 nonjudgemental
- 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 abuse, 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 may contact the Toowoomba Catholic Schools 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 Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office, the processes in the [Student Protection Processes and Guidelines](#) will be followed. Again, if there is any doubt, volunteers are encouraged to raise their concerns and seek guidance – student protection is everyone's responsibility.

School Student Protection Contacts

School Student Protection Contacts are nominated staff members to whom a student can raise a concern of abuse, harm or inappropriate behaviour. These roles can assist staff members and volunteers regarding any student protection concerns. Each of our schools has a minimum of two School Student Protection Contacts, who are readily identifiable through posters throughout the school. Volunteers are encouraged to seek guidance and support around any student concern.

REMEMBER: If there is any doubt, volunteers are encouraged to raise their concerns and seek guidance – student protection is everyone’s responsibility. Further information around student protection can be obtained by contacting school administration, or by directly contacting the Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office, Student Protection Team on 0409 306 827.

Toowoomba and surrounds schools

- Good Samaritan College
- Holy Name Primary School
- Mary MacKillop Catholic College
- Mater Dei Primary School
- Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School
- Sacred Heart Primary School
- St Anthony’s School
- St Joseph’s College
- St Mary’s College
- St Saviour’s College
- St Saviour’s Primary School
- St Thomas More’s Primary School
- St Ursula’s College
- St Francis Catholic College

Regional schools

- **Allora** | St Patrick’s School
- **Charleville** | St Mary’s School
- **Chinchilla** | St Joseph’s School
- **Clifton** | St Francis de Sales School
- **Cunnamulla** | Sacred Heart Primary School
- **Dalby** | Our Lady of the Southern Cross College
- **Goondiwindi** | St Mary’s School
- **Inglewood** | St Maria Goretti School
- **Millmerran** | St Joseph’s School
- **Mitchell** | St Patrick’s Primary School
- **Oakey** | St Monica’s School
- **Pittsworth** | St Stephen’s School
- **Quilpie** | St Finbarr’s School
- **Roma** | St John’s School
- **St George** | St Patrick’s Primary School
- **Stanthorpe** | St Joseph’s School
- **Warwick** | St Mary’s School
- **Warwick** | Assumption College
- **Tara** | St Joseph’s School



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