

# FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR VET & HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDERS

## Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

PROTECT



### YOU MUST TAKE ACTION

As an Organisation/Institution/University staff member, you play a **critical role** in protecting children\* in your care.

- You **must** act, by following the four critical actions, as soon as you witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a reasonable belief that a child has, or is at risk of being abused.
- You **must** act if you form a suspicion/reasonable belief, even if you are unsure and have not directly observed child abuse (e.g. if the victim or another person tells you about the abuse).

- You must use the relevant templates to keep clear and comprehensive notes.



\*A child or young person is defined as a person under the age of 18 years

### 1 RESPONDING TO AN EMERGENCY

If there is no risk of immediate harm go to **Action 2**.

If a child is at immediate risk of harm you **must** ensure their safety by:

- separating alleged victims and others involved
- administering first aid
- calling **000 for urgent medical and/or police assistance** to respond to immediate health or safety concerns
- identifying a contact person in your organisation for future liaison with Police.

Where necessary you may also need to maintain the integrity of the potential crime scene and preserve evidence.

### 2 REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed you **must** report all incidents, suspicions and disclosures of child abuse as soon as possible. Failure to report physical and sexual child abuse may amount to a criminal offence.

Q: Where does the source of suspected abuse come from?

#### WITHIN THE ORGANISATION, INSITUTE OR UNIVERSITY

##### VICTORIA POLICE

You **must** report all instances of suspected child abuse to Victoria Police.

You **must also** report **internally** to:

#### WITHIN THE FAMILY OR COMMUNITY

##### CHILD PROTECTION

You **must** report to DFFS Child Protection if a child is considered to be:

- in need of protection from child abuse
- at risk of being harmed (or has been harmed) and the harm has had, or is likely to have, a serious impact on the child's safety, stability or development.

##### VICTORIA POLICE

You **must also** report all instances of suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police.

You **must also** report **internally** to:

If you believe that a child is not subject to abuse, but you still hold **significant concerns** for their wellbeing you must still act.

This may include making a referral or seeking advice from Child FIRST (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support), or to DFFS Child Protection or Victoria Police.

### 3 CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

The relevant unit/staff member **must** consult with DFFS Child Protection or Victoria Police to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers. They may advise:

- not to contact** the parents/carer (e.g. in circumstances where the parents are alleged to have engaged in the abuse, or the child is a mature minor and does not wish for their parent/carer to be contacted)
- to contact** the parents/carers and provide agreed information (this must be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion).

### 4 PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

Your Organisation/Institution/University **must** provide support for children impacted by abuse. This should include a **Student Support Plan** developed in consultation with a Student Wellbeing professional/Counselling staff. Strategies may include development of a safety plan, direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals.

You **must** follow the **Four Critical Actions** every time you become aware of a further instance or risk of abuse. This includes reporting new information to authorities.

### CONTACT

#### DFFS AREA

North Division **1300 664 9777**  
 South Division **1300 655 795**  
 East Division **1300 360 391**  
 West Division (Rural) **1800 075 599** West Division (Metro) **1300 664 9777**

#### AFTER HOURS

After hours, weekends, public holidays **13 12 78**

#### CHILD FIRST

<https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/child-first-and-family-services>

#### VICTORIA POLICE

**000** or your local police station