



# Mountain District Community College

## *Child Safety- Responding and Reporting Obligations*

### *Policy and Procedures*

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to outline the procedures Mountain District Community College (MDCC) has in place to respond to complaints or concerns relating to child abuse and to ensure that all staff, board members and members of its school community understand and follow the various legal obligations that apply to the reporting of child abuse to relevant authorities.

#### **Scope**

This policy applies to complaints and concerns relating to child abuse made by or in relation to a child or student, school staff, volunteers, contractors, service providers, visitors or any other person while connected to the college (physical and online).

#### **Definitions**

##### ***Child abuse***

Child abuse includes:

- physical violence inflicted on a child
- sexual offences committed against a child
- grooming of a child by an adult
- family violence committed against or in the presence of a child
- serious emotional or psychological harm to a child
- serious neglect of a child.

The definition of child abuse is broad and can include student to student incidents and concerns, as well as behaviour committed by an adult.

##### ***Grooming***

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

##### ***School staff member***

For the purpose of this policy a college staff member includes volunteers, students on placement, or a contractor engaged by the college or its board to perform child-related work.

#### **Policy**

MDCC understands the important role our school plays in protecting children from abuse. It has a range of policies and measures in place to prevent child abuse from occurring at our college or during school activities. MDCC recognise the diversity of the children, young people, and families at

the college and take account of their individual needs and backgrounds when considering and responding to child safety incidents or concerns.

### **Information for students**

All students should feel safe to speak to any staff member to raise any concerns about their safety or any other concerns that they have.

If a student does not know who to approach at MDCC they should start by speaking with their class teacher or the Head of Wellbeing.

If a student feels unsafe, they can talk to any staff member, as outlined in the student handbook.

### **Identifying child abuse**

To ensure MDCC can respond in the best interests of students and children when complaints or concerns relating to child abuse are raised, all college staff must:

- understand how to identify signs of child abuse and behavioural indicators of perpetrators - for detailed information on identifying child abuse and behavioural indicators of perpetrators refer to [Identify child abuse](#).
- understand their various legal obligations in relation to reporting child abuse to relevant authorities.
- follow the below procedures for responding to complaints or concerns relating to child abuse, which ensure our school acts in the best interests of students and children and complies with both our legal and other obligations.

### **Procedures for responding to an incident, disclosure, allegation, or suspicion of child abuse**

In responding to a child safety incident, disclosure, allegation or suspicion, MDCC will follow:

- the [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#) for complaints and concerns relating to all forms of child abuse
- the [Four Critical Actions: Student Sexual Offending](#) for complaints and concerns relating to student sexual offending
- the Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy and Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy for complaints and concerns relating to student physical violence or other harmful student behaviours.

### ***School staff and volunteer responsibilities***

#### ***1. Immediate action***

If a college staff member witnesses an incident of child abuse, or reasonably believes, suspects or receives a disclosure or allegation that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused, they must follow the following steps:

- if a child is at immediate risk of harm, separate alleged victims and others involved, administer first aid (appropriate to their level of training) and call 000 for urgent medical or police assistance where required to respond to immediate health or safety concerns.
- notify a member of the Leadership Team, who will ensure our school follows the steps in these procedures.

- if the Head of Wellbeing is unavailable, please inform the Assistant Principal or Principal who will take on this role.
- if the concerns relate to the conduct of the Head of Wellbeing, notify the Principal or if the concerns relate to the Principal, you can notify the Chairperson of the school Board, who must then take on responsibility for ensuring our school follows these procedures.

*NOTE for college staff:*

If you are uncertain if an incident, disclosure, allegation, or suspicion gives rise to a concern about child abuse you must always err on the side of caution and report the concern to the Head of Wellbeing, Assistant Principal or Principal.

Refer to [Responding to a child safety disclosure](#) on how to respond to a disclosure of child abuse.

## **2. Reporting to authorities and referring to services**

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed, and relevant college staff have been informed, reports of suspicions and disclosures of child abuse must be reported to appropriate authorities. The Head of Wellbeing and/or the Principal will direct and support staff to make required reports in accordance with the [Four Critical Actions](#) as well as actions required under the Child Safe Standards Reportable Conduct Scheme.

The Principal must ensure:

- all relevant information is reported to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Child Protection, Victoria Police or relevant services where required
- all reportable Conduct allegations or incidents are reported by the Principal to the Commission for children and Young People (CCYP)– where a reportable conduct allegation is made against the Principal, the Board Chairperson must be informed who will then make a report to the CCYP.

*NOTE: In circumstances where staff members are legally required (see Appendix A) to report child abuse to DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police and they are unable to confirm that the information has been reported by another person at the school, the staff member who has formed the reasonable belief must still contact DFFH Child Protection and Victoria Police to make the report.*

If the staff member who has formed a reasonable belief that a child needs protection does not agree with the decision of the Head of Wellbeing or Principal not to report to DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police, the staff member should make the report regardless.

If a staff member believes that a child is not subject to abuse, but there are still significant concerns for their wellbeing, action must still be taken. This may include making a referral or seeking advice from Child FIRST or The Orange Door (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support), DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police.

## **3. Contacting parents or carers**

The Principal must ensure parents, guardians and carers are notified unless advised otherwise by DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police, or there are other safety and wellbeing concerns in relation to informing parents/guardians/carers.

For further guidance, refer to [PROTECT Contacting parents and carers](#)

#### **4. Ongoing protection and support**

The Principal and Head of Wellbeing must ensure appropriate steps are taken by the college to protect the child and other children from any continued risk of abuse. These steps must be taken in consultation with any relevant external agency such as DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police. Ongoing protection will also include further reports to authorities if new information comes to light or further incidents occur.

Appropriate, culturally sensitive and ongoing support must be offered and provided to all affected students. Ongoing support will be based on any available advice from, parents, guardians and carers, health practitioners, and other authorities (such as DFFH or Victoria Police) and may include referral to wellbeing professionals, development of a Safety Plan, Targeted Support Meetings, and, for student-to-student incidents, behaviour management and support measures.

#### **5. Recordkeeping**

The Principal and/or Head of Wellbeing will ensure that:

- detailed notes of the incident, disclosure, allegation or suspicion are taken using the [Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: Template](#) or the [Responding to Student Sexual Offending: template](#) including, where possible, notes by the college staff member to whom the incident, disclosure, or suspicion was reported
- detailed notes are taken of any immediate or ongoing action taken by the college to respond to the incident, disclosure, allegation or suspicion
- all notes and other records relating to the incident, disclosure, allegation or suspicion, including the schools immediate and ongoing actions, are stored securely in the Child Safety folder in a locked filing cabinet in the Principal's Office.

#### **School visitors and school community members**

All community members aged 18 years or over have legal obligations relating to reporting child abuse – refer to Appendix A for detailed information.

Any person can make a report to DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection. For contact details, refer to the [Four Critical Actions](#).

Members of the community do not have to inform the college that they are making a disclosure to DFFH Child Protection or the Victoria Police. However, where a community member is concerned about the safety of a child or children at the college, the community member should report this concern to the Principal so that appropriate steps to support the student can be taken

#### **Additional requirements for all staff**

All staff play an important role in supporting student safety and wellbeing and have a duty of care to take reasonable steps to prevent reasonably foreseeable harm to students.

Fulfilling the roles and responsibilities in the above procedure does not displace or discharge any other obligations that arise if a person reasonably believes that a child is at risk of child abuse. This means that if, after following the actions outlined in the procedure, a staff member reasonably believes that a child remains at risk of abuse, they must take the following steps:

- if they are concerned that the college has not taken reasonable steps to prevent or reduce the risk, raise these concerns with the Principal in the first instance, and report to the Chair of the Board if they remain unsatisfied.
- report the matter to the relevant authorities where they are unable to confirm that the information has been reported by another staff member

Staff must refer to Appendix A for further information on their obligations relating to reporting to authorities.

### **Communication**

This policy will be communicated to our school community in the following ways:

- available publicly on our school’s website
- included in staff induction processes and annual staff training
- included in volunteer induction processes and training
- discussed annually in staff briefings or meetings
- included in staff handbook
- a hard copy can be made available from the school administration upon request

The following Mountain District Community College policies are also relevant to this policy:

- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy
- Volunteer Policy
- Duty of Care Policy

### **Policy review and approval**

<b>Created Date:</b>	July 2022
<b>Consultation:</b>	Students, Staff and Board members
<b>Endorsed By:</b>	MDCC Board
<b>Endorsed On:</b>	
<b>Next Review Date:</b>	July 2023