



Reviewer	Last Approval Date	Next Review Date
LF	Aug 2022	2024

Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse Policy

POLICY STATEMENT, PRINCIPLES AND DEFINITIONS

The Principal at the school is the person nominated as being responsible for the review and updating of this policy and ensuring that all new staff members and the School community are advised as to its purpose and practices. This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis and updated as required by legislation.

Purpose

This policy is to assist school staff in the identification and notification of children who are being maltreated. It is intended to be used by all staff and is the responsibility of the Principal to act as 'guardian' to all the children and staff. This policy is a public document and is available to all members of the school's community.

Background

Western Australia has a system of mandatory reporting of suspected child sexual abuse. All staff at Margaret River Montessori School are in a position of special trust with respect to the students in their care. Staff must be mindful that the legislature recognises this position of authority and trust, and accordingly the law provides greater penalties for sexual offences committed by employees against students. It is unacceptable and illegal for staff to have any form of sexual contact with a student.

Existing staff are made aware of all updates to this policy and undertake annual training in this area, thus ensuring all staff are aware of their responsibilities. This policy is part of the induction of all new staff.

Child Safe Organisation Framework

The framework that underpins all practices (including this policy) at Margaret River Montessori School and ensures there is a strong focus on child safety and wellbeing is the *Child Safe Organisations WA: Guidelines* by the WA Commissioner for Children and Young People. The School also conducts an annual Child Safety Audit, assessed annually by the School Council which follows the Principles for Child Safety in Organisations of the Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians.

Underlying Principles

All students have a right to feel safe at school and whilst participating in school authorised activities. All staff are responsible for reporting concerns of neglect or emotional, psychological, physical or sexual abuse. Margaret River Montessori School is committed to the well-being of students. This commitment extends beyond the achievement of academic success to intellectual, physical, social and emotional development. Our school recognises the fundamental right of students to be protected from neglect and from physical, emotional or sexual maltreatment whether at home, at school or in the community. All staff need to be able to recognise the indicators of abuse and neglect, in order to take appropriate action. Staff need to be aware that the presence of one type of abuse or violence within a household may be a strong indicator of other types of abuse or violence within the same household.

Stakeholders

Our community expects schools to provide a safe, secure and pleasant environment for learning. Our community also expects the Principal to take every course of action to ensure that students are protected from abuse and neglect.

Staff are required to have the knowledge and skills to provide high standards of care and protection for the students. All staff must uphold this and all other policies of the School including the Staff Code of Conduct Policy.

Curriculum

MRMS has adopted the Keeping Safe Protective Behaviours Curriculum materials designed for each level of schooling. This comprehensive, realistic and developmentally and age-appropriate curriculum provides students with the opportunity to develop the essential knowledge, attitudes and skills that will enable them to manage their personal safety, report abuse, understand power in relationships and develop protective strategies, including seeking help (when, how and whom to tell when a boundary has been crossed). Staff are trained in the use of the curriculum materials.

Visitors, Volunteers, Contractors, Parents, Carers

- All parents, carers, visitors, volunteers of contractors must also agree to uphold this and other policies of the School including the Code of Conduct Policy for Parents, Carers, Volunteers, Visitors and Contractors.
- All visitors to the School are required to visit the Administration read, the Visitor Protocols and sign the Visitor Book to agree to the protocols.
- Regular visitors and volunteers are provided with the Child Protection Advice for Volunteers and Regular Visitors.
- Protective behaviours training for students, their parents and staff will be conducted on a regular basis.
- All volunteers, in any capacity and external providers must provide a working with children check (this does not apply to parents unless they are involved in overnight school camps) and/or a federal police clearance. Parents may be asked to sign a confidential declaration form as per the Duty of Care Policy.

Students

Students must abide by our Student Code of Conduct. This is taught to all classes at the beginning of each year and is also part of the induction of any new student to our school. All classes use the Student Code of Conduct when creating their class rule and guidelines or behaviour, and it forms part of our Behaviour Management processes (see Behaviour Management Policy).

Human Resources and Screening

All persons employed at the school must provide a Working with Children Check and a Federal Police Clearance prior to commencing work at the school. WWCC are renewed as per period of renewal required by WWCC (5 years). Federal Police clearances are to be provided every 3 years or as requested. Teachers will also be required to have current TRBWA registration, which includes a Federal Police Clearance, and renewed as required.

Persons convicted of sexual offences against children will not be employed by Margaret River Montessori School. Where an employee is not convicted, but is considered to have behaved in an inappropriate manner, disciplinary action will be taken. Legislation also requires that matters of serious improper conduct be reported to the Police and the TRBWA.

All recruitment practices make every attempt to assess commitment to the Staff Code of Conduct on the part of applicants.

Professional Development

All staff undergo annual professional learning on the recognition of grooming and child abuse and appropriate prevention practices and strategies. Records are kept of this and our annual Mandatory Reporting training in our Staff Register to ensure all staff are followed up. Staff also undertake review and professional learning around our Staff Code of Conduct at the beginning of very year as a minimum and also as needed throughout the year.

Provision of Information to Parents and Carers

Parents and Carers are informed about all of our child abuse prevention measures via our website <https://www.margmont.wa.edu.au/child-protection-and-wellbeing/> as well as via regular newsletter updates, Principal's Reports to our P&F Meetings and parent information sessions and workshops. Information to parents and carers includes our protective behaviours curriculum, the Staff Code of Conduct, Student Code of Conduct, Code of Conduct for Parents, Carers, Volunteers, Visitors and Contractors, and when, how and who to tell if they or their children have concerns about grooming, child abuse or any behaviour not permitted by any of the Codes.

Policy Statement

Everyone working in our school is responsible for the care and protection of the students. Everyone working in our school is responsible for reporting concerns of neglect or emotional, physical or sexual abuse.

This policy document explains the action to be taken by the School Council, the Principal and all staff members, to protect students in circumstances where abuse or neglect is suspected; or when allegations of maltreatment or assault are made against employees, students or other people in the community.

The following statement is used on our school website, in a variety of our communications and in all advertisements for recruitment of staff.

Margaret River Montessori School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people and expects all staff, volunteers and visitors to share this commitment. All recruitment practices include background checks to ensure the ongoing safety of our community.

Definitions

Child - A child is a person who is under 18 years of age. In the absence of positive evidence as to age, a child is a person who is apparently under 18 years of age.

Child abuse: Four forms of child abuse are covered by WA law and are defined by the Department of Communities:

1. Physical abuse occurs when a child is severely and/or persistently hurt or injured by an adult or caregiver.
2. Sexual abuse occurs when a child is exposed to, or involved in, sexual activity that is inappropriate to the child's age and developmental level, and includes sexual behaviour in circumstances where:
 - (a) the child is the subject of bribery, coercion, a threat, exploitation or violence;
 - (b) the child has less power than another person involved in the behaviour; or
 - (c) there is a significant disparity in the developmental function or maturity of the child and another person involved in the behaviour.
3. Emotional abuse occurs when an adult harms a child's development by repeatedly treating and speaking to a child in ways that damage the child's ability to feel and express their feelings. It also includes:
 - (a) psychological abuse - treating and speaking to a child in ways that damage the child's perceptions, memory, self-esteem, moral development and intelligence; and
 - (b) being exposed to an act of family and domestic violence.
4. Neglect is when children do not receive adequate food or shelter, medical treatment, supervision, care or nurturance to such an extent that their development is damaged or they are injured. Neglect may be acute, episodic or chronic.

Corporal punishment: Any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light; typically involving hitting the child with the hand or with an implement; can also include,

for example, forcing the child to stay in an uncomfortable position. It does not include the use of reasonable physical restraint to protect the child or others from harm [UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 8 (2006)]. 2022/05005 51 6 September 2022.

Margaret River Montessori School does not permit corporal punishment and other degrading punishments of students, or child abuse as a punishment or behaviour management tool. "This does not include, however, the application of force only to prevent personal injury to, or damage to or the destruction of property of any person (including the student)". {Education Reform Amendment Act (School Discipline), 1995}

Degrading punishment: Any punishment which is incompatible with respect for human dignity, including corporal punishment and non-physical punishment which belittles, humiliates, denigrates, scapegoats, threatens, scares or ridicules the child [UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 8 (2006)].

Grooming – Actions deliberately undertaken with the aim of befriending and establishing an emotional connection with a child, to lower the child's inhibitions in preparation for engaging in sexual activity with the child. For more information, see Staff Code of Conduct Policy.

What is the legislative definition of Child Sexual Abuse? Child sexual abuse includes sexual behaviour in circumstances where the child:

- Is the subject of bribery, coercion, a threat, exploitation or violence; or
- Has less power than another person involved in the behaviour; or
- There is a significant disparity in the development function of maturity of the child and another person involved in the behaviour.

What is the CPFS definition of Child Sexual Abuse (from the field worker guidelines)? The CPFS takes the position that sexual abuse involves the exposure of children and young people to inappropriate sexual activity by either forcing them to be involved in sexual acts; or witnessing the sexual activity of others, either by reading or viewing pornographic material or through direct observation.

GROOMING

Understanding Grooming Behaviour

Grooming in a child protection context refers to deliberate actions undertaken to engage in sexual activity with a child. It differs from sexual abuse in that it is primarily a preparatory activity occurring before abuse occurs, but is continued during and after the abuse to ensure the safety of the groomer.

Grooming is a subtle, gradual, and escalating process of building trust with a child and those around the child, both children and adults, with the express purpose of the sexual gratification of the perpetrator and generally involves engaging in sexual activity with the child. It is deliberate and purposeful and occurs both before and after the abuse. Abusers may groom children and supporting adults for weeks, months, or even years before any sexual abuse actually takes place. The grooming may occur in person or via cyber media.

In the early stage, a committed offender will employ grooming behaviour and because it is so subtle and gradual the child may not be aware of the actual abuse when it occurs and that it is wrong or harmful. The grooming occurs not only with the child but also with those supporting networks around the child which might act as a deterrent or

protective element. The perpetrator will invest significant energy and patience to minimise the risk of detection and exposure.

The groomer will employ manipulation, guilt, shame, bribery, coercion or exploit low self-esteem to psychologically manipulate the child and as a result the child becomes increasingly dependent on the groomer and increasingly alienated from protective elements including possible sources to disclose to. Plausible deniability is part of the strategy that the groomer employs to ensure that staff don't take seriously the possible disclosures of a child. This is a deliberate strategy employed to maintain the secrecy of the abuse, so that the abuse is concealed and to ensure the silence of the child.

The groomer will exploit vulnerabilities of the protective elements around the child, including parents and family circumstances, organizational and systemic weaknesses. Groomers are very adept at identifying anomalies, boundary ambiguities, and the lack of systemic awareness; at deflecting attention from their own actions and intentions.

While distinguishing between appropriate intent and inappropriate intent is very difficult, particularly for a child, it is essential that schools have very clear expectations and boundaries around behaviours so that there can be rigorous accountability when dealing with children.

Organisations must invest in increasing understanding around providing a safe environment for children and adults to challenge existing practice, to be able to raise concerns around unprofessional behaviour and to have a shared understanding of what a safe school is.

Grooming behaviour with children may include, but is not limited to:

- selecting, befriending a child and gaining his or her trust, exploiting the child's vulnerabilities;
- testing a child's boundaries through telling inappropriate jokes, roughhousing, backrubs, tickling, or sexual games;
- moving from non-sexual touching to "accidental" sexual touching. This typically happens during play so the child may not even identify it as purposeful, inappropriate touching. It is often done slowly so the child is gradually desensitized to the touch;
- manipulating the child to not tell anyone about what is happening. The abuser may use a child's fear, embarrassment, or guilt about what has happened. Sometimes, the abuser uses bribery, threats, or coercion;
- causing the child to feel responsible for the abuse. Children may not notice or may become confused as the contact becomes increasingly intimate and sexual.

Grooming behaviour with adolescents may include additional strategies, such as:

- identifying with the adolescent. The abuser may appear to be the only one who understands him/her;
- displaying common interests in sports, music, movies, video games, television shows, etc;
- recognizing and filling the adolescent's need for affection and attention;
- giving gifts or special privileges to the adolescent;
- allowing or encouraging the adolescent to break rules (e.g., smoking, drinking, using drugs, viewing pornography);
- communicating with the adolescent outside of the person's role (e.g., teacher, or coach). This could include, for example, texting or emailing the teen without the parents' knowledge.

In addition to grooming the child, the groomer will use deflection strategies to remain unchallenged. Some of these strategies may include where the perpetrator:

- promotes self and creates a reputation as caring, child-loving, competent, available, trustworthy, truthful;
- raises doubts about the motives, mental health, reliability of the child or anyone else who might approach support services with allegations;
- fosters dependency as someone the family can rely on; and positively represents child to others so as to be perceived as someone who would never harm the child.

Preventing or interrupting the Grooming process

Organisations unfortunately provide a vast array of opportunities for groomers to enact the grooming process. Some abusers have a particular preference for children within particular age bands and some studies have shown that groomers will take child focussed employment primarily to get access to a particular cohort of children.

At MRMS all staff members are accountable to the school Code of Conduct Policy as challenging boundary crossings and violations is one of the most accessible strategies to combat grooming behaviour.

Employees, other professionals and volunteers, and others, must have very clear understandings of the expectations around interactions with students and processes for reporting concerning behaviours. Where an employee is investigated for behaviours considered to be grooming, this will be reported to both the Director General of DES and the TRBWA (Standard 9).

Child safe recruitment processes are in place (see Human Resources Policy) as well as all required background checks (see Staff Contracts).

Cyber Predators

The internet is one of the main sources of communication for young people today. The popularity of various social media as well as chat rooms, discussion groups and interactive games makes them a very attractive place for predators as they can remain virtually anonymous whilst participating in a range of paedophilic activity. There are significant concerns in this area, and schools, parents and students need to be informed consumers of this space.

These quotes come from the NetAlert website:

"...paedophiles can socialise together, trawl for inappropriate content (such as child pornography) and easily make collections of this and distribute to others.

They can pretend to be people other than themselves and they find a sense of security by operating from the confines of their own homes.

Grooming children online with the intention to meet them in real life is an activity many undertake.

They often set up bogus email accounts and handles (a nickname for a person who uses the Internet) which protect their identity online.

*Children need to think carefully about a handle they choose. Handles such as *Angel-Babe*, *Sweet-Sixteen* and *SexyKid* appear harmless on the outset, however can attract the wrong attention. Paedophiles are often attracted to people with these types of names.*

Paedophiles can also erase the history of what they have done online from their personal computers, making it a lengthy and difficult task for authorities to charge them with an offence.

Paedophiles conduct numerous activities online, including:

- *swapping child pornographic pictures in chat rooms or through email or P2P networks;*
- *swapping children's personal information;*
- *participating in online communities with the intention to groom children for personal sexual gratification or to meet them in person;*
- *forming networks with other paedophiles;*
- *trading techniques on how to avoid the authorities."*

The *Criminal Code Amendment (Cyber Predators) Act 2006* is the legislation in Western Australia that protects children under the age of 16, or that the offender believes is under the age of 16, from an adult who uses electronic communications with the intent to procure the child to engage in sexual activity; or to expose the child to any indecent matter.

PROCEDURES FOR IDENTIFYING AND REPORTING CHILD ABUSE, GROOMING AND NEGLECT AT MRMS – What to do next?

The following procedures emphasise the staff member's role in the identification and reporting of child abuse, grooming and neglect.

Physical, emotional or psychological abuse, or neglect:

Teachers who have concerns that a child is being abused or neglected must inform the Principal or the School Chair (if it is not appropriate to discuss it with the Principal) and keep brief written, dated records of their suspicions or observations.

Anecdotal records and any other written information should be regarded as confidential and used in a professional manner. This information could be required at a later stage if legal action is forthcoming from any notification made.

(Please see appendix for indicators)

If initial concerns arise, the staff member may wish to discuss with the school educational psychologist and/or school nurse, any initial concerns they may have. These staff are available for consultation and support to both teachers and their students. If the issue concerns a school staff member, then the Principal can contact and discuss their concerns with the Co-ordinator of the Non-Government Schools Psychology Service, who has experience in these issues.

Once direct disclosure has been made, or a belief has been formed, the staff having knowledge of the situation **MUST** report the matter to the Principal.

Note: It is vital to remember that confidentiality is paramount and that disclosure of this information should only be discussed with those in the school who are required to know.

Staff cannot agree to a student's demands for confidentiality or requests that parents, police or other agencies not be informed, when the welfare or safety of the student or other students may be threatened.

All strong concerns for the welfare of the student believed maltreated by the parents/caregivers are discussed with the Department of Community Development or the Police Child Abuse Investigation Unit before advising the parents/caregivers and any further action. These agencies will then decide on the provision of advice to parents/caregivers and any further action. The police and the CPFS are available to provide advice on child abuse concerns and may be contacted anonymously if needed.

Note: Students aged 18 are legally considered adults and as such CPFS does not have a child protection mandate for them. Schools should contact the Police when aware of any assault or crime against a young adult. The Youth Legal Service is available for consultation.

Sexual Abuse and Grooming – mandatory reporting: What mandated reporters do/What non-mandated reporters do

In cases of suspected sexual abuse and/or grooming, **the teacher is the mandated reporter and is required to make a report to the Child Protection and Family Services through the Mandatory Reporting Service.** If the teacher concerned wishes, they may include the Principal and other relevant staff in discussions with the teacher in relation to a specific child prior to the teacher forming a belief based on reasonable grounds.

The Teacher **may advise the Principal** of the report, but there is no obligation on the teacher to do so.

Non-Mandated reporters which include all other school staff who are not teachers **will need to consult the Principal** prior to any report being made.

If, following a report, a family approaches the school to receive support for their child, any interview will be conducted with a minimum of 2 school members (eg. The Principal and one other) to provide support.

Note: It is important to remember that the focus of the meeting should be the welfare of the child.

Very important! To avoid interfering with any investigative process initiated by CPFS or the Police, the Principal or teacher must seek advice from CPFS or Police prior to informing the parent/carer of a concern of abuse or neglect.

In cases of child sexual abuse, the legislation provides protection for the person reporting. Disclosure of the reporter's identity or identifying information to parents or any other party can incur a fine of \$24,000 and two year's imprisonment. The Principal will arrange ongoing support for the teacher, the student and anyone else affected. The need for ongoing support is often necessary as the teacher will continue in their role with the student and the CPFS's role may continue for an extended period of time.

In cases where a former student, or the parent or guardian of a former student, makes an allegation about child sexual abuse at the school occurring before 2009, the Department of Communities – Child Protection Service is to be informed immediately.

The School Council ensures that breaches of any of the School's Codes of Conduct where there are reasonable grounds to suspect grooming, are reported to the Director General, as per the Emergency and Critical Incidents and Crisis Management Policy

Complaints Procedures

At any time a parent/carer, staff member or student of our School can make a complaint about another member of the school community. Staff, Parents/Carers and community members should use the Complaints Policy and Flow Chart and students should use the Student-Friendly Complaints Process. All are available on our School website and upon request.

Support for Victims

Victims of abuse and neglect will be supported by the School through an appropriate management plan formed in consultation with the Department of Child Protection and Family Services as well as the School Psychologist and AISWA Inclusive Education Consultant.

<https://margmontwa.sharepoint.com/Shared Documents/Administration/POLICIES AND PROCEDURES/Child Abuse Prevention/Preventing and Reporting Child Abuse Policy.docx>

Victimisation of staff, students, parents and carers for making an allegation in accordance with this policy is forbidden, including where the allegation is unfounded.

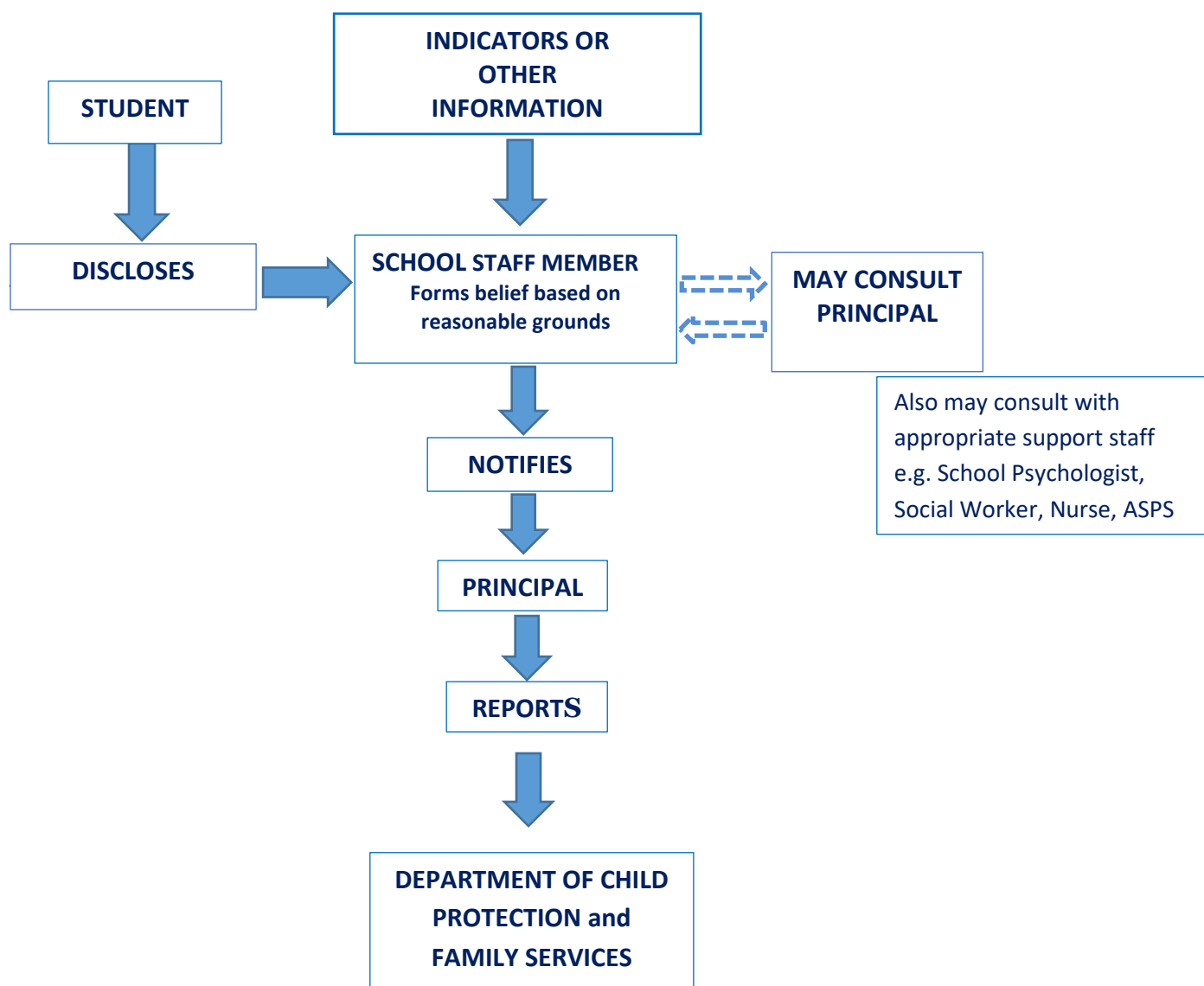
Responding to Allegations

The school responds appropriately to allegations of Staff Code of Conduct breaches, grooming and child abuse in the best interests of students. In all cases as above the following will occur:

- (a) The governing body and Principal comply with their legal and professional obligations;
- (b) In the case of an allegation of grooming or child abuse by current or former staff, the complainant is informed about the services, including advocacy and support services, which may be available.
- (c) Consultation is undertaken with the relevant government authorities to determine when, what and by whom information related to an allegation of child abuse and its investigation may be given to the person against whom the allegation is made, the complainant and his or her parents/guardian, other affected students and their parents and guardians, and the wider school community.

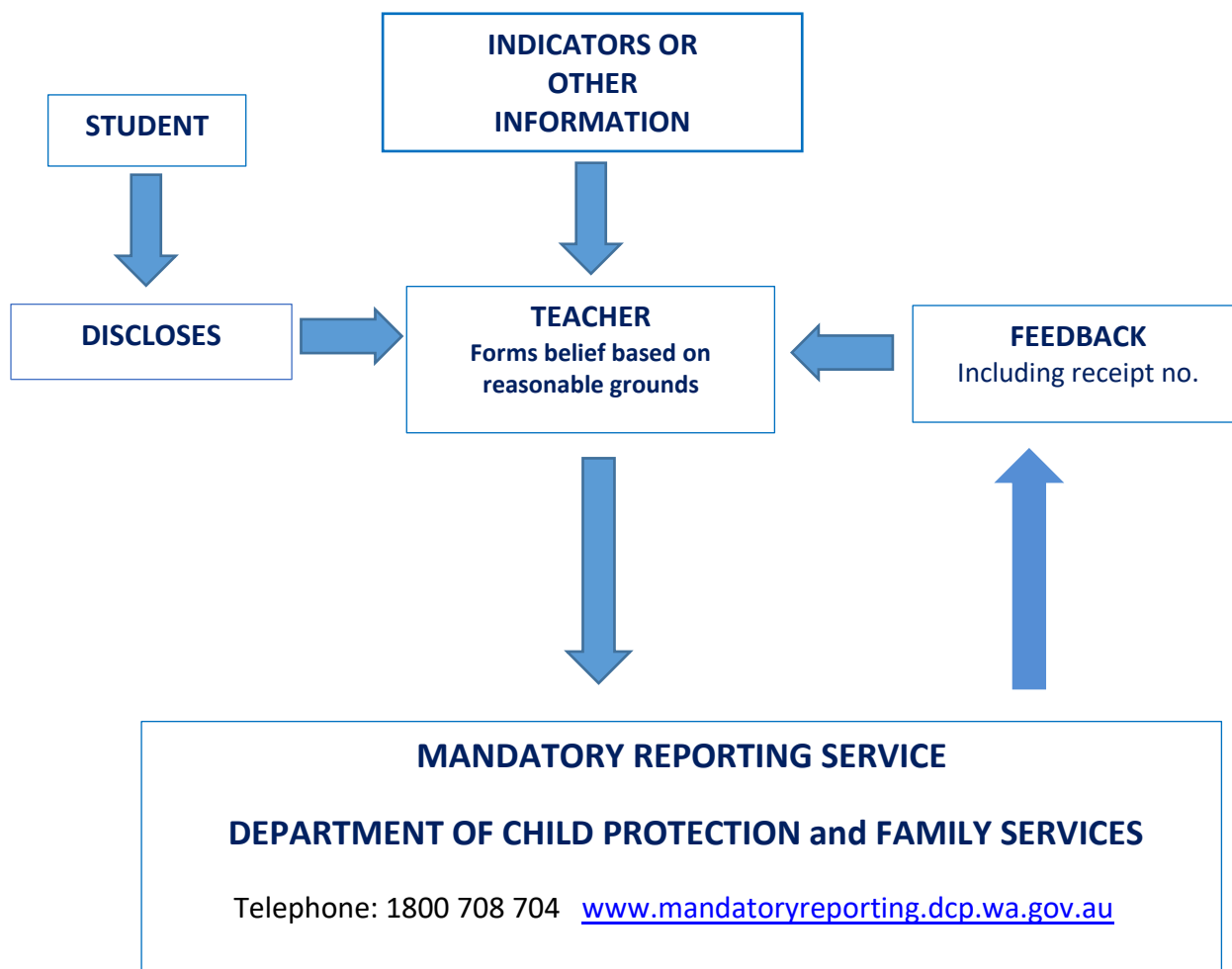
MRMS Reporting Procedures

**Reporting Flow Chart for Reporting of all forms of Abuse and Neglect
(other than sexual abuse)
(Non-Mandatory Report)**



MRMS Reporting Procedures

Reporting Flow Chart for Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Grooming (Mandatory Reporting Procedure)

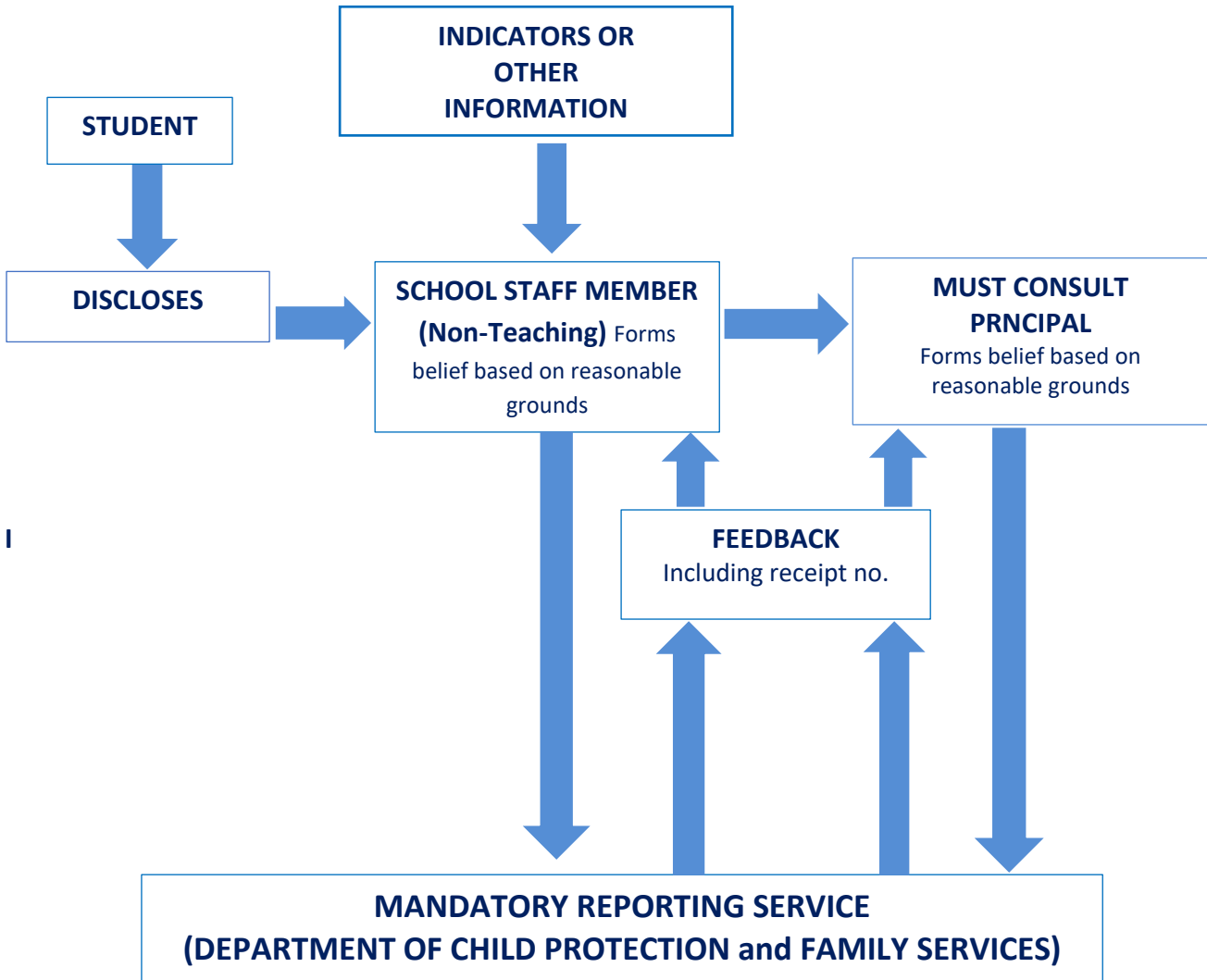


Please note that once a teacher has formed a belief based on reasonable grounds, they are required to make the report to CPFS, not the Principal. Prior to forming a belief, the teacher may, if they wish, consult with colleagues with specialist knowledge, for example, the principal, psychologist, school counsellor. The teacher may also wish to advise the Principal after they have made the report to CPFS.

If the Principal is aware of a mandatory report having been made or makes one herself it must be reported as a Reportable Incident to the Department of Education as per the Critical and Emergency Incident and Crisis Management Policy.

MRMS Reporting Procedures

Reporting Flow Chart for Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Grooming
(for Non-Mandatory Reporters)



Whoever has formed a belief based on reasonable grounds must make a report and that is when they have discharged their duties.

Review Schedules

Staff review of Code of Conduct – ALL Staff annually at staff development and or with follow up if absent

Child Abuse and Mandatory Reporting - All those covered under Codes of Conduct – All staff, School Council, P&F Committee and Class Mentors – must do online AISWA training annually, recorded in Staff and Volunteer Registers and followed up by Administration.

Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse Policy – with all new staff at induction and then again when policy is reviewed at staff meeting and via email.

Student Code of Conduct review with students – Annually at least with all classes, then again with any new student, and also in addition, when required e.g. before a camp or if an incident or topic arises.

Policy reviews – according to Policy Register, every three years at the most if not required sooner.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Response to disclosure of abuse, grooming or neglect

If a student makes a disclosure of abuse or neglect staff should be aware of the immediate needs of the student and know what to do in these circumstances. The following are suggested elements that should form part of the school policy and be discussed at staff training.

- Use 'protective interrupting' if students begin to disclose in class or in a public area to protect them from sharing the information with too many other people;
- Acknowledge that you have heard them and stop them from disclosing any further;
- Be supportive and gently indicate that they might tell you about it in a more private situation; and
- Quietly arrange to see them as soon as possible, in a situation away from other students.
- Establish clear limits on confidentiality by telling the child that a report will be made to a person who will be able to provide help and protection and that you will help them throughout the process;
- Put your own feelings aside and listen as if the information is not sensational;
- Provide reassurance that you believe them, that it is right to tell and do not think that they are to blame or make judgements about what has happened:
- Listen to students in a private location within the school;
- Be supportive and understanding;
- Be empathetic to student feelings;
- Acknowledge that it is difficult to talk about such things;
- Try to identify students' fears;
- Let students tell the event in their own words;
- If you are unable to answer all the questions of the child, it is OK to let them know;
- Once you have established that they have been harmed or are at risk of being harmed, do not pursue the conversation any further. This is important to ensure that questions cannot be raised later about possible manipulation of the disclosure;
- Allow students the option of support during any agency interview and reassure them of the availability of continuing support;
- Document the conversation that you have had remembering as accurately as you can, the words and phrases used by the child to describe what has happened to them;
- Document the disclosure and subsequent discussion and actions;
- Explain what will happen next; and
- Try and stay with the student after the disclosure to provide a sense of security until necessary steps have been taken to ensure the safety and support

Appendix 2

Where to go for information and assistance

The Department for Child Protection is the agency responsible for the new legislation regarding the mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse. The Mandatory Reporting Service has been established by the Department to receive and investigate reports of sexual abuse.

The Department for Child Protection has established a website www.mandatoryreporting.dcp.wa.gov.au. Information on this website includes frequently asked questions and a copy of the report to download.

The Mandatory Reporting Service can also be contacted through the following ways:

Telephone: 1800 708 704

Email: mrs@dcp.wa.gov.au

Fax: 1800 610 614

Post: PO Box 8146, Perth BC, WA 6849

Appendix 3

Indicators of Child Abuse and Neglect

The following list of indicators is not exhaustive but contains those that will be of most use to staff. This list has been taken from the Department for Child Protection document *"Identifying and responding to child abuse and neglect – A Guide for Professionals"*.

Students frequently show indicators from more than one category; and the examples listed are not necessarily exclusive to a single category of abuse. Any of these indicators may suggest that a student is being abused, neglected or at risk of harm; however, indicators should be considered in the context of the student's age, medical

and developmental history, and capabilities. In addition, mental illness, substance abuse and domestic violence within families must also be considered.

Physical abuse

- broken bones or unexplained bruises, burns, or welts in various stages of healing
- the child or young person is unable to explain an injury, or explanations given are inconsistent, vague or bizarre
- direct admissions from the parents that they are concerned that they might harm their child
- family history of violence
- marked delay between injury and obtaining medical assistance
- parent who shows little concern about the welfare of their child or the treatment and care of the injury
- repeated presentations of the child to health services with injuries, ingestions or minor complaints (this could also be an indicator of Factitious Disorder by proxy, a rare expression of physical and emotional abuse)
- the child or young person is unusually frightened of a parent or carer, or is afraid to go home
- the child or young person reports intentional injury by their parent or carer
- arms and legs are kept covered by inappropriate clothing in warm conditions
- ingestion of poisonous substances including alcohol or drugs
- avoidance of physical contact by the child (particularly with a parent or carer)

Sexual abuse

- sexualised behaviours inappropriate to their age (including sexually touching other children and themselves)
- knowledge of sexual behaviour inappropriate to their years
- disclosure of abuse either directly or indirectly through drawings, play or writing that describes abuse
- pain or bleeding in the anal or genital area with redness or swelling
- fear of being alone with a particular person
- child or young person implies that he/she is required to keep secrets
- presence of sexually transmitted disease
- sudden unexplained fears
- enuresis and/or encopresis (bed-wetting and bed soiling)

Emotional or Psychological abuse

- the parent or carer constantly criticises, threatens, belittles, insults, or rejects the child or young person with no evidence of love, support, or guidance
- the child or young person exhibits extremes in behaviour from overly aggressive to overly passive
- delayed physical, emotional, or intellectual development
- compulsive lying and stealing
- high levels of anxiety
- lack of trust in people
- feelings of worthlessness about life and themselves
- eating hungrily or hardly at all
- uncharacteristic seeking of attention or affection
- reluctance to go home
- rocking, sucking thumbs or self-harming behaviour
- fearfulness when approached by a person known to them

Neglect

- signs of malnutrition, begging, stealing or hoarding food
- poor hygiene: matted hair, dirty skin or severe body odour
- unattended physical or medical problems
- the child or young person states that no one is home to provide care (inadequate supervision, failure to ensure safety)
- child or young person appears constantly tired
- frequent lateness to school or absence from school
- inappropriate clothing, especially inadequate clothing in winter
- alcohol and/or drug abuse present in the household
- frequent illness, low grade infections or sores
- hunger

Myths about Child Abuse and its Prevalence

An accurate understanding of the dynamics underlying child abuse is important because the impact of any form of abuse on the victim can be life changing. Common outcomes associated with abuse include drug abuse, suicide, eating disorders, low self-esteem, psychosomatic illness and self-mutilation.

There are many myths about sexual abuse. Some of the common ones are:

- sex between children and adults is not damaging if it is in the context of a loving relationship;
- it is not the abuse which causes the problem but the effects of the intervention by others;
- those abused turn into abusers;
- children frequently lie about sexual abuse;
- sexual abuse is more common in lower socio-economic areas and families;
- only men sexually abuse children;
- sexual abusers are readily identified by 'normal' people.
- The following myths pertaining to sexual and other forms of abuse relate particularly to schools:
- there will not be a problem here because all the volunteers/employees are female;
- there will not be a problem here because the young people come from privileged backgrounds and will complain if there is an issue of abuse;
- if we get the selection procedures right we will eliminate the possibility of abuse;
- we use Police Clearances and Working with Children Checks here so we are covered;
- it is one of the other children's parents/brothers/sisters to whom I am entrusting the child/ren, so it will be OK;
- we did not need to screen Mr Smith because he is a friend of the teacher, president etc;
- my workers, volunteers and casuals are youth themselves so there is no risk;
- we are pretty good at identifying people here who are a bit 'odd'.

The Facts about Child Abuse

Children or young people are more often abused by a parent or carer. Adults who were abused as children are at greater risk of developing psychological and emotional problems later in life, and repeating the pattern of abuse with their own children.

A child abuser can be a member of the family (father, step-father, mother etc.) or someone close to the family or the child (church member, teacher, community group leader). A child abuser usually spends a lot of time grooming the child with the child being made to feel that they are in some way complicit in the acts, thus making disclosure a difficult process.

On the whole, abusers are the least obvious people in our community. Many child sex abusers, for example, hold positions of trust within the community with easy access to children and their families. Occupations that some

<https://margmontwa.sharepoint.com/Shared Documents/Administration/POLICIES AND PROCEDURES/Child Abuse Prevention/Preventing and Reporting Child Abuse Policy.docx>

convicted child sex offenders have held include bus driver, entertainer, teacher, scout leader, librarian, principal, church leader, judge.

A recent study carried out by Huddersfield University, UK found that 52% of children were sexually abused in community-based organisations. These included sports and voluntary groups and also private tuition classes.

In Australia, a case of child abuse is reported every 2.5 minutes.

Sexual abuse is more common among girls, other types of abuse are slightly more common among boys (Child Protection, Australia (2010 – 11), Australian Institute of Health and Welfare).

Two-thirds of substantiations for abuse or neglect are for children aged 9 years old and under (Child Protection, Australia (2010 – 11), Australian Institute of Health and Welfare).

Appendix 4 Circular from AISWA January 2018

*Please note that the Department of Communities – Child Protection and Family Support (DC-CPFS) have requested that all AISWA schools and their staff be reminded of the following **important information**.*

If a child discloses sexual abuse, it is imperative to follow the protocol of Mandatory Reporting to ensure the safety of the child. When a child or young person discloses to you it is important to believe him or her and reassure them that telling was the right thing to do. It is important to remember that while it is your role to be a supportive listener, **it is not your role** to question the child or investigate his or her claims.

What to do during the disclosure:

- Give the child or young person your full attention.
- Maintain a calm appearance.
- Reassure the child or young person it is right to tell.
- Let them take their time.
- Don't make promises you can't keep.
- **Do not interrogate or interview the child.**
- Tell the child or young person what you plan to do next.
- Do not confront the perpetrator.

Your role:

To report a **belief** and not investigate or find 'proof'.

Why not investigate?

Specialist child interviewers from the Department of Communities – Child Protection and Family Support and the Western Australia Police will conduct any necessary interviews with a child. It is important that the **Mandatory Reporter does not interview the child** to obtain information for several reasons:

1. We know that the child will have to re-live their experience once already with the interviewers and we do not want to increase their distress.
2. We know that the interviewers are specifically trained to ask questions in such a way that will elicit information while causing minimum distress.
3. Information deemed to be gathered from what could be seen as 'leading' questions may later hinder a CPFS investigation or a future court case.

The Mandatory Reporting Service role:

When you have submitted a report, the **Mandatory Reporting Service** will undertake an initial assessment regarding possible sexual abuse of a child. The assessment process could include reviewing, collating and evaluating information from existing sources, and contacting other professionals who may be working with the child. The assessment process may result in a decision to investigate. An investigation may include workers from the Department for Child Protection and Family Support and/or the Western Australia Police speaking with the child and the child's family or carers.

The Mandatory Reporting Service may contact you to ask further clarifying questions and request that you speak to parents or others in regards to any concerns raised.

Appendix 5

Relevant Documents to be read in conjunction with this policy:

Human Resources Policy

Duty of Care Policy

Staff Induction Checklist

Staff Handbook

Staff Code of Conduct Policy

Relevant legislation and Authority

The following Acts can be viewed at www.slp.wa.gov.au

- Children and Community Services Act 2004
- Children and Community Services Amendment (Reporting Sexual Abuse of Children) Act 2008
- Criminal Code Act (1913)
- Criminal Code Amendment (Cyber Predators) Act 2006
 - (changes to s204B of The Criminal Code)
- Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004

