
Procedures for Recognising and Responding to Child Abuse or Neglect

1. Purpose

- a) Victoria University of Wellington ('Victoria') has in place a Child Protection Policy which is intended to protect the safety and promote the wellbeing of children aged under 18 years who are receiving Children's Services from Victoria. That Policy is intended to give effect to the provisions of the Vulnerable Children Act 2014 as amended (the 'Vulnerable Children Act') and its related regulations, so far as they relate to situations where Victoria is providing Children's Services.
- b) The purpose of these Procedures is to set out the obligations and actions required of Victoria in relation to the identification and response to suspected child abuse and neglect.

2. Application of Procedures

- a) These Procedures apply to staff members and students who meet the definition of a Children's Worker.

3. Definitions

- a) The definitions set out in the Child Protection Policy apply to these Procedures.

4. Principles

- 4.1 The Child's safety is always the paramount consideration in the process for notifying abuse or neglect.
- 4.2 No decisions or actions taken in respect of suspected or actual child abuse or neglect should be made by any staff member or student in isolation unless there are concerns for the immediate safety of the Child.
- 4.3 A consultative approach is essential to ensure the safety of the Child and the staff member or student.

5. Responding to suspected child abuse

- 5.1 In cases where a staff member or student has a concern about a Child being or likely to be abused by an adult or another child, that staff member or student must report his or her concern to the appropriate supervisor or manager.
- 5.2 Staff members: report to an appropriate senior person in the Child's location and/or the staff member's Victoria line manager;
- 5.3 Students on placement: report to a senior person or supervisor in the Child's location and/or the University supervisor.

- 5.4 Where a staff member or student reports the matter to a University supervisor or manager, the supervisor or manager will immediately refer the matter to the Child Protection Co-ordinator (co-shared between the General Manager, Student Health and the Manager, Student Counselling) for action.
- 5.5 A referral to the Ministry for Children may be made at any time in consultation with the Child Protection Coordinator.

6. Child abuse – indicators, identification and responding to a disclosure

Note: (see [Ministry for Children e.g. Safer Organisations Safer Children](#) for further information about indicators of child abuse, identifying child abuse and responding to a child when the child discloses abuse)

- 6.1 Indicators are signs or symptoms that, when found either on their own or in various combinations, point to possible abuse, family violence or neglect. Indicators do not necessarily prove or mean that a Child has been harmed. They are clues that alert that abuse may have occurred and that a Child may require help or protection. These indicators may include:
- (a) Physical signs of abuse e.g. unexplained injuries, burns, fractures, unusual or excessive itching, genital injuries, sexually transmitted diseases; physical signs of neglect e.g. looking rough and uncared for, dirty, without appropriate clothing, hungry, underweight.
 - (b) Developmental delays of abuse or neglect e.g. small for their age, cognitive delays, falling behind in school, poor speech and social skills.
 - (c) Emotional abuse or neglect e.g. sleep problems, low self-esteem, obsessive behaviour, inability to cope in social situations, sadness/loneliness, evidence of self-harm.
 - (d) Behavioural concerns of abuse e.g. age-inappropriate sexual interest or play, fear of a certain person or place; behavioural concerns of abuse and neglect e.g. disengagement, neediness, eating disorders/substance abuse, aggression.
 - (e) The child talking about things that indicate abuse (a disclosure).
 - (f) Medical neglect e.g. persistent nappy rash or skin disorders, other untreated medical issues.
- 6.2 Every situation is different and it is important to consider all available information about the Child and their environment before reaching conclusions. For example, behavioural concerns may be the result of life events, such as divorce, accidental injury or the arrival of a new sibling.
- 6.3 Responding to a Child when the Child discloses abuse:

Listen to the Child	Disclosures by children are often subtle and need to be handled with particular care, including an awareness of the Child’s cultural identity and how that affects interpretation of their behaviour and language.
Reassure the Child	Let the Child know that they: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are not in trouble. • Have done the right thing.
Ask open ended prompts – e.g. “What happened next?”	Do not interview the Child (in other words, do not ask questions beyond open prompts for the Child to continue). Do not make promises that cannot be kept, e.g., “I will keep you safe now”.

If the Child is visibly distressed	Provide appropriate reassurance and re-engage in appropriate activities under supervision until they are able to participate in ordinary activities.
If the Child is not in immediate danger	Re-involve the Child in ordinary activities and explain what you are going to do next.
If the Child is in immediate danger	Contact the police immediately.
As soon as possible formally record the disclosure	Record: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word for word, what the Child said. • The date, time and who was present.

7. Recording suspected child abuse

7.1 If reporting suspected child abuse to a Victoria manager or supervisor, the Staff Member or Student should:

(a) Formally record:

- (i) Anything said by the Child;
- (ii) The date, time, location and the names of any Staff Member or Student that may be relevant; and
- (iii) The factual concerns or observations that have led to the suspicion of abuse or neglect (e.g. any physical, behavioural or developmental concerns).

(b) Make no decisions in isolation and do not act outside area of expertise.

7.2 The Victoria manager or supervisor should:

- (a) Immediately refer the matter to the Child Protection Co-ordinator, and
- (b) Record the action taken by Victoria and any other information that may be relevant.

Note: Relevant information can inform any future actions.

8. Notifying the Ministry for Children of suspected child abuse

8.1 The Child Protection Co-ordinator should notify the Ministry for Children promptly if there is a belief that a Child has been, or is likely to be abused or neglected.

8.2 A phone call is the preferred initial contact with the Ministry for Children (see below) as this enables both parties to discuss the nature of the concerns and appropriate response options.

- (i) Phone: 0508 Family (0508 326 459);
- (ii) Email: contact@mvcot.govt.nz

8.3 The Ministry for Children will make the decision to inform the parents or caregivers, in consultation with Victoria.

8.4 The Ministry for Children will advise what, if any, immediate action may be appropriate, including referring the concern to the Police.

8.5 The Ministry for Children is responsible for looking into the situation to find out what may be happening.

9. Storing relevant information

9.1 Records of concerns that arise can assist in identifying patterns. Notification may be based on an accumulation of concerns rather than a specific incident. The Victoria manager or supervisor should securely store all relevant information in the work unit and, where appropriate, with any earlier concerns. This information includes:

- (a) The record of the concern;
- (b) A record of any related discussions, including copies of correspondence, if any;
- (c) A record of any advice received (e.g. from the Ministry for Children or the police); and
- (d) The action Victoria took, including any rationale.

10. Allegations against a staff member or student

10.1 Any allegation against a Staff Member or Student will be investigated and addressed in accordance with Victoria's internal statutes, policies and procedures.

10.2 Any allegation against a contractor will be addressed in accordance with the terms of their contract with Victoria.

11. Contact Persons

11.1 Contacting the Child Protection Co-ordinator:

- (a) General Manager, Student Health, Ext. 6441; or
- (b) Manager, Student Counselling, Ext. 5310.

11.2 The following person may be approached on a routine basis in relation to these procedures:

- (a) Manager, Employment Law and Employment Relations, Ext. 5174.