

**Catholic Education, Diocese of Wollongong
has responded to pastoral and legal
responsibilities in the following ways:**

- Caring for children and young people by –
 - acting in their best interest and
 - taking all reasonable steps to ensure their protection
- Providing extensive professional development in child protection for staff. This includes:
 - pastoral responsibilities
 - legal requirements
 - identification of child abuse and risk of harm
 - reporting procedures
 - interagency cooperation
- Providing further levels of training for Principals and other key staff to equip them for their more demanding role in child protection
- Providing appropriate child protection education for students, according to syllabus requirements
- Implementing processes for comprehensive checks at the point of employment to ensure that those employed are fit and proper persons to work in a Catholic School
- Developing clear procedures for responding to complaints of improper conduct by staff
- Fostering a high degree of cooperation between all Catholic Church personnel who work closely with schools, including parish clergy and CatholicCare
- Renewing our commitment to work cooperatively with other agencies dealing with the care and protection of children and young people
- Exchanging information under the legislative provisions in NSW, with sensitivity and integrity

**How can school communities
work together to ensure that
students are protected?**

In all matters to do with the welfare of children the whole school community must work together cooperatively for the most effective outcome. In doing this, **the safety, welfare and wellbeing of students is given the highest priority in every preventative and protective action taken.**

It is only by working together to create a safe and pastoral environment that students may feel safe to disclose if they are at risk of harm.

The Catholic School accepts that it has a key role to play in today's society by assisting students and families with the pressing issue of child protection. Catholic Education and CatholicCare are committed to working closely with schools and families in dealing with these challenges.

We acknowledge the importance of supporting parents in their efforts to protect their children from abuse, by teaching children about personal safety. We also commit ourselves to maintaining the highest professional standards in working with families in responding to any child protection concern that may arise.

**What can parents do if they have concerns
about student safety at school?**

Any concerns should be raised with the Principal, or a teacher who is obliged to raise child protection matters with the Principal (on the parent's behalf).

If for any reason this is not possible parents should contact ⇒

Child Safety and Professional Services (CSaPS)
Catholic Education Diocese of Wollongong
Phone: 4250 9555
Email: childprotection@dow.catholic.edu.au

The Care, Wellbeing and Protection of Children and Young People



**INFORMATION FOR
SCHOOL COMMUNITIES
ABOUT CHILD WELLBEING
AND CHILD PROTECTION
IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OF
THE DIOCESE OF
WOLLONGONG**



CATHOLIC EDUCATION
DIOCESE OF WOLLONGONG

May 2022

A commitment to the protection of children and young people

The dignity of the human person is a central truth of the Gospel message of Jesus. In respecting the dignity of all human persons, Catholic School communities are called to ensure the welfare and safety of all of its members. The protection of the students entrusted to our care, then, is a very serious responsibility. In taking up this responsibility along with parents, who are recognised as the primary educators and carers of their children, Catholic School communities are committed to:

- ensuring that Catholic Schools have at their centre the total care of the whole student
- developing appropriate responses to individuals or families in crisis
- working collaboratively with other agencies involved in the care and protection of children
- inspiring hope and a positive vision for the future.

Who is responsible for the safety of children?

Whilst all agencies that deal with children have particular responsibilities for the protection of the children in their care, child protection is essentially the responsibility of **everybody**.

The NSW Government has adopted a policy that requires agencies that deal with children, including Catholic Schools to work in cooperation with each other for the overall protection of children, taking reasonable steps consistent with their function and expertise to coordinate child/family assistance.

Our child protection policy

- is based on NSW law
- meets the current professional expectation of schools in Australia, and
- reflects the pastoral responsibility of those who work in Catholic Schools.

Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Wollongong have a history of working collaboratively with *CatholicCare*, which is the social services agency in the Diocese of Wollongong. The Child Protection initiatives outlined in this brochure are a joint endeavour of Catholic Education and CatholicCare, and reflect the spirit of partnership that is essential to ensure the protection of children and young people in our care.

What is child abuse?

Child abuse is an offence. The *Children and Young Person (Care and Protection) Act, 1998* defines child abuse as:

- assaulting (including sexually assaulting) a child
- ill-treating a child
- exposing or subjecting a child to behaviour that psychologically harms the child.

The law empowers any person who *has reasonable grounds* to suspect a child or young person under 18 years is at risk of significant harm, to report the concern to NSW Family and Community Services (FaCS) *Child Protection Helpline*.

Various forms of child abuse and risk may be reported -

- **Sexual assault/abuse** is any sexual act or sexual threat imposed on a child or young person. It occurs when someone uses power over the child to engage the child/young person in sexual activity.
- **Physical abuse** is a non-accidental injury to a child/young person. It includes injuries that are caused by excessive discipline, severe beatings or shakings. These injuries may be seen as bruising, lacerations or welts, burns, fractures or dislocation.
- **Psychological harm/Emotional abuse** covers a range of behaviours that are persistent, repetitive and have a negative impact on a child/young person, or corrupting behaviour, or deliberately exposing to traumatic events.
- **Neglect** occurs where a child/young person is harmed by a failure to provide basic physical and emotional necessities - shelter, food, clothing, emotional security, affection, medical care, education and adequate supervision.
- **Carer concern** impacting on a child/young person. This may relate to significant **mental health** concerns with the parent/carer, **substance abuse** or **domestic violence**, which can have a profound effect on a child or young person.

School staff must ensure the Principal is informed as soon as practicable where there are concerns for the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a child/young person.

Mandatory Reporting*

- **NSW Law:** Any person working in the school in a professional or paid capacity has a duty to report current concerns that a **child (under 16 years) is at risk of significant harm** where there are *reasonable grounds* to suspect this. Such concerns are reportable to the *Child Protection Helpline*.
- **Diocesan schools policy:** Staff in Diocesan Catholic schools must report concerns regarding child abuse and risk of harm to the Principal. Where there are *reasonable grounds* to suspect a **child or young person (under 18 years) is at risk of significant harm**, it must be reported to the *Child Protection Helpline* following Diocesan guidelines.

Reasonable grounds

Reporting to the *Child Protection Helpline* is a serious action and the law states that the person reporting the matter must have *reasonable grounds* for making the report. It is not necessary for the person making the report to provide proof that abuse has or will actually occur; however, there must be some reasonable basis for suspecting risk of significant harm.

* Note

- **NSW Law (s316A, Crimes Act):** All adults are required to report child abuse to police unless there is a *reasonable excuse* not to report to police (for instance, the offence **already** has been reported to the FaCS *Child Protection Helpline*).
- **NSW Law (s43B, Crimes Act):** Penalties apply if an adult working in a position in a school organisation, knows another worker in the organisation poses a serious risk of abusing a student, and has the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, and fails to do so.