

RESPONDING TO SEXUAL EXPLOITATION FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

As a parent or carer, you play a crucial role in keeping all children and young people protected and safe from abuse. This includes knowing how to spot the signs of sexual exploitation and understanding how to best respond to this form of abuse.

WHAT DO I DO IF I SUSPECT MY CHILD IS AT RISK OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OR IS BEING SEXUALLY EXPLOITED?

Sexual exploitation is a real threat for all children and young people. Your child is not too young to be a victim and it can happen to children of any background. As a community we all have a shared responsibility to ensure that every child and young person is protected and safe from abuse.

As parents/carers you play a crucial role, not only in protecting and educating your own children, but also in working with your school to identify and respond to suspected abuse within the school community.

Child sexual exploitation can be hard to identify, however there are warning signs. It is critical that you are able to recognise the signs of sexual exploitation, as you may be the only adult in a position to identify and respond to this type of abuse.

These resources will help you spot the signs of sexual exploitation and provide you with guidance on how to best respond when you have concerns about your child being exposed to this type of abuse.

Sexual exploitation can be difficult to speak about with your child. Your child may be very reluctant to share information and disclose details about the abuse.

These sections include explicit descriptions of abuse and may be distressing to engage with for some staff members. If you need to talk to someone, it is recommended that you speak to your school leadership team about arranging appropriate support. You can also talk to your GP or another allied health professional. Government school staff can also contact the Employee Assistance Program on 1300 361 008.

When listening to your child make a disclosure about potential abuse, including sexual exploitation, it is important to avoid asking leading or intrusive questions. Your role is simply to receive the information in an unbiased way and to reassure your child that they no longer have to deal with the abuse alone. It is the role of the Victoria Police and other relevant authorities to investigate the concerns and identify the details of what exactly happened.

Some tips to remember when talking to your child:

- listen to your child and allow them to speak
- stay calm and do not display expressions of panic or shock
- use a neutral tone with no urgency and where possible use the child's language and vocabulary
- be patient and non-judgmental throughout
- highlight to your child that they are doing the right thing in telling you about what happened and that it is not their fault
- do not ask leading questions, but instead, gently ask "What happened next?" rather than "Why?"
- be patient and allow your child to talk at their own pace and in their own words
- do not pressure your child into telling you more than they want to
- reassure your child that you believe them and that disclosing the matter was the right thing to do
- use verbal facilitators such as "Okay, I see", restate your child's previous statement, and use non-suggestive words of encouragement, designed to keep your child talking in an open-ended way
- avoid going over the information time and time again (you are only gathering information to help you form a belief on reasonable grounds that you need to make a report to the relevant authority)
- tell your child you will need to seek support from the authorities to help stop the abuse, and explain the role of these authorities if appropriate

Questions you could ask your child are:

- "Can you tell me a bit more about that?"
- How do you feel when this happens?
- What do you mean by that?"

These sections include explicit descriptions of abuse and may be distressing to engage with for some staff members. If you need to talk to someone, it is recommended that you speak to your school leadership team about arranging appropriate support. You can also talk to your GP or another allied health professional. Government school staff can also contact the Employee Assistance Program on 1300 361 008.

WHAT ARE MY OBLIGATIONS?

As a community we all have a shared responsibility to ensure that every child and young person is protected and safe from abuse.

If you form a reasonable belief that your child (or another child) is being sexually exploited, or is at risk of sexual exploitation you must immediately report this to Victoria Police.

The Victorian Government has introduced new laws to protect children. If an adult fails to report suspected child sexual abuse, they can be charged with a criminal offence if it includes a:

- ***failure to disclose*** - where an adult (**applies to all adults not just professionals who work with children**) who has a reasonable belief that a child under the age of 16 years has been, or is at risk of being sexually abused by an adult, but fails to disclose this reasonable belief to the Victoria Police; or a
- ***failure to protect*** - where a person with requisite authority or control within an organisation (e.g. school) knew of a risk that an adult associated with the organisation may subject a child of the organisation to sexual abuse, and they negligently failed to reduce or remove the risk.

Various professionals including principals, teachers, doctors, nurses and police must report any reasonable belief that a child has been physically abused or sexually abused to the Department of Health and Human Services (Child Protection) if the parents/carers of the child are unable or unwilling to protect the child from harm of that type. This is known as the Mandatory Reporting obligation and arises whenever these professionals form a reasonable belief in the course of carrying out their duties or engaging in their profession or employment.

You should act even if you are unsure and have not directly observed the abuse. It is the role of the authorities to investigate, and your report may be critical in protecting the safety and wellbeing of the child or young person.

These sections include explicit descriptions of abuse and may be distressing to engage with for some staff members. If you need to talk to someone, it is recommended that you speak to your school leadership team about arranging appropriate support. You can also talk to your GP or another allied health professional. Government school staff can also contact the Employee Assistance Program on 1300 361 008.

WHERE CAN I GET SUPPORT?

If you are at all concerned about the possibility of your child being the victim of a sexual predator online or in person, please contact the Victoria Police for advice and assistance.

If you believe your child is in immediate danger, please phone 000.

Crisis Line 13 12 78 (after hours, weekends, public holidays).

USEFUL RESOURCES

PROTECT

For more information see www.education.vic.gov.au/Protect

SPEAK UP: UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO CHILD ABUSE

http://childwise.blob.core.windows.net/assets/uploads/files/SpeakUp_booklet_VIC.pdf

STUDENT SEXUAL OFFENDING

'Identifying and Responding to Student Sexual Offending' (PROTECT)

BULLY STOPPERS GROOMING FACT SHEET

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/bullystoppers/smgrooming.pdf>

SEXTING

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/bullystoppers/Pages/advice sexting.aspx>.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE AND REGULATION 'GROOMING' OFFENCE FACT SHEET

<http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/grooming+offence>

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE AND REGULATION 'FAILURE TO DISCLOSE' OFFENCE FACT SHEETS

<http://assets.justice.vic.gov.au/justice/resources/ea484f74-feb7-400e-ad68-9bd0be8e2a40/failure+to+disclose.pdf>

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE AND REGULATION 'FAILURE TO PROTECT' OFFENCE FACT SHEET

<http://assets.justice.vic.gov.au/justice/resources/790183f8-3ad0-41c4-bbc4-08d9a0bd8618/failure-to-protect.pdf>

These sections include explicit descriptions of abuse and may be distressing to engage with for some staff members. If you need to talk to someone, it is recommended that you speak to your school leadership team about arranging appropriate support. You can also talk to your GP or another allied health professional. Government school staff can also contact the Employee Assistance Program on 1300 361 008.