

Protecting Children from Abuse: For Families (Early Childhood)

A CRITICAL ROLE

As adults we all play a critical role in protecting children from harm.

As a parent/carer you have the primary responsibility for protecting and caring for your own children, and supporting them to develop their skills to build relationships that are safe and respectful.

You also play a critical role in identifying and responding to suspected abuse within the community. In fact, it may amount to a criminal offence if you fail to report suspected sexual child abuse committed by an adult.



REPORTING ABUSE

What should I do if I suspect that my child has been abused?

If you believe your child has been abused, or is at risk of being abused contact Victoria Police, immediately via the local police station. If it's an emergency call **000** immediately.

What should I do if I suspect that another child has been abused?

If you form a reasonable belief that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused, and the parents and carers of the child are unable or unwilling to protect the child from that abuse, you should report your concerns to the Department of Health and Human Services (Child Protection). It is their role to investigate your concerns and determine if any further action needs to be taken.

In addition, if you form a reasonable belief that a child under 16 years of age has been, or is being, sexually abused by an adult, you **MUST** report your concerns to the Victoria Police. You may be committing a criminal offence if you fail to do so.*

You should report even if you're not sure. It is the role of authorities to investigate your concerns and determine if any further action needs to be taken.

When is it a criminal offence to not report suspect abuse?

Any adult may face criminal charges if they believe that another adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 years of age and does not report this information to Victoria Police.

FACTS ON CHILD ABUSE

What is child abuse?

Child abuse:

- can include physical abuse, sexual abuse, grooming, emotional or psychological harm, neglect or family violence
- does not have to involve physical contact or force (e.g. child sexual abuse can include talking to a child in a sexually explicit way)
- can be committed by any member of the community, including someone within a child's family or someone within an early childhood or school setting.

The trauma associated with child abuse can significantly impact upon the wellbeing and development of a child. This is why it is critical that we all respond immediately to any form of suspected abuse within our communities.

TIPS FOR TALKING TO YOUR CHILD

- talk openly with your child about their feelings and relationships
- be sure that they understand you will listen and act if they have concerns about how anyone is treating them
- use the correct names for body parts and have age-appropriate conversations about touching and sexual activity
- let your child know that adults should never harm or act in a sexual way with any child.

What are the signs that a child has been abused?

There are a range of physical and behavioural indicators of child abuse. Some common signs include:

In an infant or toddler:

- rocking, head banging or other repetitive behaviours
- crying excessively or not at all
- listless and immobile
- significant delays in gross motor development and coordination.

In all children:

- physical injury that is not likely to be the result of an accident
- bruises, burns or welts (e.g. back, bottom, legs, arms and inner thighs)
- frequent urinary tract infections
- malnutrition and/or unattended health problems
- disclosure of abuse (e.g. by child, friend, family member)
- drawings or descriptions in stories that are sexually explicit and not age-appropriate
- persistent and age-inappropriate sexual activity
- wariness or fear of a parent, carer or guardian and reluctance to go home
- unusual fear of physical contact with adults
- wearing clothes unsuitable for weather conditions to hide injuries.*

Whilst the presence of one or more of these indicators does not confirm that a child has been subject to abuse, it is most important that you act if you notice anything that causes you to form a reasonable belief that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused.

**This is not an exhaustive list of indicators.*

For further information please visit [Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Early Childhood Services](#).

PROTECTING MY CHILD

What can I do to help educate and protect my child from abuse?

You should talk to your child in a way they can understand about feeling safe. Let them know that no one is allowed to threaten, hurt or touch them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable, or ask them to keep a secret from you.

You can demonstrate to your child that every relationship should be respectful and no one should behave in a way that makes them feel unsafe or afraid.

KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE OUTSIDE OF HOME

You play a critical role in ensuring your children are spending time in safe places.

In Victoria all regulated early childhood education and care services are required by law to ensure that all staff members within the service meet new Child Safe Standards, including the requirement that all staff have a valid Working With Children Check.

The Commission for Children and Young People has developed a clear tip sheet to support families on seeking child safe organisations (including informal settings like sports and music programs, camps etc.). To access this advice please visit: www.cryp.vic.gov.au/downloads/tipsheets/tipsheet-childsafe-org-5922.pdf.

It is important that you find help if you think that you or your children aren't safe from harm. Visit the Victorian Government's Better Health Channel for information on seeking support.

THE ROLE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

How do early childhood services respond to suspected child abuse?

Staff in Victorian early childhood services have a range of obligations to respond to any incident or suspicion of child abuse. As a parent/carer with a child in a Victorian early childhood setting, you can expect that services will follow the **Four Critical Actions** outlined below. These actions are recommended by the Victorian Government.

1. Responding to the emergency

Address any immediate health and safety needs (e.g. administer first aid or contact emergency services).

2. Informing authorities

Report any reasonable belief that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused to DHHS Child Protection service and/or Victoria Police.

Notify the regulator, approved provider and/or licensee.

3. Contacting parents and/or carers when appropriate

Contact parents/carers once authorities advise that it is safe and appropriate to do so.

4. Providing ongoing support for all children impacted by the abuse

Provide appropriate support for all children impacted by abuse, where this is appropriate (the level of 'appropriate' support will depend on the nature of the service).

These actions are outlined in further detail in **Four Critical Actions for Early Childhood Services: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse**.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Where can I go for more information and support?

You can contact DHHS Child Protection and Victoria Police directly to discuss any concerns you may have for the wellbeing of a child (see contact details)

If you have any concerns about your child or another child attending an early childhood service you can talk to a staff member at the service. You can also raise this matter with DHHS Child Protection and Victoria Police.

For further information on where to go for support to keep your children safe from harm visit the Victorian Government's *Better Health Channel*.

For more information on:

- The role of early childhood services in preventing and managing child abuse visit: www.education.vic.gov.au/protect
- Indicators of abuse visit: www.education.vic.gov.au/protect
- Reporting concerns that an early childhood service may have compromised the health, safety and wellbeing of children please visit: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation/Pages/complaints.aspx>

CONTACT NUMBERS

DHHS Child Protection

Area

North Division **1300 664 9777**

South Division **1300 655 795**

East Division **1300 360 391**

West Division (Rural) **1800 075 599**

West Division (Metro) **1300 664 9777**

After Hours

After hours, weekends, public holidays **13 12 78**

Child First

www.dhs.vic.gov.au

Victoria Police

000 or your local police station

Quality Assessment and Regulation Division

North Western

Loddon Mallee **(03) 5440 3111**

Northern Metropolitan **(03) 8397 0372**

South-Eastern

Gippsland Area **(03) 5127 0400**

Southern Metropolitan **(03) 8765 5787**

North-Eastern

Eastern Metropolitan **1300 651 940**

Hume **(03) 8392 9500**

South-Western

Barwon South West **(03) 5225 1001**

Western Metropolitan **(03) 8397 0246**

Grampians **(03) 5337 8444**

