CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

School Board Policy Number Thirteen
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Philosophical Basis

Message from His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the XXIV World Day of Peace:

"Let us give children a future of peace! This is the confident appeal which I make to men and women of good will, and I invite everyone to help children grow up in an environment of authentic peace. This is their right, and it is our duty." (1st January 1996).

"Children and young people are our present and our future. They have the right to grow and to develop their full potential physically, emotionally and spiritually. That potential is their families' and communities' responsibility to nurture and fulfill." (Excerpt from the Child Protection Council Charter, March 2005).

The South Australian Catholic Child Protection Council (referred to throughout this Policy as the Child Protection Council) has been established to promote and oversee the safety and wellbeing of children and young people within our Church community, in partnership with their families.

The provision of trusting and secure relationships is essential in enabling children and young people to thrive and become confident, compassionate and independent adults. Such relationships are consistent with the vision and values of the Catholic Church and are achieved by families and significant adults, in turn, being supported and nurtured. In this way, a foundation of emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing and security is achieved for our children and young people. This is our community responsibility and the responsibility of the Church.

This policy informs and directs all child protection guidelines and procedures at St Brigid’s Catholic School.

Mandatory Provisions

Children and young people have unique gifts and each requires different support to reach their potential.

For a child or young person to grow towards their full potential, it is necessary to provide them with a spiritual, emotional and physical environment that is enriching and safe.

St Brigid’s Catholic School shares the responsibility for this with the young child or young person’s family and the broader community.

All personnel in schools are Mandated Notifiers. Mandated Notifiers include anyone who works with or cares for children in a paid or voluntary capacity by providing children with health, welfare, education, childcare or residential services. Such people are legally obliged to notify the appropriate Child Protection Agency in the course of their paid or voluntary work, if they suspect on reasonable grounds that a child has been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected.

Although Mandated Notifiers have a legal responsibility to notify, everyone has a moral responsibility to report suspected child abuse or neglect. All school personnel (ie all teachers and all Education Support Officers and Volunteers), involved in or associated with the delivery of educational, health, welfare, child care or residential care services should participate in a training course for Mandated Notifiers of suspected child abuse and update their training every three years.

St Brigid’s Catholic School will review their guidelines and procedures every three years.

ALL St Brigid’s Catholic School staff have a legal and pastoral obligation:

- To listen to and treat children with dignity and respect, to act with propriety, provide a duty of care and protect children in their care.
- To notify the appropriate Child Protection Agency if, in the course of their work, they suspect on reasonable grounds that a child has been, is being or is at risk of being abused or neglected.
- To provide a physically and psychologically safe environment for children.
- To participate in training and development opportunities, which provide knowledge and skills in Mandatory Notification at least every three years.
- To teach children skills and understanding which will empower them to achieve and maintain personal safety.
- To assist children to develop positive, responsible and caring attitudes and behaviours which recognize the rights of all people to be safe and free from both harassment and abuse.
- To be guided by The South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools Child Protection Policy to further develop policies, practices and procedures for students of St Brigid’s Catholic School to:
- ensure a safe environment for children at St Brigid’s Catholic School.
- support children to gain confidence in their identity and develop their capabilities and strengths.
- respect the diverse and special needs of children.
- are sensitive and responsive to changes in behaviour which may be indicative of abuse.

• Provide training and development opportunities for all school staff to:
  - ensure they understand their obligations and responsibilities as mandated notifiers and develop appropriate procedures at their work site.
  - provide the skills, knowledge and understanding of personal safety programs for children and enable them to continually build on this.
  - assist them in their role as advocates, particularly on behalf of very young children.

• Develop partnerships between home, school and the wider community to:
  - promote safe environments for children wherever they are, based on effective communication.
  - promote community understanding of personal safety programs.
  - acknowledge and provide for diversity eg. cultural, special needs.

• Develop mandatory reporting systems which are clear and understood by all school personnel so that they:
  - are provided with clear information relevant to their employment.
  - establish support mechanisms at each site.
  - are able to participate in training and development ie. Mandatory Notification Training and refresher courses and Induction Programs.

• Provide Child Protection Programs which support children to:
  - develop knowledge, skills and understanding to achieve and maintain personal safety (ie Religious Education, Family Life Education, Child Safe Curriculum, Program Achieve, and Society and the Environment.)

Basis of Discretion

The Children’s Protection Act (SA) 1993 and its Regulations are the relevant legislative documents relating to the issue of child abuse.

- Schools are required to observe the agreed practices laid out in ‘Child Protection: Interagency Guidelines’ (1997).
- When School Principals, Deputy Principals, Teachers, Education Support Officers and other School Personnel, including volunteers, have suspicions of child abuse; these procedures are to help them carry out their obligations under the Act.

Procedures For Dealing With Child Abuse

Children’s Protection Act
• Under Section 11 (1) & (2) of the Children’s Protection Act 1993 Principals, Teachers and other School Personnel (including volunteers) are obliged by law to notify the appropriate Child Protection Agency if they suspect on reasonable grounds that a child (ie. person under eighteen years of age) has been, is being or is at risk of being abused or neglected.

Recognition of Abuse
The term ‘abuse’ refers to sexual, physical, emotional, psychological abuse and neglect.

The following definitions are used by Child Protection Agencies in determining whether child abuse has occurred:

Physical Abuse:
Any non accidental act inflicted upon a child, which results in physical injury to the child.

Sexual Abuse:
Any sexual behaviour imposed on a child including but not limited to sexual touching and violation, viewing sexually explicit material/ acts, text/SMS messages of a sexual nature, sexual innuendo and sexual jokes, songs or rhymes.

Emotional Abuse:
A chronic attitude or behaviour directed at a child, or a creation of an emotional environment, which is detrimental to, or impairs the child’s psychological and/or physical development.

Neglect:
Neglect refers to any serious omission or commission by a person that jeopardizes or impairs the child’s psychological, intellectual or physical development.
Legal Requirements

It is important to note that it is the role of the appropriate Child Protection Agency to determine whether abuse occurred – NOT SCHOOL PERSONNEL.

The Law requires school personnel to report reasonable suspicions of abuse. School personnel have reasonable grounds to suspect abuse and to contact the appropriate Child Protection Agency when:

• a child tells you when he or she has been abused;
• a child tells them he or she knows someone who has been abused (a child could possibly be referring to himself or herself);
• someone else tells them (eg. sibling, relative, friend, neighbour, or acquaintance of the child) that a child has been abused;
• their own observations of the child's physical condition and/or behaviour lead them to suspect that the child has been abused;
• other circumstances lead them to suspect that a child has been abused.

If in doubt, school personnel are advised to consult the Child Abuse Report Line as soon as possible (Ph 131 478 – 24 hour service).

5. When making a notification, school personnel must advise:
   • the child/young person's name, age and address.
   • the reason for suspecting that the injury to, or behaviour of, or the condition of the child/young person is the result of abuse or neglect the notifier’s assessment of immediate danger to the child or young person (information may be sought about the whereabouts of the alleged abuser/s).
   • what arrangements, if any, exist for the care and protection of the child/young person.
   • what involvement, if any, other agencies have in dealing with the abuse or neglect issues.
   • the notifier’s description of the injury, the behaviour or condition observed.
   • the current whereabouts of the child/young person. (The notifier is not required to have all of the above information in order to make a notification).

6. The onus to notify the appropriate Child Protection Agency rests with the person who suspects abuse.

7. When making a notification to the appropriate Child Protection Agency, school personnel must advise the Principal or a member of the Leadership Team of the notification (all Child Protection issues surrounding sexual abuse are reported to the Principal Consultant at the Catholic Education Office).

Notification Procedures

1. To consult and make a notification, phone the Child Abuse Report Line on 131 478 as soon as possible.
2. This is a 24 hour, 7 day a week line and can be rung from anywhere in the state for the cost of a local call.
3. The calls will be received by the Central Intake Team workers during business hours. At all other times the line is operated by Crisis Care staff.
4. Under Section 11(3) of the Children’s Protection Act, 1993, the school personnel making notification will be required to provide the appropriate Child Protection Agency with “a statement of the observations, information and opinions upon which the suspicion is based”. This can be done verbally.

Following the Child Protection Agency investigation, a number of interventions may occur, including, for example:

• counselling for the family and/or individual.
• referral to other agencies.
• emergency foster care to relieve the immediate stress on the family and remove the risk to the child the service of a parent aide (trained volunteer).
• practical assistance (eg. help with housing, finance, child care).
• an assessment that the student is safe and hence no further action.
• In all cases of sexual abuse, serious physical abuse, or serious neglect, the Police and the appropriate Child Protection Agency consult to determine the respective roles of the two departments.
• The Child Protection Agency gives priority to child protection matters.
Resources

• SACCs Child Protection Policy.
• Child Protection Interagency Guidelines.
• Interview of Students.
• Towards Healing.
• National Safe Schools Framework.
• St Brigid’s Catholic School Safe School Policy.
• St Brigid’s Catholic School Personal Responsibility Policy.
• Child Safe Curriculum

Evaluation

It is expected that the CHILD PROTECTION POLICY will be reviewed on a regular basis.

It is anticipated that this will occur every three years.

Appendix

• Mandatory Notification Record
• Notification Checklist: Education & Care