

# Guide to Managing a Disclosure of Child Abuse

- Stay calm and control expressions of panic and shock
- State clearly that the abuse was not the child/young person's – no matter what the circumstances
- Always accept what the child says, no matter how fanciful it may appear to you — let them know you believe them
- Allow the child/young person to talk at their own pace, and use their own language.
- Listen attentively and only ask open-ended questions. Avoid using leading questions, and remember: *you are not investigating the allegation.*
- Do not pressure the child/young person into telling you more than they want to.
- Encourage the child/young person to talk about their concerns, as this can be helpful in dealing with difficult experiences.
- Not all the information will be necessarily expressed in one conversation or discussion.
- Tell the child/young person you are pleased they told you.
- At some point in the disclosure ensure that you inform the child or young person that you cannot offer absolute confidentiality or protection. Do not make promises that you may not be able to keep.
- Take careful notes throughout, if appropriate, or very soon after the child/young person has left. Keep to the facts, and use the words as they were spoken to you. Note date, time and place.
- You may wish to stop the interview if you think it is better handled by another person or staff member, or if it is too stressful for the child/young person.
- 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 make a notification to Department of Human Services (DHS) Child Protection.
- DHS Child Protection and/or police are responsible for investigating the allegations after a notification to Child Protection has been made.
- This can be very stressful for staff involved in a disclosure with a child/young person. Staff do not have to cope on their own, and that support from the school leadership team and staff is available. Support can also be accessed through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) on phone 1800 337 068.

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- The resource *Protecting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, a joint protocol of the Department of Human Services Child Protection, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Licensed Children's Services and Victorian Schools* (the Protocol) is a comprehensive guide to mandatory reporting requirements that all school staff should be aware of

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/safety/childprotection/childprotection.htm>

### Examples of Open Questions.

- "When did this happen?"
- "What did the person do?"
- "Can you tell me a bit more about that?"
- "What did the person say?"
- "Have you told anybody else about this?"
- "Where did this happen?"
- "How do you feel when this happens?"
- "Has this happened more than once?"
- "What do you mean by that?"