



# CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

## INTRODUCTION

Thornlie Christian College, in seeking to meet its "duty of care" obligation to students, has developed the following policy to ensure that all stakeholders are familiar with the College's procedures and practices in relation to "Child Protection" and that the College is maintained as a safe environment for its students.

It may be said that everyone working in the College is responsible for the care and protection of the students and equally everyone working in the College is responsible for reporting concerns of neglect or emotional, physical or sexual abuse. Staff at TCC are required to be registered with WACOT and to obtain a WWCC card by the dates determined in the relevant legislation. TCC does not employ staff who have a criminal record relating to child abuse. TCC provides staff training in order to assist staff to detect and deal with child abuse.

Child abuse and neglect are defined as: maltreatment of a person under the age of 18 years. They are the result of action or inaction on the part of a person who has responsibility to care for a child that results in harm or injury to the child. *N.B For further definition of categories of abuse refer Appendix 1 Department Of Education - Regulatory Framework System 6*

## RATIONALE

Scripture clearly defines the importance of children and their protection from abuse or harm of any kind with dire consequences. Matthew 19:14, Luke 17:1-2. In the College context we maintain that all our community members have a right to feel safe at all times and that nothing is so awful that it can't be talked about with someone. A close network of pastoral care team leaders is provided to ensure that issues of this nature might be addressed to members of the College staff who are known and trusted by the student community.

## PRACTICE

**Step 1** The individual Teacher makes observations and keeps note of concerns that exist that have led them to the belief that a report may be necessary.

OR

A student discloses abuse or neglect of the types listed below:

- i. Disclosure of abuse or neglect from someone with a responsibility to care for the student;
- ii. Alleges sexual contact by staff;
- iii. Show indication of abuse or neglect;
- iv. Sexual contact by another student.

*Note: It may assist Teachers to think in terms of reporting a behaviour or a series of behaviours and concern/s rather than reporting an individual family.*

**Step 2** The Teacher's observations or the child's disclosure should be discussed, in the first instance, with the Principal, or the College Chair, if it is not appropriate to discuss it with the Principal.

It is not the role of the Teacher to investigate child abuse or neglect matters. They must report concerns to the Principal.

The Teacher and Principal may wish to consult with the College psychologist.

*Note: It is vital to remember that confidentiality is paramount and that disclosure of this information should only be discussed with those in the College who are required to know.*

**Step 3** In cases of *suspected sexual abuse*, the *Teacher* is the *mandated reporter required to make a report to the Department for Child Protection through the Mandatory Reporting Service.*  
(Tel 1800 708 704 Web: [mandatoryreporting.dcp.wa.gov.au](http://mandatoryreporting.dcp.wa.gov.au))

In cases of other forms of child abuse and neglect, the Principal may be the appropriate person who will then decide the appropriate actions to take and who should be contacted.

**Very important!** To avoid interfering with any investigative process initiated by DCP or the Police, the Principal or Teacher must seek advice from DCP or Police prior to informing the parent/carer of a concern of abuse or neglect.

### **Department of Child Protection (DCP)**

In cases of child sexual abuse the Teacher will provide a written report to the Mandatory Reporting Service of DCP. The Mandatory Reporting Unit will provide a feedback letter to the reporter outlining which DCP local office is involved, and what action has been taken. The Mandatory Reporting Service is required to forward all reports on to the WA Police.

For other forms of abuse, the Principal should report all disclosures or strong concerns to the DCP of abuse or neglect arising from the actions or inactions of parents/caregivers and maintain a written record of this communication and subsequent actions. The DCP will then decide how to proceed. The decision to progress the matter further is the responsibility of the DCP.

The DCP is required to provide feedback to people making reports on child abuse. The Principal should seek undertakings from the DCP that they will be kept informed within the bounds of confidentiality. The Principal's initial contact with the DCP will be through the Duty Officer at the Local District Office closest to where the child lives (all offices are listed in the White Pages). All calls from College concerning students are taken very seriously and it may be appropriate if the emergency occurs after hours to explain to the switchboard operator that it is an emergency so they can speak to the Duty Officer promptly. When reporting to the Duty Officer, note his/her name and position.

*Note: The Mandatory Reporting Service and the Duty Officer at the local DCP office can also be used initially in a consultative role if either the Principal or the Teacher is unsure of what action to take.*

The College should be aware that the powers of the DCP under the *Children and Community Services Act 2004* includes:

### **Apprehension of children in need of care and protection (without warrant)**

**Interviewing the child:** DCP has the authority to interview the child at College before contact is made with the parent/caregiver. Before doing so, the Principal or 'person in charge' at the College must be notified. The child should have the option of having support at the interview from a staff member of their choosing.

**Removal of children from the College:** DCP officers may remove a child from the College if they have the permission of the parent/caregiver or if they have apprehended the child. The Principal should satisfy themselves that all conditions have been met before this occurs and document all conversations.

**Medical examination:** DCP may require that a medical examination occur as soon as possible so that bruising, marking and other symptoms can be recorded for future reference. This would normally take place at either PMH or the Community Child Health Services Centres. This examination can only take place if permission has been obtained from the parent/caregiver or the child has been apprehended (when parent/carer permission is not obtained).

### **Police**

Strong concerns and disclosures of abuse and neglect from a person who is not the parent/caregiver should be advised to the police. Principals should also notify the DCP as they can offer support to the student and family, and risk assess other children in the community.

The Police are also notified by the Mandatory Reporting Service of DCP of all reports of child sexual abuse.

### **Parents/Caregivers**

To avoid interfering with any investigative process initiated by DCP or the Police, the Principal and Teacher must seek advice from DCP or Police prior to informing the parent/carer of a concern of abuse or neglect.

**Step 4** If following a report, a family approaches the College, it is recommended that any interview be conducted with a minimum of 2 College members present (eg. The Principal and one other) to provide support.

*Note: It is important to remember that the focus of the meeting should be the welfare of the child.*

In cases of child sexual abuse, the legislation provides protection for the person reporting. Disclosure of the reporter's identity or identifying information to parents or any other party can incur a fine of \$24,000 and two years imprisonment.

**Step 5** The Principal should undertake ongoing support for the Teacher, the student and anyone else affected. The need for ongoing support could be necessary as the Teacher continues in their role with the student and the DCP's role may continue for a while.

### **The Protective Behaviours Programme**

The Protective Behaviours Programme is being developed and implemented in the College. Protective Behaviours programmes are integrated into the College Health curriculum and supported by the teaching staff. The Protective Behaviours Programme aims to enhance the problem-solving and communications skills of people of all ages. It also encourages individuals to identify situations that are unsafe, or potentially unsafe, and to develop strategies to counter these situations and preserve their physical and emotional safety.

Additional training will be provided for students with disabilities, where such disability may limit their capacity to understand the issues involved or communicate a disclosure. Students with disabilities have the same rights to information and training in prevention and protective behaviours as their non-disabled peers.

### **Staff**

*The Criminal Code (see Appendix 5 on Legal Considerations) stipulates that a child under the age of 16 years is not able to give consent to any activity of a sexual nature in any relationship with an adult. In addition, the law does not allow activity of a sexual nature to occur between a child under 18 years of age and a person who holds a position of authority over the child.*

### **Child Protection**

*Department Of Education – Regulatory Framework System 4*

Persons convicted of sexual offences against children will not be employed by Thornlie Christian College. In the event that a staff member is reported to be, or suspected to be involved in an incidence of abuse, the matter should in the first instance be reported to the Principal who will investigate the matter.

### **Parents**

Parents wishing to report an issue pertaining to Child Protection where they are not the primary care givers should refer to the College Grievance Policy for procedural guidance. If such a report is made by a person or persons who wish to remain anonymous and whose information is unsubstantiated the College will require the matter be referred directly to the police.

## APPENDIX 1

### Response to disclosure to abuse or neglect

#### ***Advice for staff dealing with a student or students who have made a disclosure to them***

- Use protective interrupting if students begin to disclose in class or in a public area. Acknowledge that you have heard them and stop them from disclosing any further
- Be supportive and gently indicate that they might tell you about it in a more private situation and;
- Quietly arranged to see them as soon as possible, in a situation away from the students.
- Establish clear limits on confidentiality. (Students should clearly understand that issues where
  - The student is in danger *from* someone else
  - The student is a danger *to* someone else
  - The student is a danger to themselves (self-harming, suicide)will be reported to an appropriate person.
- Listen attentively
- Be supportive and understanding
- Acknowledge that it is difficult talk about such things
- Try to identify the student's fears
- Allow the student to tell you about the event their own words
- Reassure the student that it is alright to disclose, that they are believed and that they are not to blame
- Be calm and non-judgmental
- Tell students that a report will be made to a person who will be able to provide protection
- Allow students the option of support during any agency interview and reassure them of the availability of continuing support
- Document the disclosure and subsequent discussion and actions
- Explain what will happen next and
- Try and stay with students until necessary steps have been taken to ensure their safety and support

#### ***Staff must be mindful that they do not***

- Push for details, put words into students mouths or conduct an investigation
- Express judgment of the student, the perpetrator or the family
- Get angry, upset or show shock
- Apportion blame
- Promise "not to tell" when there are clear limits on confidentiality and accountabilities to Report concerns
- Give a lecture about right and wrong
- Say forget it, you'll get over it, or other such minimalising statements
- Give excessive pity
- Engage in general staffroom discussions about the disclosure
- Staff must be aware that a disclosure can arouse in them strong feelings of shock anger and helplessness It is important to control these feelings; they can be worked through after the disclosure.

***Children left at College:*** it is imperative that the College exhausts all avenues attempting to contact the child's family and emergency contacts. If no contact can be made the Principal or senior staff member may drive the student/s home to establish contact with the family. If the College is still unable to make any contact with the child's family the Principal should contact local district office of the DCP and report the matter to the appropriate authorities.



## **APPENDIX 2**

### ***Overview of The Protective Behaviours Programme***

The Protective Behaviours Programme was first introduced as a preventative educational strategy against child abuse. The success of the programme has led to its adaptation to suit persons of all ages and abilities in all situations where personal safety is a concern. With its emphasis on the right to safety, networks and problem-solving strategies, the programme has proven effective in relation to a range of personal safety issues including drug and alcohol abuse, College bullying, domestic violence and sexual harassment.

#### **Basis of Programme**

Two themes form the foundation of the Protective Behaviour Program. These are:

- 1) Everybody is encouraged to recognise their inherent right to feeling safe as well as to respect others' right to safety.
- 2) Children are encouraged to recognise their feelings of safety in different situations.

When we feel unsafe, our bodies tell us through physical sensations that something is wrong. These physical sensations are called early warning signs, however they are often also called natural instincts, gut feelings or intuition. Some of these early warning signs may include butterflies in the stomach, sweaty hands, goose bumps and a racing heart. There are three types of situations where we may experience these early warning signs.

- 1) When we feel unsafe but are having fun and are in control of the situation eg watching a scary movie.
- 2) When we feel unsafe, it is not fun, but we are still in control of the situation e.g. sitting an exam, going to the dentist.
- 3) When we feel unsafe, it is not fun and we have no control over the situation e.g. an attack situation.

The third situation can be seen to constitute a personal emergency, as the individual is in danger of losing control over what happens to them. When this occurs you are encouraged to use safety strategies and personal networks to regain control of the situation, as well as your physical and emotional safety.

There are numerous benefits of having a network of people that you feel confident talking to when you feel unsafe. Having a number of alternative people on a network should mean that there is always one person available and suitable to discuss any concern that you may have. The benefits of talking with members of a network can include the reduction of stress and a feeling of comfort and support, which can result in an increased ability to regain control of the situation.

Members of a network should be trustworthy, accessible, willing to listen, and willing to take action with you, but not for you. The network person's role is to support you - not to disempower you by taking over.

#### **Core Concepts**

As well as empowerment through internalising the two themes, Protective Behaviours emphasises and positively reinforces two corresponding core concepts:

##### **1. *Early Warning Signs***

Participants are encouraged to recognise their feelings of safety in different situations. When we feel unsafe, our bodies tell us through physical sensations that something is wrong. Within the program these sensations are called early warning signs, however you may refer to them as natural instincts, gut feelings or intuition. Participants are encouraged to identify their early warning signs, for example:

butterflies in the stomach, sweaty hands, goose bumps, racing heart, and the situations in which they can occur.

There are generally three types of situations where we experience early warning signs:

Firstly, when we feel unsafe, but are having fun and are in control of the situation, i.e. it is our choice to be there. Watching a scary movie, diving off a high tower or riding a roller coaster are examples of this situation.

The second type of situation is when we feel unsafe, it is not fun, but we are still in control. For example going to the dentist or sitting an exam.

The third type of situation is when we feel unsafe, it is not fun and we have no control over the situation. These situations are personal emergencies as the individual is in danger of losing control over what happens to them. When this occurs participants are encouraged to use safety strategies and personal networks to regain control of the situation and restore them to a state of physical and emotional safety.

## **2. Networks**

A person's network consists of a group of people chosen by them. It is encouraged that network members are accessible, supportive, trustworthy and willing to listen. Ideally they should also be willing to take action if needed in order to help the individual feel, and be, safe again. Whilst we are encouraged to make decisions for ourselves, we do not have to make decisions by ourselves. Networks of trusted people can be used to talk about all things, whether they are good or of a concern to us.

Additionally, when we experience a 'personal emergency' we are encouraged to seek assistance from our network in order to restore our feelings of safety.

## APPENDIX 3

### Child Protection

#### *Department Of Education - Regulatory Framework System 6 (further definitions)*

- 1) **Emotional abuse:** a constant attitude or behaviour by a person towards a child that causes emotional harm. It can include rejection or refusal to accept a child, terrorizing, bullying, isolation, continued belittlement and exposure to chronic or serious domestic violence. Emotional abuse may be evidenced through disturbed behaviour or the impairment of the child's emotional, intellectual or social development.
- 2) **Physical abuse:** persistent and/or severe physical harm caused to a child. It includes injuries such as cuts, bruises, burns and fractures caused by a range of acts including beating, shaking, illicit administration of alcohol and other drugs, attempted suffocation or excessive discipline. Female genital mutilation as a part of cultural practices is included in this definition.
- 3) **Sexual abuse:** a wide range of behaviours or activities that expose or subject a child to sexual activity that is illegal and/or inappropriate to his/her developmental level. These behaviours include observation or involvement with inappropriate fondling of a child's body, making a child touch an adult's genitalia, showing pornographic material to a child, and sexual penetration of the child.
- 4) **Neglect:** failure of a parent/caregiver to provide a child with the basic necessities of life such that his/her development is or is likely to be, significantly damaged or injury occurs. These include adequate supervision, healthy food, suitable clothing, medical care and emotional security.