



Our Lady of Mt Carmel School Mullewa

CHILD ABUSE POLICY

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RATIONALE

The Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) acknowledges that a goal of the Catholic school is that students should learn about their value as human persons from the time they enter a Catholic school community. This principle must influence every level of the school's life so that students learn about their own dignity and value as a human person. The care and attention they receive from all within the school should help them realise this fundamental period.

Some schools have staff whose fulltime task is pastoral care. Others may have counsellors who contribute in a special way to students' integrated personal development. While appreciating these specialists and their contribution, the Commission stresses that every staff member, when accepting a position in a Catholic school, shares responsibility for the pastoral care of students. In addition, by accepting a position in the school they are also accepting the role of teacher/educator or "one who helps to form human persons". In a Catholic school the Principal has the ultimate responsibility for this care.

Catholic schools are entrusted to take on, in partnership with parents who are the primary educators of their children, the total education of the child. Catholic school staff have therefore a duty of care to students during school hours and at other times when a staff/student relationship exists. Duty of care falls under the area of common law that is established by the courts on the basis of precedent. The concept of duty of care requires that a staff person must take reasonable care to avoid acts or omissions which they can reasonably foresee that would be likely to injure the student and take steps to remove those dangers.

The CECWA in promulgating this policy statement is acknowledging its responsibilities for the duty of care of all students in Catholic schools. This policy addresses the issue of child abuse.

Child abuse is defined as the long term and short term maltreatment of a person under the age of 18 years of age. It is the result of action or inaction which results in harm or injury to a child.

Child abuse may be categorised as follows

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Physical neglect
- Emotional neglect

PRINCIPLES

The CECWA acknowledges the serious consequences of child abuse, both in the short term and the long term and is committed to taking action to protect children from all forms of abuse and neglect. Within Catholic schools the protection strategies and procedures to be followed are based on the following principles.

1. Under the Children and Community Services Act 2004 (as amended in 2008), teachers have a mandatory responsibility to report concerns to the appropriate child protection agency when a belief has been formed, on reasonable grounds, that a child is being, or has been sexually

abused. The Principal remains responsible for the management within the school of suspected or disclosed incidents of child abuse howsoever categorised.

2. The Principal is to ensure that the school's pastoral care structures address the issue of child abuse, making appropriate provisions for the assistance of children, families and staff.
3. School staff who have access to information regarding suspected or disclosed child abuse have a clear obligation to observe appropriate confidentiality, in relation to the entire matter, and an obligation to ensure that this information is kept secure. (Refer to the CECWA Guideline Statement: The Management of Confidential Information in Schools).
4. All staff at Our Lady of Mount Carmel has a responsibility to care for children, to positively promote their welfare and to protect them from any kind of abuse.
5. All children have the right to a thorough and systematic education in personal safety. This should be done in partnership with their parents/guardians.
6. The value of the family unit is to be respected. This should not be detrimental to the well-being of a child.
7. This CECWA is committed to the importance and implementation of child protection strategies and procedures.
8. All persons involved in situations where abuse is suspected or disclosed must be treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect.

PROCEDURES

1. To assist Principals and staff, the CECWA has endorsed three complementary documents to deal with allegations of child abuse in Catholic schools:
 - (i) Child Abuse, Allegations of Misconduct and Serious Misconduct Against Lay Employees is to be used when an allegation is directed against school employees.
 - (ii) Towards Healing Principles and Procedures in Responding to Complaints of Sexual Abuse Against Personnel of the Catholic Church in Australia, is to be used when an allegation is directed against any clergy or members of religious institutions.
 - (iii) Procedures for Identification and Notification of Child Abuse and Neglect, is to be used when an allegation is directed against school community members or persons who are not employed by the school. These include but are not restricted to school volunteers, parents, family members and/or relatives.
2. It is the Principal's responsibility to ensure that staff are inducted in these procedures.
3. Under the Memorandum of Understanding with the Department for Child Protection (DCP), Principals employed in Catholic Schools have been recognised as an approved class of persons able to take reports regarding child sexual abuse. Principals employed in Catholic schools have a legal obligation upon receiving reports regarding child sexual abuse to forward these unaltered to the approved agency (Currently DCP) as soon as possible. As well as informing the Principal, teachers would continue to have the option in law to report directly to DCP.

DOCUMENTS

The following 3 documents for use in dealing with allegations of child abuse in Catholic schools are currently housed in the resource shelf in the school's staff room.

- i. Allegations of Misconduct and Serious Misconduct Against Lay Employees
- ii. Towards Healing, Principles and Procedures in Responding to Complaints of Sexual Abuse Against Personnel of the Catholic Church in Australia.
- iii. Procedures for Identification and Notification of Child Abuse and Neglect (1993).