Handbook for Other Personnel
Working in a Brisbane Catholic Education School
(not staff members or volunteers)

Catholic Education
Archdiocese of Brisbane
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Child protection is everyone’s business

As adults we all have a responsibility to care for children and young people and to protect them from all forms of harm as well as to positively promote their wellbeing.

Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) seeks to continue its adherence to legislative requirements, policy directives and duty of care to students by a commitment to the implementation of student protection strategies and processes.

Your role in the school

Our aim is to give students the sense of feeling safe, being safe and valued as people so that they are secure and ready to learn at their best. As a person other than a staff member or volunteer working with students you play a significant role in the work of the school, form part of the school community and assist in providing the optimal learning environment for students.

This document outlines information you need to know in the vital area of student protection. It is important that you read this document, in conjunction with the Code of Conduct for Other Personnel, so you understand your responsibilities in the protection of our students.

What is child abuse?

The term ‘abuse’ has been replaced in state legislation with the term ‘harm’. Child ‘abuse’ is any act, or failure to act, that leads to the ‘harm’ of a child or young person. It can be better understood by thinking that ‘abuse’ is the action and ‘harm’ is the consequence.
The legal definition of ‘harm’

In Queensland ‘harm’ is legally defined as:

➤ ‘Harm to a child is any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child’s physical, psychological or emotional well being.
➤ ‘It is immaterial how the harm is caused.’
➤ ‘Harm can be caused by:
  ➤ physical, psychological or emotional abuse or neglect or
  ➤ sexual abuse or exploitation.’
➤ ‘Harm can be caused by –
  ➤ a single act, omission or circumstance; or
  ➤ a series or combination of acts, omissions or circumstances’.

The Child Protection Act 1999

Sources of harm to a student

Include:

➤ Harm to a student by a staff member, other personnel or volunteer
➤ Harm to a student by a person who is not an employee or agent of the school or another student (i.e. someone outside the school)
➤ Harm by another student
➤ Self-harm by a student.

Forming a suspicion about harm

A person may form a suspicion that a student may have experienced, is experiencing or is at unacceptable risk of experiencing harm when:

➤ a student reports or discloses information of concern about him/herself or about another person’s behaviour
➤ another student reports or discloses information of concern about a student or another person's behaviour in relation to the student
➤ a parent or another person reports information of concern about a student and/or another person’s behaviour. (This information may come from a relative, friend, acquaintance of the student, or sometimes could be anonymous)
➤ relevant observations (appearance, behaviours and situations) are witnessed, or other relevant firsthand knowledge is gained.

What is a “disclosure” of harm?

Adults in a school environment are often the first people students may tell when they are feeling unsafe. Sometimes a student may approach you and tell you about their experience of being harmed. This is described as a “disclosure”.

It is important for personnel working in a school to be aware of how children /young people disclose and how to respond in the most appropriate manner. If a student speaks to you about a concern, you need to be prepared so that you can be supportive of the student and clear about your own responsibility at the same time.
If a student tells you about being harmed or being at risk of harm

DO:
➤ listen attentively, actively and without judgement
➤ let the child use their own words
➤ respond calmly to the information the student provides
➤ Avoid questioning; if clarification is necessary use open-ended statements such as, ‘Tell me more about that.’
➤ reassure the student that they have done the right thing e.g. ‘I am pleased you have told me these things’
➤ reassure them they are not to blame for the behaviours of others
➤ provide pastoral support to the student and be aware of the privacy issues involved
➤ be honest about your responsibility for taking action
➤ pass the information onto the Principal or the school’s nominated Student Protection Contact (SPC) immediately
➤ make detailed notes.

DO NOT:
➤ react emotionally or accuse
➤ seek any more information than is absolutely necessary
➤ ask leading or probing questions or put words in the student’s mouth
➤ make promises that you cannot keep – particularly about not telling others such as the Principal or another SPC about the information
➤ leave the student alone immediately after a disclosure
➤ discuss the situation with parents, caregivers or others (other than those designated e.g. Principal or other SPC).

Who are Student Protection Contacts (SPCs)?

The Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Regulation 2001 requires non-State schools in Queensland to nominate at least two staff members to whom students can report concerns.

In BCE the principal is nominated as one SPC and the Principal must also nominate at least one other staff member to be the school’s other SPC. Students, staff, parents and others can report to the Principal or other SPC if they have concerns for students.

The names of the SPCs must be made known to staff, students and parents. Be sure to find out the names of your school’s SPCs.

Your reporting responsibilities

If at any time while you are working at the school you become aware of, or reasonably suspect harm to a student has occurred, or is likely to occur, you must report this as soon as possible to the Principal or the school student protection contact (SPC).

Please check with your school Principal about whom you are to report to if you have concerns about a student.
Confidentiality

Remember it is VITAL to maintain confidentiality for the protection of all involved.

What happens next?

Once you have reported the suspected harm of a student, the Principal or the SPC will do whatever is necessary to make sure the student is safe.

You can rest assured that your report will be taken seriously, dealt with immediately and reported to the appropriate State authorities where necessary.

Case Scenarios

Here are some scenarios for your consideration

Scenario 1

In the performance of your role, you notice a Year 2 girl has a large bruise around her eye and she tells you that she has been hit by her mother. You have had a number of conversations with the child's mother.

What do you do?

Scenario 2

In performing your role you are working with a group of students. A parent volunteer is assisting you.

You observe that the volunteer appears angry, is raising her voice at the student, and poking the student on the shoulder. You have worked with this volunteer all year.

What do you do?

Scenario 3

In conducting your duties you have been working with a female student in Year 8. You notice she has cuts on her arms and legs. You discreetly enquire and she tells you that she did it to herself because she was really unhappy.

You have regular contact with her parents to provide feedback on her progress.

What do you do?

Scenario 4

In the performance of your role you are working with a group of Year 6 students. One of the girls tells you that a boy in her class has been acting in a sexually inappropriate manner in the toilets. You know the male student is the son of a staff member at the school.

What do you do?
Answer to scenarios

Report each of these situations to the Principal or SPC.
Remember you do NOT have to be sure that a student has been harmed to report – you just need to have a concern.

Very Important Note

If you have been involved in a student protection matter in your role in the school, be aware of your own reactions and seek support if required. Your Principal can assist you if required.
Finally, please sign the ‘Other Personnel Training Register’ form where indicated to confirm your understanding of your student protection responsibilities while working at the school.

References and Resources

More information on student protection in BCE can be found in the following documents which can be accessed on BCE’s public website at www.bne.catholic.edu.au
➤ Archdiocese of Brisbane Catholic Education Council Student Protection Policy 2011
➤ Student Protection Processes
➤ Student Protection Brochure for Families