



Student Protection

Handbook for volunteers

Catholic Education
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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 welfare.

Brisbane Catholic Education seeks to continue its adherence to legislative requirements and duty of care to students by a commitment to the implementation of student protection strategies and procedures.

The volunteer's role in the school

Our aim is to give students the sense of being safe and valued as people so that they are secure and ready to learn at their best level. As a volunteer 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 the students.

This document outlines your responsibilities as a volunteer in the vital area of student protection and it is important that you read this document, in conjunction with the Volunteer Code of Conduct, so you understand your responsibilities in the protection of our students.

What is child abuse?

The term 'abuse' has been replaced in recent 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'

Harm is defined legally in the *Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Act and Regulations 2001*, and the *Child Protection Act 1999* as:

'Harm caused to the student under 18 years is any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the student's physical, psychological or emotional well being. It is immaterial how the harm is caused.'

Within a school there are four circumstances where harm can be caused to a student.

They are:

1. Harm to a student by a staff member or volunteer of the school.
2. Harm to a student by someone outside the school.
3. Harm by other students
4. Student self harm

What are reasonable grounds to suspect harm to a student?

Reasonable grounds to suspect that harm to a student may have occurred is when:

- a student speaks about being harmed or being in danger of being harmed
- someone else (perhaps a relative, friend, acquaintance or sibling of the student) informs you that they suspect a student has been harmed
- a student tells you that they know a child who has been harmed (often the student is referring to him/herself)
- you observe a particular student's behaviour, physical appearance or social relationships that raises concerns of possible harm to the student.

What is a disclosure of harm?

Sometimes a student may approach you and tell you about their experience of being harmed. This is described as a disclosure.

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:

- Let them tell their experience first in their own words and at their own time.
- Listen attentively to their story
- React calmly to the information the student provides though it might be upsetting
- Reassure the student that they have done the right thing to tell e.g. "I am pleased you have told me these things"
- Reassure the child that it is not his/her fault that whatever the concern is has occurred
- **At this stage you may ask for clarification ONLY if it is necessary. If you have the essence of the story, you probably have enough information to report your concerns**
- Be thoughtful and careful of the student's feelings at this time. They may be distressed or ashamed, so they will need care and reassurance
- Be aware of privacy issues for the student
- Treat this information confidentially and discuss it only with the right person out of the hearing of other students
- Be honest with the student about your responsibility for taking action.
- Act immediately to report the concerns to the principal or the school student protection contact (SPC) (See below for more about this)

DO NOT:

- Panic
- React emotionally or accuse the alleged perpetrator.
- Ask leading questions e.g. Was it your father who did this to you?
- Make promises that you cannot keep – particularly about not telling others (e.g. relevant adults such as the principal etc) about the information
- Leave the student alone immediately after a disclosure as they will be feeling very vulnerable at this time
- Discuss the situation with parents, caregivers or others (other than those designated e.g. principal, student protection contact.)

Your reporting responsibilities

In any instance where you either become aware, or reasonably suspect harm to a student has occurred, or there is a risk of it occurring, 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.

REMEMBER
Maintaining confidentiality is vital for the
protection of all involved.

What happens next ?

Once you have reported the alleged harm of a student, the principal or the SPC will do whatever is necessary to make sure the student is safe. Brisbane Catholic Education has student protection reporting processes and all Brisbane Catholic Education staff have received training in student protection. You can rest assured that your report will be taken seriously, dealt with immediately and reported to the appropriate State authorities where necessary.

Below are some scenarios for your consideration

Scenario 1

You work as a volunteer in the tuckshop. You notice a yr 2 girl has a large bruise around her eye and she tells you that she had been hit by her mother. You know her mother well. What do you do?

Scenario 2

You are a volunteer who assists with helping students to read. Another volunteer is working nearby with a student. You observe that the volunteer appears angry, is raising her voice at the student, poking the student on the shoulder and you observe the volunteer angrily hit the student on the arm. You have worked with this volunteer all year and usually have morning tea with her. What do you do?

Scenario 3

You are a volunteer and assist with the school year eight netball team. You notice that a female student in the team has cuts on her arms and on her legs. You enquire about the cuts and she tells you she did it to herself because she felt unhappy. You remember someone remarking in the past that this girl was a little '*strange*'. What do you do?

Scenario 4

You are a volunteer parent assisting school staff take the year six class on an excursion. On the bus one of the year six girls tells you that one of the boys has been acting in a sexually inappropriate manner at the back of the bus. The male student is the son of a friend with whom you talk with regularly. What do you do?

Answers:

In each of the above situations you should be reporting these incidents to the principal or another delegated person e.g. SPC. You do not have to be sure that a student has been harmed.

Very Important Note

If you have been involved in a student protection matter in your role as a school volunteer, be aware of your own reactions and seek support if required. Your principal can assist you with this issue.

Finally, please sign the following page where indicated to confirm you understand your student protection responsibilities as a volunteer.

Brisbane Catholic Education thanks you for your support for our schools and our students.

References and Resources

More information on student protection in Brisbane Catholic Education can be found in the following documents:

- 1. Archdiocese of Brisbane Catholic Education Council *Student Protection Policy – May 2005***
- 2. *Student Protection – Reporting and Investigative Processes for allegations of Inappropriate Behaviour and Harm to child/student by employees 2004***
- 3. *Student Protection – Reporting Processes for Allegations of Harm to Child/Student by Someone who is not immediately associated with the school (family member, friend or other), other students and student self-harm 2004***