



Student Protection

Handbook for volunteers

Catholic Education
Archdiocese of Brisbane
2013

CONTENT

Child protection is everyone's business	2
The volunteer's role in the school	2
What is child abuse?	2
The legal definition of harm	2
The four circumstances of harm	2
<i>Reasonable grounds</i> to suspect harm to a student	3
What is a 'disclosure' of harm?	3
If a child tells you about being harmed or being at risk of harm	3
Your reporting responsibilities	4
What happens next?	4
Case Scenarios	4
Very Important Note	5
References and Resources	5
Confirmation of understanding – sign off sheet	6

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, policy directives and duty of care to students by a commitment to the implementation of student protection strategies and processes.

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. 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'

In Queensland harm is legally defined as:

'Harm caused to the child/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.'

Harm can be caused by:

- (a) physical, psychological or emotional abuse or neglect or*
- (b) sexual abuse or exploitation'.*

(Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Act and Regulations 2001, and the Child Protection Act 1999)

Within a school there are four (4) sources of harm to a student.

They are:

1. Harm to a student by a staff member, other employee 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 can be 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 (SPC).)

Who are Student Protection Contacts (SPC's)?

Legislation requires all non-State schools in Queensland to nominate at least two staff members to whom students can report concerns.

In Brisbane Catholic Education the principal is one student protection contact and the principal must also nominate at least one other staff member to be the school's other Student Protection Contact (SPC).

Students, staff, parents and others can report to the principal and/or SPC if they have concerns for students.

Your reporting responsibilities

In your role as a volunteer at the school if in any instance:

- you become aware, or reasonably suspect harm to a student has occurred, or it is likely 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
It is vital to maintain confidentiality 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.

Here 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. 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 to scenarios:

Each of these situations should be reported 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 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 which can be accessed on Brisbane Catholic Education's public website

www.bne.catholic.edu.au

- 1. Archdiocese of Brisbane Catholic Education Council *Student Protection Policy 2011***
- 2. *Student Protection Processes January 2013***
- 3. *Student Protection Brochure for Families 2011***