



**Catholic  
Education**  
Diocese of Cairns

*Learning with Faith and Vision*

# **Student Protection Handbook for Volunteers**

**Updated 2017**

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## Child Protection Is Everyone's Business

As adults we 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. Student Protection begins with our own conduct.

## The Volunteers 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.

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 Catholic Education Parent and Volunteers Code of Conduct, so that you understand your responsibilities in the protection of students.

While you are a volunteer in our school, your conduct must always be professional which incorporates protective practices for the safety of students and yourself.

## Understanding Abuse and Harm

All children have the right to be safe in environments free from abuse and harm. Where this is not the case, adults have a responsibility to act. This part explains the key concepts that underpin the processes for ensuring the safety of students, in order to inform the actions Catechist must take if they form a reasonable suspicion of abuse, harm or staff inappropriate behaviour towards a student.

As a first step, it is important that you have an understanding of what is meant by the terms 'abuse' and 'harm'.

Generally, the types of abuse can be summarised as:

**Sexual Abuse**

**Emotional or Psychological Abuse**

**Physical Abuse**

**Neglect**



These types of abuse can cause the following types of harm to a student:

**Physical Harm**

**Psychological Harm**

**Emotional Harm**

## Sources of abuse and harm

Students can be abused, or experience harm from a number of sources. These include:

### Person associated with the school

*(Staff member, Volunteer or another student at the school)*

### Family Member/Relative of the student

*(Parent/Carer, Sibling, Grandparent, other relative)*

### Other person in the community

*(Family friend, neighbour coach, tutor, stranger)*

### Self-harming by a student

## Types of Abuse

### Sexual Abuse and Likely Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse of a student occurs where a person engages in sexual behaviour with a student, and:

- the other person bribes, coerces, exploits, threatens or is violent toward the relevant person; and/or
- the student has less power than the other person; and/or
- there is a significant disparity between the student and the other person in intellectual capacity or maturity.<sup>1</sup>

Characteristics of a power imbalance include: significant differences in age, developmental ability, authority, influence or some kind of control over the student.

Likely sexual abuse is where it is more probable than not that a student will be sexually abused in the future. One situation where a reasonable suspicion of likely sexual abuse could be formed is where 'grooming' behaviours towards a student are identified.

#### **IMPORTANT NOTE: Sexual Activity between staff members or volunteers and students**

**The involvement of any staff member or volunteer within a school in sexual activity with, or sexual exploitation of, a student attending that school is always to be regarded as sexual abuse.**

## What does sexual abuse involve?

Sexual abuse involves an imbalance of power between a student and the other person. The imbalance of power allows force, trickery, emotional bribery, blackmail or emotional pressures to be used against the

<sup>1</sup> See Section 364 of the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006*

student to involve him/her in sexual activity or to sexually exploit him/her. Secrecy, the misuse of power and distortion of adult-child relationships may also be involved.

Sexual abuse involving physical contact with a student could include:

- touching, kissing, holding or fondling a student's body in a sexual manner;
- touching, kissing or fondling a student's genital area;
- engaging in or attempting to engage in vaginal or anal intercourse with a student;
- penetrating or attempting to penetrate a student's vagina or anus with a finger or other object;
- engaging or attempting to engage in oral sex with a student; or
- engaging or attempting to engage in masturbation with a student.

It does not matter whether the student is clothed or unclothed whilst sexual abuse involving physical contact takes place. Engagement of a student in sexual acts by duress or through inducements of any kind is considered sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse/likely sexual abuse of a student may not necessarily involve physical contact. It could, for example, involve behaviour that occurs in the student's direct presence or that occurs indirectly including through electronic communications. Examples include:

- exposing a sexual body part to a student;
- requesting a student to expose a sexual body part;
- making obscene or sexually explicit remarks to a student;
- sending obscene or sexually explicit material to a student;
- blatant or persistent intrusion into a student's physical privacy;
- voyeurism - covertly observing intimate behaviour that is normally private;
- exposing a student to pornographic films, photographs, magazines or other material;
- having a student pose or perform in a sexually explicit manner;
- exposing a student to a sexual act;
- forcing a student to witness a sexual act; or
- communicating with a student in a sexually intrusive way.

## **What is Grooming?**

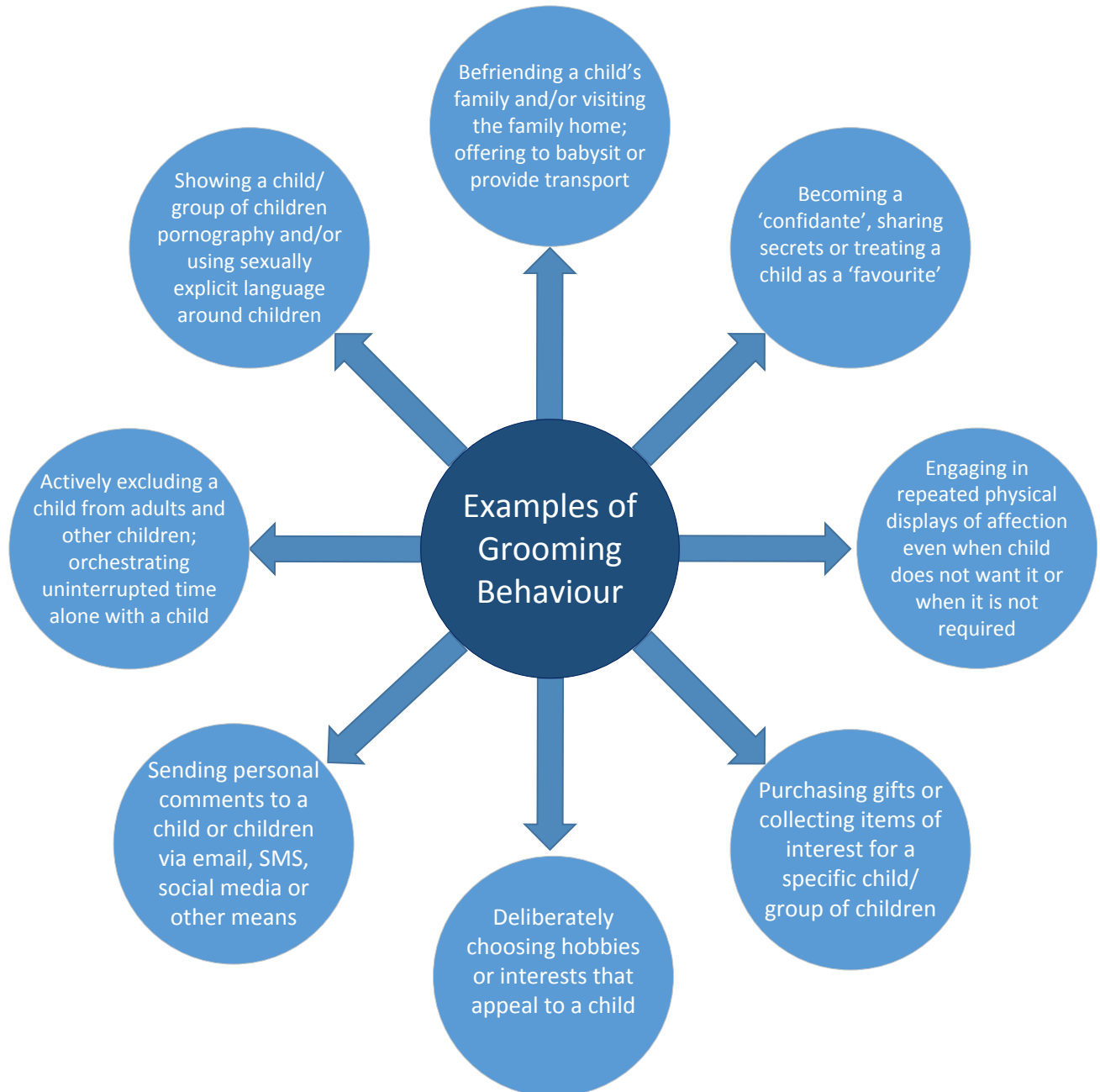
Sexual offending against a child is rarely a random act by a stranger. It is commonly based on a relationship with the child that has been formed over time. The abuse is commonly well thought out and planned in advance. Offenders may often take time to 'groom' their victim, often over a lengthy period. They will also often 'groom' the child's parents, care-providers or others who might otherwise protect them from the abuse. This occurs so that the child and his/her parents or care-providers will trust the offender and not suspect any intended wrongdoing.

The establishment of a relationship of trust which is then misused is often very confusing and damaging to the child, who may not even immediately recognise what is happening to them as abuse. Grooming behaviour is unlikely to be recognised when observed as a one-off event, but a pattern of grooming of the intended victim and/or the intended victim's parents or care-providers is likely to be recognised. Grooming will tend to develop in intensity over time. It will also tend to include elements of secrecy and concealment. It is important to be aware of the types of behaviours that can be used in the process of grooming a child or young person, while remembering that some of the behaviours might equally reflect normal interactions based on genuine motives of care and concern. This is the reason that, for Catechists, the observance of

clear professional boundaries and transparency in the declaration of potential conflicts of interest is a vital part of the protection of children and of the professional integrity of staff and volunteers.

Recognition of the grooming process that is used as a preparation for the sexual abuse of a child is an indicator of likely sexual abuse.

**Some examples of 'grooming' behaviour could include:**



## Physical Abuse



*Physical abuse refers to non-accidental use of physical force against a child by another person that results in significant harm to the child.*

### What does physical abuse involve ?

Examples of physical abuse include but are not limited to hitting, shaking, throwing, burning, biting, poisoning and female genital mutilation. The definition of physically abusive behaviour extends to the fabrication, exaggeration and inducing of illness symptoms in a child.

A person does not have to intend to physically harm a child to have physically abused them (for example, physical punishment that results in bruising or fractures would generally be considered physical abuse). Physical abuse does not always leave visible marks or injuries. Physical abuse can result in significant physical harm (for example, fractures, burns or bruises) and/or emotional/psychological harm (for example, hyper vigilance, depression or persistent state of fear and anxiety) to a child.

When considering if a child is at unacceptable risk of suffering harm caused by physical abuse by a person, a range of factors are considered. Examples include:

- the person's propensity towards violence,
- the degree of control a person has over their own behaviour or the behaviour of others,
- the physical force used and
- the ability and willingness of another adult to act protectively to prevent the physical abuse.

Examples of situations which give rise to an unacceptable risk of physical abuse include, though are not limited to:

- domestic violence involving the throwing of objects; or
- situations in which a baby is shaken but not obviously injured.

## Emotional/Psychological Abuse



*Emotional or psychological abuse is the persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child which causes severe and persistent adverse effects on a child's emotional development.*

### What does emotional or psychological abuse involve ?

Examples of emotional abuse include but are not limited to constant criticism, public humiliation, belittling, constant yelling, withholding praise and affection, excessive teasing, scape-goating, rejection, hostility, exposure of a child to domestic and family violence and conveying that a child is worthless or unloved, inadequate or valued only insofar as the child meets the needs of another person.

Emotional or psychological abuse may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of reasonable exploration and learning or preventing the child from participating in normal social interaction. Emotional abuse can result in significant harm to a child, for

example, it can result in significant emotional / psychological harm such as depression, attachment disorders, chronic feeling of fear/anxiety or self-harm.

A child is considered to be at unacceptable risk of suffering harm caused by emotional abuse in a number of situations for example the frequent, chronic and entrenched verbal criticisms and hostility directed at the child by another person.

## Neglect



*Neglect is the persistent failure to provide for a child's basic physical and emotional necessities of life such that the child's health and development are affected.*

### What does neglect involve?

Neglect is the persistent failure to provide for a child's basic physical and emotional necessities of life such that the child's health and development are affected. Basic needs include: food, housing, adequate clothing; personal hygiene and hygienic living conditions; health care, including the timely provision of medical treatment and dental care; and adequate supervision and protection needed for the child's optimal growth and development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse.

Neglect can result in a significant impact on a child's physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing. It can result in significant physical harm such as serious injury or death. For example, failure to supervise a child may result in a child ingesting poison, or getting seriously injured or getting burnt. Neglect can also result in serious emotional/ psychological harm such as attachment disorders, failure to thrive in infants and significant developmental delays.

A child is considered to be at unacceptable risk of neglect in situations such as severe or chronic substance misuse, significant mental illness, lack of parenting skills and addiction to gambling by the child's primary parent or care-provider inhibiting their capacity to provide sufficient care.

**More information around understanding child abuse and harm can be found on the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services [website](#)**

## Significant Harm

Harm can be caused by physical, psychological or emotional abuse, sexual abuse or neglect. Harm refers to the detrimental effect or impact of abuse/neglect on a child. For statutory intervention to occur, there must be information to suggest:

- that the child has suffered, is suffering or is at any unacceptable risk of suffering significant harm; and
- there may not have a parent able and willing to protect the child from harm.

Harm can be caused by a single act, omission or circumstance or a series or combination of acts, omissions or circumstances. This series or combination of acts, omissions or circumstances is often referred to as "cumulative harm".

### What is "unacceptable risk" of harm?

A child is considered to be at unacceptable risk of suffering harm if there are grounds to suspect that unless someone intervenes to prevent it, the actions of a person will result in, or is likely to result, in a detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child's physical, emotional and/or psychological well-being.



## Relationship between abuse and harm

In essence, abuse is the action towards a student, and harm is the impact of that action on the child. Children can experience multiple types of abuse, which in turn can cause multiple types of harm.

Types of Abuse	Physical abuse	Emotional abuse	Sexual abuse	Neglect
	Hitting	Rejection	Sexual exploitation	Inadequate supervision
	Punching	Persistent hostility	Penetration	Poor hygiene/nutrition
			Exposure to Pornography	



Types of harm (impact on the child)	Physical (refers to body)	Emotional (ability to express emotions)	Psychological (mind & cognitive processes)
	Bruising	Depression	Learning and developmental delays
	Fractures	Hypervigilance	Impaired self-image
	Internal injuries	Self-harm	

## Recognising harm and abuse

There are many signs that might lead you to have concerns about a student. It is important to keep an open mind when encountering these signs, as their presence does not necessarily mean that the student is experiencing harm caused by abuse and/or neglect. However, they may identify concerns for a student and indicate that further consideration and monitoring is the appropriate response.

It is important to remember:

- the signs are generally more significant if they are severe, form a pattern, and/or show frequency
- the younger the child involved, the greater the risk
- all factors need to be considered including the child's circumstances and family context.

## Observations of student behaviour

In general terms, something may be wrong if you observe student behaviour such as:

- nervousness/withdrawal;
- passivity/excessive compliance;
- evidence of deterioration in peer relationships and/or generally poor peer relationships;
- trouble concentrating at school/unexpected drop in school academic performance;
- frequent absences from school without substantiated or acceptable explanations;
- being extremely aggressive, stealing or running away;
- evidence of extreme or continually aroused emotional states;
- out of character behaviour;
- behaviour that is not age appropriate or typical of peer behaviour;
- in younger students: separation anxiety, changed eating patterns;
- in older students: drug/alcohol use, sexual promiscuity, self-harm or reckless and risk-taking behaviour.

In relation to possible harm or risk of harm to a student that may be a result of sexual, physical or emotional abuse and/or neglect you may observe the following:

## Physical

- bruises or lacerations, especially on face, head and neck;
- burns/scalds;
- multiple injuries or bruises, especially over time;
- fractures, dislocations, twisting injuries;
- explanations offered by the child not consistent with the injury or the injury is unable to be explained by the child;
- A child hiding injuries
- repeated injuries with a recurring or similar explanation.

## Neglect

- delay in achieving developmental milestones;
- medical or therapeutic needs not attended to;
- poor personal hygiene leading to social isolation;
- scavenging for/stealing food; lack of adequate school lunches;
- extreme seeking of adult affection;
- flat and superficial way of relating.

## Domestic violence

- difficulties in eating and sleeping;
- hyper vigilance;
- regression to age-inappropriate behaviours;
- developmental delays;
- child is over-protective of a parent;
- excessively controlling or aggressive/violent behaviour;
- abuse of siblings/parent.

## Emotional/psychological

- inability to value self and others;
- lack of trust in people;
- statements from the child e.g. "I'm bad; I was born bad";
- extreme attention-seeking behaviours.

## Sexual

- direct or indirect disclosures of abuse;
- concerning sexual behaviour and/or age-inappropriate sexual knowledge;
- use of threats, coercion or bribery to force other children into sexual acts;
- sexual themes/fears expressed in artwork, written work or play;
- repeated urinary tract infections, especially in younger girls;
- physical trauma to buttocks, breasts, genitals, lower abdomen, thighs;
- unexplained accumulation of money/gifts;

- presence of sexually-transmitted infections, especially in younger children

**More information around recognising the signs of abuse can be found on the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services Website.**

Generally, the ways in which you may identify a concern is when :



- A student makes a direct disclosure about another person's behaviour
- A parent or any person reports information of concern about a student and/or another person's behaviour (this information may come from another student, relative, friend, acquaintance of the student, or sometimes could be anonymous)



- Direct observation of abusive or inappropriate behaviour towards a student
- Relevant observations (appearance, behaviours, and situations) are witnessed, or other relevant firsthand knowledge is gained.

## Responding to Disclosures

it is important for you to be aware of how children/young people disclose and how to respond in the most appropriate manner. If a student tells you about being abused or harmed:



- **Move to a suitable environment**, free of distractions.
- **Be calm and patient** - allow for the child to be heard.
- **Let the child use their own words** - avoid asking leading questions.
- **Avoid "quizzing" the child about details of the abuse.**
- **Don't be afraid of saying the 'wrong' thing.** Listening supportively is more important than what you say.



- Reassure the child that **it is Okay to tell you** what's been happening.
- **Address any concerns about the child's safety.**
- Reassure the child s/he is **not at fault and is not the cause of any distress** you may feel.



- Respect that the child **may only reveal some details.**
- **Acknowledge the child's bravery and strength.**
- **Avoid making promises you can't keep** - manage the child or young person's expectations.
- **Explain** to the child that in order for them to be safe **you will need to report their experience to someone else**

*Adapted from an AIFS infographic:*

Any response must be focussed on the best interests of the student. As such, the immediate support needs of a student are the priority and you must act promptly to raise the concerns with the classroom teacher and the Principal.

## Professional Boundaries

Inappropriate behaviour includes (though is not limited to) any behaviour, including words, towards a student that is contrary to what is required of you under the Code of Conduct.

Inappropriate behaviour towards a student can be described in terms of *violations of professional boundaries*. These boundaries can be described as follows:

### Physical Boundaries

Exist to protect the body. Physical boundaries define appropriate physical contact between staff members and students in appropriate circumstances whilst respecting and responding to the physical needs of students

### Emotional Boundaries

Exist to protect feelings. Emotional boundaries determine the nature of appropriate professional relationships between staff members and a students in the context of respecting the emotional needs and wellbeing of students.

### Behavioural Boundaries

Exist to protect actions. Behavioural boundaries determine the appropriate behaviours expected of a staff member towards students, including respecting the rules of the Catholic School Authority or School.

**Examples of boundary violations appear on the following page.**

## Examples of Professional Boundary Violations

\*See also The [Professional Boundaries: A Guideline for Queensland Teachers](#) as published by the QCT

Physical Boundary Violations	Emotional Boundary Violations	Behavioural Boundary Violations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pushing</li> <li>• pulling</li> <li>• grabbing</li> <li>• hitting</li> <li>• poking shoving</li> <li>• shaking</li> <li>• throwing</li> <li>• kicking</li> <li>• pinching</li> <li>• punching</li> <li>• using physical force to ensure a child cooperates</li> <li>• holding or restraining a child (unless in imminent danger of harm)</li> <li>• using an object (ruler, book, whiteboard marker) to manage a student</li> <li>• Refusing biological necessities</li> <li>• Applying painful or noxious conditions to a student</li> <li>• Inappropriately touching or massaging a student</li> <li>• Unnecessary or unwanted physical contact</li> </ul>	<p>Making inappropriate comments about a student and/or a student’s family by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shaming,</li> <li>• embarrassing, humiliating</li> <li>• using sarcasm</li> <li>• making derogatory remarks belittling</li> <li>• teasing</li> <li>• unprofessional criticism</li> </ul> <p>Exerting power over a student through the use of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• intimidating behaviour</li> <li>• fear</li> <li>• threats</li> <li>• moral pressure</li> </ul> <p>Shouting at a student</p>	<p>Having inappropriate interactions with a student through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inappropriate use of social media in relation to a student</li> <li>• phone calls emails or texts to the student’s personal email or phone</li> <li>• gift giving or showing special favours sharing secrets with a student disclosing inappropriate personal information to a student</li> <li>• inappropriate questioning of a student about personal and private matters engaging in social activities with students (with whom there is not a declared personal relationship) outside school</li> <li>• driving students without appropriate authority</li> <li>• visiting students at home without appropriate authority</li> </ul> <p>Using unprofessional language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• swearing at or in the presence of a student</li> <li>• making otherwise inappropriate comments to or in the presence of a student</li> </ul> <p>Failing to follow a school’s behaviour support policy and procedures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unreasonable, unfair and/or unjust disciplinary measures</li> <li>• the imposition of manifestly unreasonable expectations or excessive demands on a student</li> <li>• using inappropriate locations or social isolation outside of the school’s behaviour support guidelines as punishment</li> </ul> <p>Using a personal device or private email address to make contact with a student (with whom there is not a declared personal relationship or appropriate authority)</p> <p>Photographing a student other than for an appropriate professional reason Supplying substances to a student (e.g. unauthorised medication, tobacco, alcohol, illicit drugs)</p> <p>Exposing students to material that contains adult content or themes that is offensive or inappropriate to the age and/or maturity of the student</p>

## Exercise 1

Please take a few moments to complete this exercise. Draw a line from each statement to the corresponding abuse type. Answers to this exercise can be found in Appendix A.

A student has a  
bruise around  
their eye

A student says  
that their Uncle  
touched their  
'rude parts'

A student has  
unexplained  
marks on their  
arms

A student being  
told they are  
worthless

A student forcing  
another student  
to touch their  
genitals

A 5 year old  
student is left  
alone overnight

A parent  
humiliating their  
child

A student is  
frequently  
presenting with  
no lunch



**Sexual Abuse**



**Physical Abuse**



**Emotional Abuse**



**Neglect**

## Practice Questions

1. You walk past a classroom and see a staff member alone with a year 2 student. The student is sitting on the staff members knee and the staff member has their arm around the students shoulders. Both are laughing.
  - Wait to see if something like this happens again
  - Do nothing, there is probably nothing wrong here
  - Speak with the Principal about your concerns
  
2. During a lesson a student discloses that they do not want to go home this afternoon as they are frightened of their step-father. The student says that they step-father gets angry when he is drunk, breaks things and threatens to hurt his mother. You should
  - Tell the student that it is OK their step-father probably does not meant it
  - Tell the student that you are glad he shared his concerns and that you need to discuss this with another person who can help him – then inform the teacher
  - Ask the student lots of questions about what is happening at home
  
3. A student tells you that they don't like going to the toilet at school as an older child sometimes follows him and wants to touch his 'private parts'. You should
  - Tell the student not to go to the toilet at school and this will fix the problem
  - Give the student some karate tips so that the next time the boy follows him he can protect himself
  - Tell the student that you are glad he shared his concern and that you need to discuss this with someone else who can help him – then inform the teacher
  
4. A student asks that you friend them on Facebook. You should
  - Friend the whole class – what's the harm
  - Thank them for wanting to include you in their social media; however, as a volunteer it would be inappropriate for you to do this.
  - Ask them what Facebook is

## APPENDIX A

A student has a bruise around their eye

A student says that their Uncle touched their 'rude parts'

A student is frequently presenting with no lunch

A student being told they are worthless

A student forcing another student to touch their genitals

A 5 year old student is left alone overnight

A parent humiliating their child

A student has unexplained marks on their arms



**Sexual Abuse**



**Physical Abuse**



**Emotional Abuse**



**Neglect**



## APPENDIX B

1. You walk past a classroom and see a staff member alone with a year 2 student. The student is sitting on the staff members knee and the staff member has their arm around the students shoulders. Both are laughing.
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