



PROCEDURE

Responding to Suspected Abuse (3.14.01)

INTRODUCTION

God's love and care towards children can be clearly understood from Jesus' words in Luke 17:2 " Better to wear a millstone necklace and take a swim in the deep blue sea than give even one of these little ones a hard time."

Therefore it is important that we take action when we have reason to believe that some form of abuse may be being experienced by one of the children in our care.

The school is not the investigating agent in cases of abuse. This role is one for the appropriate government agency (Oranga Tamariki – the Ministry for Children) who have the legal powers to take appropriate action.

PURPOSE

- To ensure that the safety and dignity of the child is paramount.
- To provide staff with guidelines so they can identify signs of abuse or neglect.
- To provide staff with guidelines to follow when dealing with cases of suspected abuse or neglect.

DEFINITION

Child Abuse means the harming (whether physical, emotional or sexual) ill-treatment, abuse neglect or deprivation of any child or young person. (Section 2 Children and Young Persons Amendment Act, 1994)

Sexual abuse is any act or acts that result in the sexual exploitation of a child or a young person, whether consensual or not.

Physical Abuse is any act or acts that result in inflicting injury to a child or a young person.

Emotional abuse is any act or omission that results in impaired psychological, social, emotional and/or intellectual functioning, injury and/or development of a child or a young person.

Neglect is any act or omission that results in impaired physical functioning, injury, and/or development of a child or a young person.

(Refer to: "Breaking the Cycle- An interagency guide to Child Abuse" Children, Young Person's and their Families Service. Oranga Tamariki)

GUIDELINES

1. Members of the Bethlehem College community will be expected to be receptive and sensitive to the children in their care so that the children feel listened to, know that they will be believed and will be taken seriously. It is **not the role of the teacher to decide the validity** of any statement by a child.
2. Staff will be provided through the staff handbook information about identifying child abuse. E.g. Bruising, hungry, angry, withdrawn.
3. Staff will be informed of reporting procedures in the staff handbook.

4. The College Counsellor will inform the Principal of suspected abuse of a child.
5. **The parents will not be contacted** or informed by the school of any suspected abuse. This is the role of the Police or Oranga Tamariki and they will be carrying out any needed investigation.
6. All information/ discussion in the case of suspected abuse will be confidential to the staff and agencies involved.

PROCEDURES

1. Staff will inform the College Counsellor and/or Head of School if they have concerns about the safety of a child.
2. Staff will **not interview or question** in any way the child if they have concerns about suspected abuse. Rather they need to observe and listen to what the child is telling them.
3. Staff should make a note of their observations and children's comments, date it and contact the school counsellor with their concerns.
4. The school counsellor may seek advice and direction from Oranga Tamariki as to the perceived risk.
5. The School Counsellor and/ or the Principal will liaise with appropriate outside support agencies as required.
6. If a referral is made to Oranga Tamariki they will organise a time to visit the school and speak with the child.

EXPLANATION

At the time of preparing these guidelines and procedures, reporting of suspected abuse is **NOT** mandatory. This means that a decision needs to be made by the school to report the abuse. In the majority of cases this is straight forward.

However, as the child gets older greater consideration needs to be given to the wishes of the child as to whether they wish the suspected abuse to be reported. Abuse is based in the ability of an adult or older person than the child to have "power over" the child. The school, in working with the child, needs to be aware that it too has "power" greater than the child and it should not use that power in ways that further abuse the child. Time taken to help the child gain confidence in the processes and protection that the agencies can offer is often time well spent.

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