



Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect Reports and Allegations

Purpose

Lambert School is committed to protecting the children and young people to whom it delivers a service. Accordingly, we have developed this policy on responding to child abuse reports and allegations as a guide to all our people in meeting their responsibilities in this area. Our staff are required to identify, report, and respond to any concerns about or incidents of child abuse or neglect towards children or young people to whom we provide services. Our staff are required to respond to abuse or neglect perpetrated by staff within our organisation or by other persons.

Scope

All staff and volunteers are required to meet the policy's requirements on responding to child abuse reports and allegations. No one is exempt from meeting the standards and requirements set out in the policy. If staff fail to report instances, allegations, disclosures or concerns about abuse or neglect of a child or young person – by staff within our organisation or by others – this failure is a serious matter that, depending on the circumstances, may result in disciplinary action or be grounds for dismissal.

The policy prohibits all staff and volunteers from discussing any concerns or allegations with unauthorised persons within or outside our organization. Such prohibition is not designed to limit, in any way, their rights and responsibilities to report their concerns or allegations, but rather as part of our organisation's commitment to ensuring privacy, confidentiality and natural justice, and to avoid making deliberately false, misleading or vexatious allegations.

Staff and volunteers are obliged to raise any concerns they might have concerning:

- Our policies are designed to safeguard children and young people such as outlined in Lambert School's Staff Code of Conduct Policy and this policy.
- Actions of other staff within our organisation that contravene our policies or that may otherwise have the potential to harm a child or young person.

Roles and Duties:

Responsibilities of School management:

- implement policies and procedures across the organisation;
- ensure staff have access to and understand the Policy and related procedures
- ensure all managers/supervisors have access to support and advice to understand and implement policies and procedures.

Deputy Principal/ Principal:

- ensure policies and procedures are followed and implemented.
- review and update the policy and supporting resources in consultation with relevant stakeholders;
- support the coordination of the SCYP framework and implementation
- provide training and advice in the application of policies and procedures.

All Staff and Volunteers:

- compliance with the policy and procedures
- reporting any suspicion that a child's safety may be at risk to their supervisor (or, if their supervisor is involved in the suspicion, to a responsible person at an appropriate level within the organisation)
- If any staff member or volunteer within Lambert school suspects harm to a child, they will inform [Strong Families Safe Kids](#) on 1800 000 123. This state-wide number can be used 24 hours a day to report concerns about children. However, outside of usual business hours (8.30am to 5.00pm) it should only be used to report emergencies or urgent concerns regarding the risk of immediate harm.
- They make the report known to the Principal or Deputy Principal. If the concern involves a principal, the staff member will make their concerns known to the deputy principal.
- Reports must be made as soon as is practicable after the concern becomes apparent, or if that is not possible, no later than before ending of that person's day of work at Lambert School.
- If a child or young person is at imminent risk of harm or in immediate danger, staff are required to report the situation directly to the Tasmanian Police or medical assistance is required dial 000.

Responding to Child Abuse Reports and Allegations

Responding to incidents, disclosures and suspicions of child abuse – four critical actions:

STEP 1 – Identify and Respond: In situations where a child or young person is making an allegation, our staff are required to:

- listen to the allegation or disclosure supportively, without dispute;
- clarify the basic details, without seeking detailed information or asking suggestive or leading questions;
- explain to the child (if present) that other people may need to be told in order to stop what is happening;
- provide reassurance that the school will take immediate action in response to the allegation;
- remember that safety and welfare of the child or young person is paramount at all times.

In situations where a child or young person makes a disclosure in a group situation or to another child, our staff are required to:

- acknowledge that you have heard the student;
- indicate support by explaining that what the student has said sounds important and that it would be better to talk about it privately with the Principal later;
- arrange an appropriate time as soon as possible to see the student away from other students; and
- explain you want to protect their privacy. Do NOT:
 - confront the person believed to be the perpetrator;
 - commence an investigation into the alleged abuse or neglect with any other staff, children or young people or persons outside Lambert school
 - discuss any concerns or allegations without authorized staff within or outside the organisation to ensure our organisation's commitment to privacy, confidentiality and natural justice.

STEP 2 - Report:

- Report any instance of serious abuse or neglect (cases in which a child or young person has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm from abuse or neglect) to [Strong Families Safe Kids](#) and the Principal or their nominated delegate immediately, or if that is not possible, no later than before ending that that person's day of work at Lambert School and;
- We ask that our staff also inform the Principal of any report they make to those authorities, to enable our organisation to best provide support to the child or young person, their family and our staff, where appropriate.

- The Principal or their nominated delegate will complete an incident report.

In taking a report of concern or incident from others within our organisation, our staff are:

- not to assess the validity of such allegations or concerns, but to report all allegations or concerns to the nominated person or persons within our organisation as described in this policy
- to disregard factors such as the authority or position of the persons involved and any pre-existing views about the good character, or otherwise, of any person involved or under investigation;
- not to confront the person believed to be the perpetrator; and
- not to commence an investigation into the alleged abuse or neglect with any other staff, children or young people or persons outside Lambert School.

STEP 3 - Contact:

- [Strong families Safe kids](#) on 1800 000 123 immediately (i.e. before the end of the workday). You may also wish to contact the Tasmania Police at 131 444 for Police Assistance.
- If a child is at immediate risk and Police or medical assistance is required, dial 000
- All our staff are obligated to report directly to relevant authorities such as Strong Families Safe Kids or the police any concerns they may have concerning the safety and welfare of a child or young person, regardless of whether or not they have also reported that matter internally.

STEP 4 - Support:

Experiences of child abuse, including exposure to family violence, can cause trauma and significantly impact the mental health and wellbeing of children. In addition to reporting and referral to relevant authorities, Lambert School staff play a central role in addressing this trauma and have a duty of care to ensure that student feels safe and supported at school including:

- offering support which can include direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals and community services and should involve the development of a student support plan;
- principals must ensure that other impacted students are offered and provided appropriate support;
- support must also be provided to any impacted staff members.

In relation to reportable cases of abuse where Strong Families Safe Kids and/or Tasmania Police have been notified, they may wish to carry out student interviews, sometimes jointly, at school.

- Principals are responsible for ensuring students are supported during interviews at school conducted by Tasmania Police or [Strong Families Safe Kids](#).
- Before allowing any officers access to information or students, the Principal or their nominated delegate should sight the officer's identification and may also wish to confirm this with a phone call to their station.
- No student will be interviewed at the school against the wishes of the student. It is the Principal or nominated delegate's responsibility to inform the student of this.
- In writing or via electronic mail, the officers must produce for the School official confirmation of an investigation involving a particular child. At the commencement of the interview, the Principal should ask the investigating officers to explain to the student the purpose of the interview and their role in the presence of the Principal, or their nominated delegate.
- The Principal, or their nominated delegate, will inform the student of his or her right to choose a supportive adult to be present at the interview. If a person is nominated by the student, the interview must not commence until that person has arrived. What takes place in the interview becomes part of the investigation and must remain confidential.
- Except in cases which involve a member of the family, it is expected that a parent of the child concerned will be present at any interview with the child. Should the allegations be made against a family member, the parents will be informed of the interview as soon as possible after it has commenced by the relevant authorities or the school if permission has been granted.
- Child Protection Services or Police officers are responsible for communicating with parents about any further matters related to an interview.
- Students should be provided with support and a safe space before and after any such interview.

Reporting of concerns or allegations regarding abuse involving child-to-child conduct:

There are a range of circumstances in which child-to-child conduct may be reportable, either to [Strong Families Safe Kids](#) or to the Tasmania Police. Mandatory Reporters are required to report circumstances of problematic sexual behaviour by a child or young person toward another child or young person (that is, conduct outside the bounds of normal sexual behaviour), including child-to-child sexual abuse. Child-to-child sexual abuse can occur when a child or young person involves another child in sexual activity. It can be physical, verbal or emotional.

If you have any concern that problematic sexual behaviour by a child or young person toward another child or young person (including child-to-child sexual abuse) is occurring, you must immediately inform the Principal or their nominated delegate. If you are not sure whether the sexual behaviour is problematic, you should report the behaviour to the principal or their nominated delegate. However, depending on the seriousness and nature of the alleged conduct – e.g. physical assault or threats of violence, or issues regarding consent - the matter may also be reportable to Tasmania Police or [Strong Families Safe Kids](#).

Reporting of concerns or allegations of abuse or neglect involving staff or volunteers:

All staff must immediately report to the Principal any breach of Lambert School's Staff Code of Conduct Policy arising from action by a staff member or volunteer within our organisation. In response to any instance of 'serious' breaches which relate to abuse or neglect ('serious' being cases in which the abuse or neglect has resulted in, or is likely to result in, significant harm to a child or young person), the Principal or Deputy Principal will investigate and deal with allegations of inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour towards a child in line with Lambert school's general procedures for complaint resolution and disciplinary measures including consultation with Police and other authorities.

If a 'serious' allegation has been made against a staff member of our organisation, the Principal or Deputy will:

- fill in a Child Abuse Incident Report Form to ensure all relevant details are documented;
- cooperate with the Police and other authorities and assist in their investigation of the allegation;
- take any action necessary to safeguard the child or young person (or other children or young people in our care) from additional harm through options such as: redeploying that staff member to a position where they do not work with children; additional supervision of that staff member; and removing or suspending that staff member from duty until the validity of the allegations is determined.
- assist in addressing the support needs of those impacted by the allegation, including considerations of cultural safety for:
 - the child and their family (this includes any specific support needs for those from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; culturally and linguistically diverse; or person with a disability background); the person against whom the complaint is made by, for example, offering professional counselling; other staff impacted by the allegations;
- make clear to all other staff who are aware of the allegation that:

- the allegation does not mean the person is guilty, and that the allegation will be investigated appropriately and will include the right to 'procedural fairness';
- they are not to discuss the matter with any person, except as directed by police, child protection authorities and/or the Principal and only in direct relation to the investigation of the allegation. All instances, allegations, disclosures or reasonable concerns of abuse or neglect of a child or young person arising from action by a staff member or volunteer at Lambert School will be investigated and will be the subject of a critical incident review. The Principal will take appropriate action to mitigate further potential harm, and ensure the safety of the student. This may include standing staff down from their position pending a formal investigation of the allegations.

Confidentiality and privacy

Lambert School maintains the confidentiality and privacy of all concerned (including the alleged perpetrator), except if doing so would compromise the welfare of the child or young person and/or investigation of the allegation.

Documentation

As part of our policy for responding to reports or allegations of child abuse, we have developed a Child Abuse Incident Report Form, which is to be used by any of our staff to document any allegation, disclosure, incident or concern regarding child abuse. In situations where our staff become aware of abuse, whether through observation of potential indicators such as bruises or cuts or by directly observing potentially abusive behaviour towards a child or young person, they are required to use the Child Abuse and Neglect Incident Report Form to record their observations and concerns as accurately as possible. The form can be found [here](#) or on the school's website.

Child Abuse and Neglect Incident Report Form

The Principal will oversee the maintenance of a file to contain the completed 'Child Abuse and Neglect Incident Report Form' and any other documentation relating to the allegation and subsequent action. To prevent access by unauthorised persons, our organisation stores any documentation associated with an allegation of abuse or neglect of a child or young person by having:

- hard-copy documentation stored in a locked filing cabinet (or similar). We maintain and regularly monitor records of child abuse reports as part of our Incident Management processes to ensure that they are responded to effectively according to this policy and that reporting to external authorities is complied with.
- Online databases with access restricted to senior staff or their delegates.

Communication

We communicate our policy requirements to all our staff involved with children and young people in our organisation. We involve our staff in reviews of our policy requirements. We communicate any significant alterations to our policy requirements and resources to all staff.

Monitoring and Review

This document will be reviewed at least every two years in consultation with stakeholders. Some circumstances may trigger an early review; this includes but is not limited to legislative changes, organisational changes, incident outcomes and other matters deemed appropriate by the Board and/or Chief Executive Officer. We retain evidence to document each review undertaken. Such evidence may include minutes of meetings and documentation of changes to policies and procedures that result from a review.

Sources-

[Strong families Safe kids](#)

[National-principles-child-safe-organisations](#)

[Child-and-youth-safe-organisations-framework](#)

[Aboriginal-Cultural-Safety-Short-Guide](#)

[Child and Youth Organisations Act 2023](#)

[Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997](#)

[Criminal Code Act 1924](#)

[Family Violence Act 2004](#)

[Right to Information Act 2009](#)