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| Mandatory reporting to Child Protection  |
| School counsellor’s fact sheet |

## What is mandatory reporting?

Mandatory reporting refers to the legal requirement of certain groups of people to report a reasonable belief of child physical or sexual abuse to child protection authorities.

## Who is mandated to report in Victoria?

The following are mandatory reporters in Victoria:

* registered medical practitioners
* nurses
* midwives
* registered teachers and early childhood teachers
* school principals
* school counsellors
* police officers
* out of home care workers (excluding voluntary foster and kinship carers)
* early childhood workers
* youth justice workers
* registered psychologists
* people in religious ministry.

## How is a school counsellor defined?

A ‘school counsellor’ is defined as “a person employed or engaged (other than on a voluntary basis), to provide direct support to school students, at or directly connected with a school, for mental, emotional or psychological wellbeing.”

A school counsellor includes the following:

* Student Support Service staff
* Primary Welfare Officers
* Mental health practitioners in secondary schools
* Student Wellbeing Coordinators
* Chaplains
* School-based health and wellbeing staff, including allied health staff, such as social workers, speech pathologists, youth workers and school counsellors

The definition captures some professionals who are currently mandated reporters such as doctors, nurses, registered teachers and registered psychologists. The definition does **not** capture a registered home school, TAFE institution or University.

The above list is not exhaustive. You must consider the definition of school counsellor and determine whether your work could mean you are a school counsellor.

## What am I required to do?

In Victoria, under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, mandatory reporters must make a report to child protection, if:

* in the course of practising their profession or carrying out duties of their office, position or employment
* they form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse.

## When do I have to report?

Make a report to Child Protection as soon as practicable after forming your belief. Make a report each time you become aware of any further reasonable grounds for your belief.

The penalty for failing to make mandatory report is 10 penalty points[[1]](#footnote-1).

If you are worried about a child’s wellbeing but do not believe they are in need of protection, refer to the below section on how to make a referral to Child FIRST or The Orange Door.

## What is a belief on reasonable grounds?

A belief is a belief on reasonable grounds if a reasonable person, doing the same work, would have formed the same belief on those grounds.

Grounds for forming a belief are matters of which you have become aware, and any opinions in relation to those matters.

## When is a child in need of protection?

A child may be in need of protection if they have experienced or are at risk of significant harm, and their parents have not protected, or are unlikely to protect them from that harm. Significant harm may relate to:

* physical injury
* sexual abuse
* emotional or intellectual development
* physical development or health
* abandonment or parental incapacity.

Mandatory reporters are required to report in relation to significant harm as a result of physical injury or sexual abuse. They may choose, as can anyone, to report in relation to other types of significant harm.

## What will Child Protection do?

The best interests of the child are the paramount consideration. Child Protection will decide when follow up is required and how to classify the report. This may mean providing advice to the reporter, progressing the matter to an investigation, referring the family to support services in the community, or taking no further action.

## Contact Child Protection

To make a report, you should contact the child protection intake service covering the local government area (LGA) where the child normally resides. Telephone numbers to make a report during business hours (8.45am-5.00pm), Monday to Friday, are listed below.

North Division intake: 1300 664 977

South Division intake: 1300 655 795

East Division intake: 1300 360 391

West Division intake - metropolitan: 1300 664 977

West Division intake - rural and regional: 1800 075 599

If you are not sure which number to call, check the following website for details on the LGAs covered by each intake service at [Child protection contacts](https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/child-protection-contacts) <https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/child-protection-contacts>

*Please note, child protection reports cannot be made via the department's website or email.*

## For immediate help

To report concerns that are life threatening, contact Victoria Police: 000

To report concerns about the immediate safety of a child outside of normal business hours, contact the
After Hours Child Protection Emergency Service on
13 12 78.

## What if I’m worried about a child’s wellbeing, but I don’t believe the child is in need of protection?

### Child FIRST or The Orange Door

If you have significant concerns for the wellbeing of a child, but do not believe they are at risk of significant harm, and where the immediate safety of the child will not be compromised, a referral to Child FIRST or The Orange Door may be appropriate.

Child FIRST, as the access point for family services, is progressively transitioning to The Orange Door. The Orange Door is the new access point for families who need assistance with the care and wellbeing of children, including those experiencing family violence, to contact the services they need to be safe and supported.

Referring to Child FIRST or The Orange Door would be appropriate where families:

* are experiencing significant parenting problems that may be affecting the child's development
* are experiencing family conflict, including family breakdown
* are under pressure due to a family member's physical or mental illness, substance abuse, disability or bereavement
* are young, isolated or unsupported
* are experiencing significant social or economic disadvantage that may adversely impact on a child's care or development.

Contact numbers to make a referral in each local government area are listed at the [Child and family services information, referral and support teams](https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/referral-and-support-teams) <https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/referral-and-support-teams>

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| **Child FIRST and The Orange Door** |
| Barwon | 1800 312 820 |
| Bayside Peninsula | 1800 319 353 |
| Brimbank Melton | 1300 138 180 |
| Central and Upper Hume | 1800 705 211 |
| Colac-Otway, Corangamite | (03) 5232 5500 |
| East Gippsland | (03) 5152 0052 |
| Goulburn Valley - Seymour | 1800 663 107 |
| Goulburn Valley - Shepparton | 1300 854 944 |
| Hume Moreland | 1300 786 433 |
| Inner East | 1300 762 125 |
| Latrobe & Baw Baw | 1800 319 354 |
| Lower Hume | 1800 663 107 |
| Mallee | 1800 290 943 |
| North Central | 1800 260 338 |
| North East | 1800 319 355 |
| Outer East | 1300 369 146 |
| South Coast | 1800 319 354 |
| South East | (03) 9705 3939 |
| South West | 1300 543 779 |
| Wellington (Sale) | (03) 5144 7777 |
| Western Melbourne | 1300 775 160 |
| Wimmera | 1800 195 114 |

## Will the family know I have made a report or referral?

The identity of a reporter to Child Protection or a referrer to Child FIRST or The Orange Door must remain confidential, unless:

* the reporter or referrer chooses to inform the child or family of the report or referral
* the reporter or referrer consents in writing to their identity as the reporter being disclosed
* a court or tribunal decides it needs this information in order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child
* a court or tribunal decides that in the interests of justice the evidence needs to be given.

It is often considered best practice to inform the family that you have made a report or referral, where appropriate. Being transparent about your concerns and making a report to child protection or referral to Child FIRST or The Orange Door, in circumstances where it is safe and appropriate to do so, can be beneficial for the young person, the family and your ongoing role with them.

However, in some circumstances, discussing your concerns may increase risk of harm for a child, or may compromise a child protection or police investigation. As such, seek advice at the time of making the report or referral.

## For more information

For more information refer to the Department of Health and Human Services ‘services’ and ‘providers’ websites:

<https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/reporting-child-abuse>

<https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/mandatory-reporting>

<https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/family-support>

<https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/child-protection>

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| To receive this publication in an accessible format email mandatoryreporting@dhhs.vic.gov.au, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required. Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.© State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services February 2020.Where the term ‘Aboriginal’ is used it refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Indigenous is retained when it is part of the title of a report, program or quotation.Available from the [Mandatory reporting page](https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/mandatory-reporting) <https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/mandatory-reporting> |

1. For further information, see the [Department of Treasure and Finance Indexation of fees and penalties](https://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/financial-management-government/indexation-fees-and-penalties) <https://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/financial-management-government/indexation-fees-and-penalties> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)