

Vulnerable children

Rationale

The Sponsor has an obligation to ensure the wellbeing of students enrolled at PASS and it is committed to the prevention of child abuse and neglect and to the protection of all children. The safety and wellbeing of the child is a top priority when investigating suspected or alleged abuse.

The Sponsor and the school supports the roles of the New Zealand Police (the Police) and Child, Youth and Family in the investigation of suspected abuse and will report suspected/alleged abuse to these agencies.

The Sponsor and the school supports families to protect their children.

The school has an obligation to provide a safe environment, free from physical, emotional, verbal or sexual abuse.

Background

The Vulnerable Children Act 2014 aims to improve the well-being of vulnerable children through measures aimed at:

- Protecting them from abuse and neglect
- Improving their physical and mental health and their cultural and emotional well-being
- Improving their education and training and their participation in recreation and cultural activities
- Strengthening their connection to their families, whanau, hapu and iwi or other culturally recognised family group
- Increasing their participation in decision-making about them, and their contribution to society
- Improving their social and economic well-being

Purpose

1. To ensure there is a supportive and caring school environment for the victims of abuse.
2. To support the investigation, as far as the school is able and might be reasonably expected to, of cases of suspected child abuse.
3. To follow Ministry of Education Reporting Abuse Protocols (Aug 09)
4. To prevent further abuse taking place.
5. To prevent unfair treatment of the victims of child abuse.
6. To prevent unfair treatment of the perpetrators of child abuse.
7. To facilitate appropriate treatment programmes for both victims and perpetrators of child abuse.

Policy Principles

1. The interest and protection of the child is paramount in all actions.
2. The school recognises the rights of family to participate in the decision-making about their children.
3. The school has a commitment to ensure that all staff are able to identify the signs and symptoms of potential abuse and neglect and are able to take appropriate action in response.
4. The school is committed to supporting all staff to work in accordance with this policy, to work with partner agencies and organisations to ensure child protection policies are consistent and high quality.
5. The school will always comply with relevant legislative responsibilities.
6. The school is committed to share information in a timely way and to discuss any concerns about an individual child with colleagues or the Person in Charge.
7. The school is committed to promote a culture where staff feel confident that they can constructively challenge poor practice or raise issues of concern without fear of reprisal.
8. The school recognises and supports section 2(i) of the *Registered Teacher Criteria* requiring staff to 'demonstrate commitment to promoting the well-being of all learners by taking all reasonable steps to provide and maintain a teaching and learning environment that is physically, socially, culturally and emotionally safe'

Definition

Child abuse: Includes physical, emotional and sexual abuse as well as neglect which is the direct consequence of a deliberate act or omission by an adult and which has the potential or effect of serious harm to the child.

Resource material

Identifying possible abuse or neglect

To download the Child, Youth and Family 'Signs of abuse and neglect' chart see https://www.ecc.org.nz/Folder?Action=View%20File&Folder_id=107&File=Signs%20of%20Abuse%20and%20Neglect.pdf

and

<http://www.cyf.govt.nz/documents/aboutus/publications/27713-working-together-3-0-45ppi.pdfU5T>

This resource produced by Child, Youth and Family is for people in social service agencies, schools, healthcare organisations, community and other groups who have close contact with children and families It includes useful information about identifying possible child abuse and an assessment framework.

Responding to suspected abuse or neglect

To download the 'Child Abuse Reporting Process' flowchart see

https://www.ecc.org.nz/Folder?Action=View%20File&Folder_id=107&File=Reporting%20

Guidelines for responding to suspected abuse or neglect

All suspicions or observed incidents or reports of incidents should be reported directly to the Person in Charge as soon as possible, who will immediately take steps to protect the child(ren), record the report and report the concern to Child, Youth and Family.

If there is clear evidence or reasonable cause to believe an instance of child abuse having taken place, the Person in Charge shall notify Child, Youth and Family.

In addition to guiding staff to make referrals of suspected child abuse and neglect to the statutory agencies (i.e., Child, Youth and Family and the Police), this child protection policy will also help staff to identify and respond to the needs of the many vulnerable children whose wellbeing is of concern.

In many of these cases the involvement of statutory agencies would be inappropriate and potentially harmful to families. Throughout New Zealand statutory and non-statutory agencies provide a network of mutually supportive services and it is important for PASS to work with these to respond to the needs of vulnerable children and families in a manner proportionate to the level of need and risk.

Staff members will discuss suspicions with a senior staff member.

Where appropriate, the person making the allegation will be given a copy of this policy.

Guidelines for responding to allegations or concerns about staff

When a staff member is suspected, the same processes apply.

If there is a need to pursue an allegation as an employer, consult with Child, Youth and Family or the Police before advising the person concerned, informing them that they have a right to seek legal advice and providing them with an opportunity to respond. They should also be informed of their right to seek support from the relevant union/representative body. It is vital to follow ordinary disciplinary policies, guided by the employment contract/collective employment contract and relevant statutory obligations.

We commit not to use 'settlement agreements', where these are contrary to a culture of child protection. Some settlement agreements allow a member of staff to agree to resign provided that no disciplinary action is taken, and a future reference is agreed. Where the conduct at issue concerned the safety or wellbeing of a child, use of such agreements is contrary to a culture of child protection.

Guidelines for confidentiality and information sharing

The *Privacy Act* 1993 and the *Children, Young Persons, and their Families Act* 1989 allow information to be shared to keep children safe when abuse or suspected abuse is reported or

investigated. Note that under sections 15 and 16 of the CYPF Act, any person who believes that a child has been, or is likely to be, harmed physically, emotionally or sexually or ill-treated, abused, neglected or deprived may report the matter to Child, Youth and Family or the Police and, provided the report is made in good faith, no civil, criminal or disciplinary proceedings may be brought against them.

Guidelines for recruitment and employment (safety checking)

Safety checking will be carried out in accordance with the *Vulnerable Children Act 2014*. This will include: a police vet; identity verification; references and an interview. A work history will be sought and previous employers will be contacted. If there is any suspicion that an applicant might pose a risk to a child, that applicant will not be employed.

Guidelines for training supervision and support

Training, resources and/or advice will be available to ensure that all staff can carry out their roles in terms of this policy, particularly:

- Understanding child abuse and indicators of child abuse.
- How to reduce the risk of child abuse.
- Understanding and complying with legal obligations in regard to child abuse.
- Working with outside agencies on child abuse issues.
- Planning of environment and supervision to minimise risk.
- Dealing with child/parents/family.

This policy will be part of the initial staff induction programme.

Related Policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with

- Child abuse or suspected child abuse
- Creating a safe, non-violent, bully-free environment

Review

This policy has been reviewed by the Pacific Peoples Advancement Trust and will be reviewed again by November 2019.

Approved: _____ **Date:** _____