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ST BRIGID'S SCHOOL CHILD PROTECTION PROCEDURES

1. Purpose

1.1 The most effective way to safeguard children is to have comprehensive and effective procedures, with attached practices and guidelines. Children and young people attending St Brigid's School have a right to feel safe and comfortable.

1.2 The purpose of these procedures is to provide St Brigid's School staff guidelines by which to identify and respond appropriately to concerns of abuse and neglect, and to understand their role in keeping children safe.

2. Scope

2.1 This Procedure Statement covers all staff of St Brigid's School who have direct or indirect contact with children. This includes those staff, paid or voluntary, employed directly by St Brigid's School, as well as those professionals contracted or invited to provide services to children in the care of St Brigid's School. This includes teaching and non-teaching staff.

2.2 This Procedure Statement covers the Board of Trustees and their responsibilities in the safety and wellbeing of children.

2.3 Related Documentation

- Reporting of Suspected or Actual Child Abuse and Neglect: Protocol between the MoE, STA and Oranga Tamariki 2009; The Vulnerable Children's Act 2014.
- How Can I Tell? Recognising child abuse – Child Matters CPS

3. Definitions

3.1 For the purposes of this Procedure Statement "Child" means a boy or girl under the age of 14 years, "Young person" means a boy or girl of or over the age of 14 years but under 17 years.

3.2 For the purpose of this Procedure Statement "Staff" means people working at St Brigid's School and includes employees, contactors, consultants, students, associates and volunteers whether working on a full time, part time, casual, or temporary basis.

4. Principles

4.1 This Child Protection Procedure Statement confirms the commitment of St Brigid's School to the protection of children and proceeds to:

- outline the standards and principles by which all staff will abide
- define child abuse
- outline the action to be taken by staff where any form of abuse or ill-treatment is known or suspected

4.2 St Brigid's School will ensure that:

- Staff are carefully selected with the principles of this Procedure Statement in mind.
- Staff are appropriately supported in issues of child protection.
- Staff are aware of the Child Protection Procedure Statement and accompanying guidelines.

4.3 St Brigid's School recognises that all staff and Trustees have a full and active part to play in protecting students from harm. Overall responsibility, implementation and review of this Procedure Statement rests with the Principal of St Brigid's.

4.4 All actions taken by St Brigid's School for the safety and wellbeing of children adhere to the principles of partnership, protection and participation; and the rights and responsibilities accorded by Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

5. Responsibilities

5.1 Any member of staff, paid or voluntary, may directly witness child abuse or have allegations, made by a child or an adult, relayed to them. There may also be disclosures of abuse that have occurred prior to attending St Brigid's School. Sustained abuse and neglect of children, wherever it occurs, can have major long term effects on all aspects of children's health, development and well-being and their ability to sustain stable and meaningful relationships in the future. It is the intention of St Brigid's School to ensure that all staff understand their roles and responsibilities in ensuring the safety of children at all times. This is achieved through consistent and agreed protocols regarding child protection, as well as the regular undertaking of awareness raising training.

5.2 Each member of staff must:

- be aware of, and alert to, potential indicators of abuse or neglect
- record a factual account of any concerns they have, or that are brought to their attention
- appropriately seek advice and support from their Team Leader/Principal who will then contact external agencies if appropriate
- work in co-operation with the parents and caregivers, unless this compromises the safety of the child.

5.3 It is the primary responsibility of staff to be vigilant, have knowledge and awareness of the indicators or neglect, potential or actual abuse and to report any concerns, suspicions or allegations of suspected abuse immediately and ensure that the concern is taken seriously and reported.

5.4 The statutory responsibility to investigate allegations of child abuse rests with Oranga Tamariki and the Police.

Role of the Principal

5.5 The Principal is the **designated person for child protection** and therefore must:

- Ensure the needs and rights of children come first i.e. the safety and wellbeing
- Receive information that suggests potential or actual risk of harm to a child who attends St Brigid's School, irrespective of whether the alleged abuse is current, past or likely to occur. The Principal will advise and support staff and, on the basis of the initial detail, will make a decision as to whether or not to take further action.
- Make any referrals to Oranga Tamariki and/or the Police as appropriate.
- Ensure that a team of appropriate personnel eg Team Leader, Classroom Teacher etc is in place to support the child and their family
- Ensure that all allegations are managed appropriately.
- Ensure that all staff are aware of, and have access to, full copies of the procedures for reporting child abuse.
- Ensure that all staff are recruited and employed in accordance with the guidelines identified in the Employment Procedure Statement to identify those people safe to work with children.
- Ensure that all staff receive child protection information.

Role of the Board of Trustees

5.6 The role of the Board of Trustees is to:

- Ensure the needs and rights of children come first i.e. the safety and wellbeing of each child is paramount.

- Support the Principal to ensure that all allegations are managed appropriately.
- Inform the Principal immediately should any member of the Board of Trustees be aware of a concern for the wellbeing and safety of a child who attends St Brigid's School.

6. Child Protection Procedures

6.1 All staff will respond to concerns of child abuse by following the identified procedures, consulting appropriately and collaborating with external agencies.

6.2 The procedures set out below will help staff with:

- the identification of abuse
- handling disclosures, whether verbal or behavioural, from a child
- reporting procedures

Identification of abuse

6.3 If a disclosure is made by a child to a staff member, it is important that the staff member follows the actions in the appendix "Responding to a child when the child discloses abuse" they then need to talk to the Principal

If the Principal is unavailable for advice and guidance then staff should consult with the Deputy Principal or Team Leader. Advice from Oranga Tamariki regarding child protection concerns may be sought by the Principal, Deputy Principal or Team Leader

Further information regarding signs and indicators of abuse is included in the Appendix.

Handling disclosures from a child

6.5 If a child makes a verbal disclosure to a member of staff it is important that staff take what the child says seriously. This applies irrespective of the setting, or the member of staff's own opinion on what the child is saying.

Further information regarding responding to a disclosure is included in the Appendix.

6.6 **Under no circumstances should a member of staff attempt to conduct an investigation or deal with concerns regarding child abuse alone.** Any incidents, concerns or suspicions must be reported following the procedures set out below.

Suicidal Concerns or Self-Harming Behaviours

6.7 It is important to be aware that children can harm themselves or attempt suicide. When a child identifies thoughts of suicide, or self-harming behaviour, this must be immediately notified to the Principal. If immediate action is required phone mental health team at Wellington Hospital.

Reporting procedures

6.8 All concerns of potential, suspected or alleged abuse must be brought to the attention of the Principal. If the Principal is unavailable for advice and guidance then staff should consult with the Deputy Principal or Team Leader. A decision will be made by the Principal as to whether to seek further advice or notify Oranga Tamariki.

When reporting an incident staff should:

- Inform the Principal/Deputy Principal or Team Leader as soon as possible
- Record in writing all conversations and actions taken

6.9 Effective documentation, including referrals and notifications, must include the following:

- Record of facts, including observations, with time and date
- What was said and by whom, using the person's words
- What action has been taken, by whom and when

Keeping the child's family informed and involved

6.10 Although the parent or caregiver of the child will usually be informed of concerns, there may be times when those with parental responsibility may not be initially informed. This may happen when:

- the parent or caregiver is the alleged perpetrator
- it is possible that the child may be intimidated into silence
- there is a strong likelihood that evidence will be destroyed
- the child does not want their parent or caregiver involved and they are of an age when they are competent to make that decision

Sharing Information and Confidentiality

6.11 The safety of a child is paramount. At times a child is unable to speak for or protect themselves. Therefore St Brigid's School has a greater responsibility to know when and how to share appropriate information with external agencies to protect the safety and wellbeing of children.

6.12 Giving information to protect children better is not a breach in confidentiality. Wherever possible the family/whanau should be kept informed of what information has been shared and to which agency, and for what purpose. Principle 11 of the Privacy Act, 1993, states "disclosure of the information is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious threat".

6.13 Should St Brigid's School be contacted with a request for information or access to interview a child then the following procedure will be followed:

- Confirm identity and credentials of person requesting information
- Notify the Principal and/or Designated Person
- Identify specific information required and purpose
- Check information held – does St Brigid's School have the information requested
- Principal to identify way forward and provide permission
- Depending on the reason for the request, and risk to children as judged case by case, inform the family that information has been requested, by whom and seek permission. If this is a child protection issue, permission from the family is not required.

Document all steps in the process. Ensure that all documentation is placed on the child's child protection file.

Child Protection Policy – Appendix - Definition and Sign of Abuse

Definition

Child abuse refers to the harming (whether physically, emotionally or sexually), ill treatment, abuse, neglect, or serious deprivation of any child or young person.

Physical abuse – any acts that may result in physical harm of a child or young person

Sexual abuse – any acts that involve forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not they are aware of what is happening or not

Emotional abuse – any act or omission that results in adverse or impaired psychological, social, intellectual and emotional functioning or development

Cyber Abuse - the use of electronic communication to bully a person, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature.

Neglect – the persistent failure to meet a child’s basic physical or psychological needs, leading to adverse or impaired physical or emotional functioning or development

Family violence – may be witnessed/experienced by children and involve physical, sexual and emotional abuse

Identifying child abuse and neglect

Every situation is different and it’s important to consider all the available information about the child and their environment before reaching conclusions.

Some signs of potential abuse / neglect

- Physical signs of abuse: unexplained injuries, burns, fractures, unusual or excessive itching, genital injuries, sexually transmitted diseases.
- Neglect: looking rough and uncared for, dirty, without appropriate clothing, underweight
- Medical neglect (e.g. persistent skin disorders or other untreated medical issues)
- Developmental delays (e.g. small for their age, cognitive delays, falling behind in school, poor speech and social skills)
- Emotional abuse/neglect (e.g. sleep problems, low self-esteem, obsessive behaviour, inability to cope in social situations, sadness, loneliness and evidence of self-harm)
- Behavioural concerns (e.g. age-inappropriate sexual interest or play, fear of a certain person or place, eating disorders, disengagement/neediness, aggression)
- The child talking about things that indicate abuse (sometimes called an allegation or disclosure)
- Neglectful supervision (e.g. out and about unsupervised, left alone, no safe home to return to)

Responding to Child Abuse

Guidelines for responding when a child tells of his or her abuse

It is important that you as the adult remain calm and confident when a child tells you what has been happening to him or her. Every child is different in how, when and where they will tell an adult about abusive experiences so it will most likely happen when you are least expecting it! Your facial expressions and your tone of voice are as important as what you actually say to the child.

Stay calm, listen, **reassure** the child and at times you may need to **clarify** what the child has said so that you can take the appropriate action. If a child sees that you are upset or not able to cope with what he or she is telling you he or she may not continue to tell you what has been happening or take back (i.e. retract) the original statements they have made.

Responding to a child when the child discloses abuse

Listen to the child	Disclosures by children are often subtle and need to be handled with care, including an awareness of the child’s cultural identity and how that affects interpretation of their behaviour and language.
Reassure the child	Let the child know that they are not in trouble and have done the right thing. While reassuring the child it is important that you do not agree ‘not to tell anyone’.

Ask open ended prompts, e.g. “What happened next?”	Do not interview the child (do not ask questions beyond open prompts for the child to continue).
If the child is visibly distressed	Provide appropriate reassurance and engage in appropriate activities under supervision until they are able to participate in ordinary activities.
If the child is not in immediate danger	Re-involve the child in ordinary activities and explain what you are going to do next.
As soon as possible formally record the disclosure	Record: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word for word, what the child said • The date, time and who was present

DO

- Listen, allow the child to tell as much as they want without interrupting (remember listening is not questioning)
- Respond reassuringly to the child
- If you do ask a question avoid asking leading questions, ask only open questions that seek clarification so that you can decide what action you need to take
- Most importantly “BELIEVE WHAT THEY SAY”
- Document what the child said and the responses that you made and any clarifying questions asked (word for word and remember to put the date, time, place and who was present)

DON'T

- Question in a way that introduces words, phrases, people’s names or concepts
- Indicate that you disbelieve the child
- Try to correct, confront, change, challenge or influence what they say
- Respond by saying “You should have told me sooner” or “Why did you let him/her do that?”

Disclosures that indicate an abusive experience

Those working with children know not to “question the child” if a disclosure of abuse is made. This is correct - questions should not be asked if the child makes what could be considered a “clear disclosure” of abuse e.g. “Mum punched me in the head and made my nose bleed”, or “Uncle got into my bed and put his hand in my bum”. These types of disclosures require (1) a reassuring response by an adult and (2) the adult to take immediate action by contacting Oranga Tamariki and/or Police.