

FORDELL SCHOOL

Child Protection Policy

INTRODUCTION

The Fordell School Board aim to ensure that all children are protected from harm, have their rights protected and welfare promoted. The Vulnerable Children Act of 2014 requires all children related agencies to work together to improve the well-being of vulnerable children.

PURPOSE

We recognise the important role and responsibility of all our staff in the protection of children by identifying and responding to suspected child abuse or neglect and appropriately responding to concerns about the wellbeing of a child. We will:

- Ensure that the welfare of the child is paramount.
- Provide procedural guidelines for all people working with children in this school if they suspect cases of child abuse or neglect.

GUIDELINES

Definitions of child abuse and neglect are:

- Physical abuse – any acts that may result in physical harm of a child or young person. It can be, but is not limited to: bruising, cutting, hitting, beating, biting, burning, causing abrasions, strangulation, suffocation, drowning, poisoning and fabricated or induced illness.
- 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.
- Emotional abuse – any act or omission that results in adverse or impaired psychological, social, intellectual and emotional functioning or development. This can include:
 - Patterns of isolation, degradation, constant criticism or negative comparison to others. Isolating, corrupting, exploiting or terrorising a child can also be emotional abuse.
 - Exposure to family/whānau or intimate partner violence.
- Neglect – is the most common form of abuse and although the effects may not be as obvious as physical abuse, it is just as serious. Neglect can be:
 - Physical (not providing the necessities of life like a warm place, food and clothing).
 - Emotional (not providing comfort, attention and love).
 - Neglectful supervision (leaving children without someone safe looking after them).
 - Medical neglect (not taking care of health needs).
 - Educational neglect (allowing chronic truancy, failure to enrol in education or inattention to education needs).

Identifying child abuse and neglect

Our approach to identifying abuse or neglect is guided by the following principles:

- We understand that every situation is different and it's important to consider all available information about the child and their environment before reaching conclusions. For example, behavioural concerns may be the result of life events, such as divorce, accidental injury, the arrival of a new sibling etc.
- We understand when we are concerned a child is showing signs of potential abuse or neglect we should talk to someone, either a colleague, manager/supervisor or the Designated Person for Child Protection – we shouldn't act alone.

- While there are different definitions of abuse, the important thing is for us to consider overall wellbeing and the risk of harm to the child. It is not so important to be able to categorise the type of abuse or neglect.
- It is normal for us to feel uncertain, however, the important thing is that we should be able to recognise when something is wrong, especially if we notice a pattern forming or several signs that make us concerned.
- Exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV) is a form of child abuse. There is a high rate of concurrence between IPV and the physical abuse of children.

We recognise the signs of potential abuse:

Physical Signs: <i>e.g., unexplained injuries, burns, fractures, unusual or excessive itching, genital injuries, sexually transmitted diseases.</i>	Behaviour Concerns: <i>e.g., age-inappropriate sexual interest or play, fear of a certain person or place, eating disorder, substance abuse, disengagement/neediness, aggression.</i>
Developmental Delays: <i>e.g., sleep problems, cognitive delays, falling behind in school, poor speech and social skills.</i>	Emotional Abuse/Neglect: <i>e.g., sleep problems, low self-esteem, obsessive behaviour, inability to cope in social situations, sadness/loneliness and evidence of self-harm</i>
Child Disclosure: <i>e.g., the child talking about things that indicate abuse. This can be called an allegation or disclosure.</i>	

We are aware of the signs of potential neglect:

Physical Signs: <i>e.g., looking rough and uncared for, dirty without appropriate clothing, underweight.</i>	Behaviour Concerns: <i>e.g., disengagement/neediness, eating disorders/substance abuse, aggression.</i>
Developmental Delays <i>e.g., small for their age, cognitive delays, falling behind in school, poor speech and social skills.</i>	Emotional Abuse/Neglect: <i>e.g., sleep problems, low self-esteem, obsessive behaviour, inability to cope in social situations, sadness/loneliness and evidence of self-harm.</i>
Neglectful Supervision: <i>e.g., out and about unsupervised, left alone, no safe home to return to.</i>	Medical Neglect: <i>e.g., persistent nappy rash or skin disorders or other untreated medical issues.</i>

Every situation is different and staff will consider all available information about the child and their environment before reaching conclusions. For example, behavioural concerns may be the result of life events, such as divorce, accidental injury, the arrival of a new sibling.

1. The Principal is to ensure that safe recruitment practices are in line with the Vulnerable Children Act of 2014.
2. The Principal is required to ensure that teachers within the school work together with other children's agencies (such as the Police, Oranga Tamariki: Ministry for Children, Social Workers, Health Nurse, etc.) to improve the well-being of vulnerable children by:
 - Protecting them from abuse and neglect.
 - Improving their physical and mental health and their cultural and emotional well-being.
 - Improving their educational outcomes and their participation in cultural and extra-curricular activities.
 - Increasing their participation in self-decision making and their contribution to society.
 - Strengthening their connection to their families, whanau, iwi and other culturally recognised family groups.

3. The Principal will ensure that there are procedures in place to identify and respond to allegations regarding abuse or neglect.
4. Staff, where possible, will receive training to assist them in being aware of symptoms and problems of abused or neglected children.
5. Staff will, at least once a year, be refreshed on their understanding of this policy and the procedures.
6. Fordell School will provide preventative education in the delivery of the Health and Physical Education curriculum. Students should have access to information about child abuse or neglect and appropriate response to it through the relevant parts of the school curriculum. Fordell School will use external programmes such as Keeping Ourselves Safe, Life Education Programmes and Kia Kaha.
7. Staff are encouraged to share any concerns regarding children's safety with the Principal (or designated person) in the first instance, documentations of any discussions will be kept.
8. Adults working in Fordell School will be encouraged to be receptive and sensitive to children in order that children feel listened to and believed.
9. The anonymity of the informant will be preserved.
10. Class teachers should document all areas of concern.
11. Where further action is deemed necessary, the appropriate team should be notified (e.g., Oranga Tamariki: Ministry for Children, Police, Health Nurse, etc.).
12. Once an outside agency has been notified, they will assume responsibility for the child's safety and Fordell School will act on the advice from those agencies.
13. Support for staff and others affected will be sought from appropriate agencies (e.g., Oranga Tamariki: Ministry for Children, Police, etc.).

PROCEDURES

Reporting and responding to suspected abuse or neglect

If a staff member has a concern about a child's safety or wellbeing they will, in all instances, report this to the Principal. This will be done at the first possible opportunity to best ensure the safety of the child.

The severity of the suspected abuse or neglect is not up to the staff member or the Principal to determine. The Principal has the ultimate responsibility to ensure appropriate authorities are notified.

In consultation with the Principal, staff should always respond if they suspect abuse or neglect of a child, regardless of who may be involved, as follows:

- i. **Contact the Police** immediately if a child is in immediate danger. The primary response must be to ensure the safety of the child.
- ii. **Contact Oranga Tamariki: Ministry for Children** to discuss appropriate steps where:
 - a) A child has disclosed abuse or neglect (see table below).
 - b) Abuse or neglect of a child has been disclosed by the person responsible.
 - c) A staff member has observed abuse or neglect, or suspects abuse or neglect on the basis of their own observations.
 - d) A third party has told a staff member of known child abuse or neglect, or of their suspicions of possible child abuse or neglect.

- iii. **Contact local family/whānau social service providers** (such as Whānau Ora, Children's Teams, Strengthening Families) where the concern is more of a general, wellbeing related concern and not specifically about abuse or neglect. The services available in each community will vary and may include a range of government and non-government providers who will be able to help the child and their family/whānau. Each Ministry of Education office will have a readily accessible and up to date list of contact details of local social service providers.

Before contacting Oranga Tamariki: Ministry for Children in relation to (i) above, or other organisations in relation to (ii) above:

All staff have a responsibility to discuss any child protection or wellbeing concerns with the Principal.

The Principal has a responsibility to ensure that the appropriate authority is notified when a staff member informs them that a child has been, or is likely to be, or is suspected of being, abused or neglected. This extends to ensuring that all known information about the child, young person, and their siblings and family/whānau, is shared in full with the appropriate authority, to determine the most appropriate response (see section below on confidentiality and information sharing). Local Ministry of Education Office must also be informed. It is therefore essential that in times of absence the Principal delegate this responsibility and that staff are aware of the delegation.

In the spirit of full ownership and collective responsibility for child protection, where a **third party** has advised of the abuse, that person should be encouraged to report the information to Oranga Tamariki: Ministry for Children. The staff member should ensure that this is done by following up with Oranga Tamariki: Ministry for Children.

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.

Recording and notifying Oranga Tamariki: Ministry for Children of suspected child abuse or neglect:

What process to follow	For example	Key considerations
Recording	Formally record: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anything said by the child. The date, time, location and the names of any staff that may be relevant. The factual concerns or observations that have led to the suspicion of abuse or neglect (e.g., any physical, behavioural or developmental concerns). The action taken by your organisation. Any other information that may be relevant 	Relevant information can inform any future actions.
Decision-making	Discuss any concern with the Principal or the designated person for child protection.	No decisions should be made in isolation.
Notifying authorities	Notify Oranga Tamariki: Ministry for Children promptly if there is a belief that a child has been, or is likely to be abused or neglected. A phone call to the National Contact Centre is the preferred initial contact with Oranga Tamariki: Ministry for Children (see below) as this enables both parties to discuss the nature of the concerns and appropriate response options. Call 0508 326 459 Email enquiry@ot.govt.nz	Oranga Tamariki: Ministry for Children will: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Make the decision to inform the parents or caregivers, in consultation with our organisation. Advise what, if any, immediate action may be appropriate, including referring the concern to the Police.
Following the advice of Oranga Tamariki: Ministry for Children	Oranga Tamariki: Ministry for Children advice will include what, if any, immediate action may be appropriate, including referring the concern to the Police	Oranga Tamariki: Ministry for Children is responsible for looking into the situation to find out what may be happening, whether our organisation needs to work with the family/whānau or put them in touch with people in their community who can help.
Storing relevant information	Securely store: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The record of the concern. A record of any related discussions (including copies of correspondence, where appropriate). A record of any advice received The action your organisation took, including any rationale. This concern with any earlier concerns, if the notification is based on an accumulation of concerns (rather than a specific incident). 	Records assist in identifying patterns.

Sharing Information

We share information with appropriate agencies if sharing that information will protect or improve the safety, health, or wellbeing of a child. In all circumstances Fordell School is guided by the Fordell School Privacy Policy (and Privacy Act 2020). By law, we can share information with the police and Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children.

CONCLUSION

Staff will have clear guidelines to follow for any cases of suspected abuse and the necessary in-service training to allow them to act in an informed manner. Everyone who works at Fordell School will be made aware of this policy statement and have access to a copy of it. Parents will have full access to the procedures the school have in place to protect children from any kind of abuse.

Supporting Documents

- Health and Sexuality Education Policy
- Formal Complaints Policy
- Appointments Policy
- Police Vetting Policy
- Relationship Management Policy
- Crisis and Trauma Management and Procedures
- Protected Disclosures Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Privacy Policy

Additional Resources

References to resources on identifying possibly abuse or neglect:

- **Oranga Tamariki: Ministry for Children** has developed the Working Together guide on inter-agency working to identify and respond to potential abuse and neglect:
<https://orangatamariki.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Support-for-families/Support-programmes/Working-together-seminars/Working-together-guide-2021.pdf>
- **Child Matters** is a registered charitable trust that provides guidance, advice, education and support to protect children:
<http://www.childmatters.org.nz/24/learn-about-child-abuse>
- **Vulnerable Children Act 2014** A practical guide for schools

Last Internal Review:		Term 2 2025 (2 yearly review)	
Signed by Chairperson		ST Laird	
Approval: When the Board approved this Policy, it agreed that no variations of this Policy or amendments to it could be made, except with the majority approval of the Fordell School Board.			
Policy Type	Personnel Health and Safety	Next Review:	Term 2 2027