



## ST FRANCIS XAVIER CATHOLIC SCHOOL RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF PEER ABUSE GUIDELINES

### DEFINE ABUSIVE BEHAVIOUR

Abusive behaviour can be defined as:

***“Any behaviour which takes place without the willing consent of all individuals involved, is coercive or violent in nature and involves exploitation of power in any way.”***

The school and the Board of Trustees need to be clear about what behaviours are to be regarded as abusive.

No form of physical, sexual or verbal harassment or violence is sanctioned or minimised in any way.

### TAKE ACTION WHEN ABUSE IS IDENTIFIED

In situations involving serious identified abuse the school should not attempt to manage the situation in isolation. The school does not have the statutory powers to carry out the necessary investigations or interventions. In such cases referrals to Child, Youth and Family and/or Police should take place and their advice and intervention should be sought.

However, in some cases when the abuse has occurred at school, suspension may be appropriate. When an abusing child is enrolled at a new school, there should be communication with this school about risks involved. Hopefully it will be possible to gain the co-operation of the family in doing this.

### REPRESS ADVERSE PUBLICITY

Children and parents will gossip and speculate so:

- Every effort should be made to keep specific and identifying information as private as possible.
- Nothing should be passed on to the media from the organisation involved.
- All parents should be asked to keep information as private as possible.

Children’s rights are infringed if they are prejudged and identified by the media.

Not only will the abused child/children need thorough evaluation (perhaps an evidential interview) but the offending child will need full assessment. He/she may have been abused themselves. Chronic sexual abusing often starts at a young age and is likely to be, or to become, compulsive in nature. The earlier treatment is commenced the more likely it is to be successful.

In many cases of abuse the identified situation is just the tip of the iceberg and other children and adults may be involved in some way.

The nature and breadth of the investigation will need to be discussed and decided on by the statutory authorities in consultation with school and families.

### **ENSURE THAT SUPPORT IS PROVIDED FOR ALL INVOLVED**

It is likely that anyone involved in the situation will be distressed. While it may not be the responsibility of the school or some other organisations to provide counselling, the issues involved are such that a supportive and sensitive response is essential. It is the responsibility of the statutory agencies investigating the allegations to provide information about where the families can get support and counselling if necessary.

It is important to remember that both the victims and offenders in this situation are children and need assistance and care. It is easy to become punitive towards the alleged offender and concentrate solely on the victim's needs, neglecting the needs of the abusing children.

Teachers and Boards of Trustees members may need help in taking the matter seriously, supporting intervention and in dealing with their own feelings and reactions.

### **SEPARATE THE CHILDREN**

While the situation is being evaluated the children concerned need to be separated. There are two issues to be considered:

- One is safety; and
- The other is reducing further emotional trauma for the victims who may be fearful and distressed if they are in contact with the perpetrators.

In some cases it may be sufficient to ensure the alleged perpetrator is kept out of contact with the victim and carefully supervised.