



## Responding to Student Abuse and Neglect

### Rationale

Every student has a right to a life free of abuse, neglect and violence. Child abuse is a serious societal issue. As “service providers”, everyone at Sacred Heart School must be aware of signs of child abuse or neglect and know how to respond to them.

### Guiding Principles

1. The safety and well-being of children are the paramount considerations.
2. Children are entitled to be protected from abuse, neglect, harm or threat of harm.
3. A family is the preferred environment for the care and upbringing of children and the responsibility for the protection of children rests primarily with the parents.
4. If, with available support services, a family can provide a safe and nurturing environment for a child, support services should be provided.
5. The child’s views should be taken into account when decisions relating to a child are made.
6. Kinship ties and a child’s attachment to the extended family should be preserved if possible.
7. The cultural identity of Aboriginal children should be preserved.
8. Decisions relating to children should be made and implemented in a timely manner.

### Policy

Sacred Heart School policies prohibit any form of child abuse, neglect or violence. The *Child, Family and Community Service Act* requires anyone who has reason to believe that a child has been, or is likely to be at risk, has a legal duty to make a report to a child welfare worker or directly to the police, if a child is in immediate danger.

- A. At the beginning of each school year, the school principal will review with all school personnel the following 3 documents:
  - a. “BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect” (BC Ministry of Children and Family Development)
  - b. “Responding to Child Welfare Concerns” (BC Ministry of Children and Family Development)
  - c. “Supporting our Students: A Guide for Independent School Personnel Responding to Child Abuse” (Office of the Inspector of Independent Schools BC)
- B. The school principal is designated as the ‘Appointed School Official (ASO)’ and a second ASO, Mrs. Grund, the vice-principal, is appointed by the principal to act as a back up in accordance with Supporting Our Students: A Guide for Independent School Personnel Responding to Child Abuse.



- C. Sacred Heart School will protect personal information regarding child abuse, neglect or violence against improper or unauthorized disclosure and use.
- D. School personnel will report suspected child abuse, neglect or violence immediately. Everyone who has a reason to believe that a child has been, or is likely to be physically harmed, sexually abused or exploited, or neglected by a parent, or otherwise in need of protection as set out in Section 13 of the Child, Family and Community Service Act is legally responsible under section 14 of that Act to report promptly to a social worker. School personnel, who are uncertain about their duty to report, will consult with a social worker who can discuss the options and course of action.
- E. School personnel will inform the principal (or another school official in the event that the principal is the alleged offender) as soon as possible.
- F. School personnel will co-operate with the resulting investigation.
- G. School personnel will support students who have experienced child abuse, neglect or violence.

## **Procedure**

Anyone who suspects a child is being abused or neglected, has the legal duty to report the concern to a local child welfare worker. If the child is in immediate danger, call 911.

## **Summary of Roles and Responsibilities**

1. Parents have the primary responsibility to protect their children. Where parents are unwilling or unable to care for a child or protect the child from harm, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) is authorized to intervene.
2. MCFD has the lead responsibility for responding to suspected child abuse and neglect. In cases involving aboriginal children the Ministry delegates authority to the Aboriginal Child and Family Services Agency, which provide services to aboriginal communities.
3. Police respond when a child is in immediate danger and investigate suspected cases of criminal offence.
4. Service providers must be aware of signs of possible child abuse or neglect and respond to any concern about a child's safety or well-being.
5. The school principal and his back up are the designated "Appointed School Officials", who may be required to:
  - investigate on behalf of the school authority
  - ensure a safe school environment during investigations
  - consult with the child welfare worker and/or police • ensure that no school employee interferes with any investigations



- communicate with parents with respect to actions taken by the school authority
  - report to the British Columbia Teacher Regulation Branch and/or the Inspector of Independent Schools when the School Authority dismisses, suspends or otherwise disciplines a certified teacher.
  - refer student(s) for counselling
6. Anyone who has reason to believe that a child may be at risk, and the child's parents are unwilling or unable to protect the child, has a legal duty to report to a child welfare worker. The duty to report overrides any duty to protect the privacy of clients, patients, students or staff with the exception of solicitor-client privilege or confidentiality provisions of the federal Youth Criminal Justice Act.