

# Student Protection

## Handbook for Volunteers



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## Child protection is everyone's business

As adults, we all have a responsibility to care for children and young people and to protect them from all forms of harm as well as to promote their welfare.

Mount Alvernia College seeks to continue its adherence to legislative requirements and duty of care to students by maintaining currency of student protection strategies and procedures.

## What is child abuse?

The term 'abuse' has been replaced in recent state legislation with the term "harm". Child '**abuse**' is any act, or failure to act, that leads to the '**harm**' of a child or young person. It can be better understood by thinking that 'abuse' is the action and 'harm' is the consequence.

## The legal definition of 'harm'

Harm is defined legally in the *Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Act and Regulations 2001*, and the *Child Protection Act 1999* as:

*'Harm, caused to the student under 18 years, is any detrimental effect of a significant nature on a student's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing. It is immaterial how the harm is caused.'*

## The Volunteer's role in the school

Our aim is to honour our student's right to feel safe and valued so they are secure and able to learn to their best level. As volunteers you assist in providing an optimal learning environment for students. This document outlines your responsibilities as volunteers in the vital area of student protection and it is important that you read this document, in conjunction with the Volunteers Code of Conduct, so you understand your responsibilities regarding the protection of our students.

As volunteers you have the following legal responsibilities in regards to child protection:

- You must immediately report when you (as the "first person"), in the course of your employment at the school, reasonably suspect that a student under the age of 18 years attending the school **has been sexually abused** by another person regardless of who that person might be.
- You must immediately report when you (as the "first person"), in the course of your employment at the school, reasonably suspect that a student under the age of 18 years attending the school **is likely to be sexually abused** by another person regardless of who that person might be.
- You must immediately report when you (as the "first person"), in the course of your employment at the school, reasonably suspect that a student under the age of 18 years attending the school is being **emotional abused, physically abused or neglected**.

***(Education and Training Legislation Amendment Act 2011)***

You are also required to attend student protection training which is provided by Mount Alvernia College approximately every 6 months or twice yearly.

**There are four circumstances within a school where harm can be caused to a student.**

They are:

1. Harm to a student by a staff member, volunteer or contractor of the school;
2. Harm to a student by someone outside the school;
3. Harm by other students; or
4. Student self-harm.

**What are reasonable grounds to suspect harm to a student?**

*Reasonable grounds* to suspect that harm to a student may have occurred include when:

- a student speaks about being harmed or being in danger of being harmed;
- someone else (perhaps a relative, friend, acquaintance or sibling of the student) informs you that they suspect a student has been harmed;
- a student tells you that she knows a child who has been harmed (often the student is referring to herself); or
- you observe a particular student's behaviour, physical appearance or social relationships that raise concerns of possible harm to the student.

**If a student tells you about being harmed or being at risk of harm**

**DO:**

- let her report her experience in her own words and in her own time;
- listen attentively to her story;
- react calmly to the information the student provides though it might be upsetting;
- reassure the student that she has done the right thing in telling e.g. "I am pleased you let me know these things";
- reassure the student that it is not her fault that what was reported had occurred;
- **at this stage, you may ask for clarification ONLY if it is necessary. If you have the essence of the story, you have enough information to report your concerns; You do not need to investigate, just understand the facts presented to you.**
- be thoughtful and careful of the student's feelings at this time. The student may be distressed or ashamed, so she will need care and reassurance; Do not leave her unsupervised.
- be aware of privacy issues for the student;
- treat this information confidentially and discuss it only with an appropriate person (see below) where others will not overhear;
- be honest with the student about your responsibility to take action; and
- act immediately to report the concerns to the Principal or the other school Student Protection Contact (SPC). (See below for more detail)

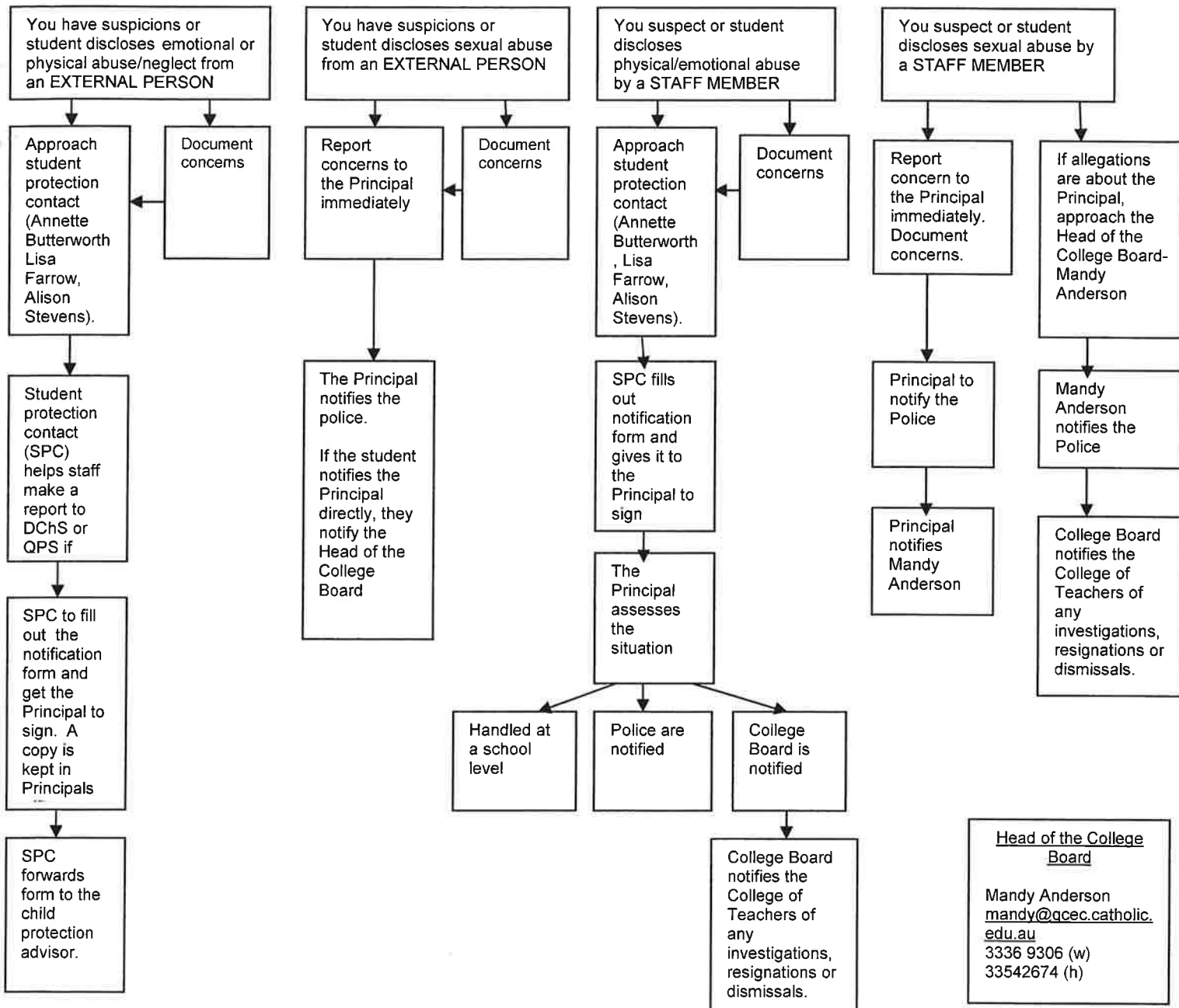
**DO NOT:**

- panic;
- react emotionally or accuse the alleged perpetrator;
- ask leading questions e.g. Was it your father/mother who did this to you?;
- make promises that you cannot keep – particularly about not telling others (e.g. relevant adults such as the Principal etc.) about the information;
- leave the student alone immediately after a disclosure as she will be feeling very vulnerable at this time; or

- discuss the situation with parents, caregivers or others (other than those designated e.g. Principal, Student Protection Contact).

## Your reporting responsibilities

In any instance where you either become aware of, or reasonably suspect, harm has occurred to a student, or there is a risk of it occurring, you must report this as soon as possible to the Principal or the other school Student Protection Contact (SPC). Follow the reporting process which is outlined below:



### REMEMBER

**Maintaining confidentiality is vital for the protection of all involved.**

### **What happens next?**

Once you have reported the alleged harm of a student, the Principal or the SPC will do whatever is necessary to make sure the student is safe. Mount Alvernia College has student protection reporting processes and all staff have received training in student protection. You can be assured that your report will be taken seriously, dealt with immediately and reported to the appropriate State authorities where necessary.

### **Very Important Note**

If you have been involved in a student protection matter in your role as a school volunteer, be aware of your own reactions and seek support if required. The Business Manager or Principal can assist you with this.

Finally, please sign the following page where indicated to confirm you understand your student protection responsibilities as a member of Mount Alvernia staff.

Mount Alvernia College thanks you for your support of our school and our students.

### **References and Resources**

More information on student protection at Mount Alvernia College can be found in the following documents:

- 1. Mount Alvernia College Limited *Student Protection Policy – 2013***
- 2. *Reporting of physical harm, neglect, emotional abuse 2013***
- 3. *Reporting of Alleged Sexual abuse 2013***