

Cashmere Avenue School Policy

1.15 CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT

1. STATEMENT

Cashmere Avenue School will work to ensure that all forms of child abuse (physical, emotional and sexual) are properly identified and reported.

2. PURPOSE

2.1 The safety of the child or young person is of paramount consideration in all decisions and actions taken with regard to this policy

2.2 To establish procedures for dealing with cases of suspected child abuse.

3. PROCEDURES

3.1 The School is not a statutory investigation agency. However, the school has an obligation, both to the child and the parents, to ensure that there are sound reasons for referring suspected child abuse to a statutory agency

3.2 The procedure to be followed in cases of suspected child abuse differs depending upon whether there is:

- (a) an **urgent safety** need to such an extent that the child cannot return home that day; or
- (b) the need for a thorough, planned investigation when the child is not at immediate risk of further abuse

3.3 Staff shall bring all cases of suspected abuse to the attention of the Principal as soon as there are any concerns of possible abuse, This includes all cases of suspected physical (including neglect), emotional, or sexual abuse

3.4 Staff who have disclosure made to them will accept the disclosure at face value with little or no comment, but follow the matter up with the Principal and the pupil without delay.

3.5 The Principal, after careful discussion with the reporting staff member, will gather all the relevant information the school has about the child.

If urgent, as in (a) above, the Principal will make an immediate referral to the police or social workers of the Children and Young Persons Service of the Department of Social Welfare. The Child's caregivers will be advised of any action taken by the statutory agencies involved as required under the Children Young Persons and Their Families Act. This will be as soon as it is

appropriate depending on the child's safety, and the need for follow-up or referral to another agency. The Principal will notify the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees immediately after the referral is made.

If not urgent, as in (b) above, then the Principal will:

3.5.1 conduct a **thorough and planned investigation** to ensure that there are reasonable grounds to suspect child abuse. The investigation should include reference to external advisors (such as the Public Health Nurse) to ensure that it is thorough and fair. The investigation may include a meeting with caregivers which focuses on barriers to learning, but provides an opportunity to explore explanations other than abuse.

3.5.2 compile a written report detailing the investigation

3.5.3 refer the suspected abuse to statutory agencies **only** after the relevant staff and other professionals have reviewed the report **and** concur that there are grounds for concern that warrant a referral.

Caregivers will be advised by the relevant statutory agency if any action is planned

3.6 The privacy of the child and their family will be protected by ensuring the School's concerns are treated in strict confidence. Any documents relating to a case of suspected abuse are to be strictly confidential and kept in a locked file in the Principal's office.

3.7 If a referral has been made the Principal will report, in-committee, to the Board of Trustees that a case of suspected abuse has been reported to the relevant statutory agency.

3.8 Once a referral has been made an interview with the Principal will be offered to caregivers to discuss the situation.

3.9 If a staff member is implicated as being responsible for the abuse, the Principal shall contact the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees immediately. The Board shall ensure that the interests of the staff member and the child are met. The Principal will follow the procedures set out in the Teachers Collective Agreement regarding complaints against Teachers.

3.10 If the Principal is implicated as being responsible for the abuse, the staff member who identified the concern shall contact the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees immediately. In this instance the Chairperson shall take the place of the Principal in implementing the Child Abuse procedure. The board shall ensure that the interests of the Principal and the child are met. The Board will follow the procedures set out in the Principal's employment contract regarding complaints.

4. CONCLUSION

Any reporter of suspected child abuse is protected from any criminal, civil or disciplinary action by Section 16 of the Children Young Persons and Their Families Act. The prime concern of the school will be to refer concerns to people with a statutory responsibility to investigate, and if necessary, act to protect the child. The prime concern of the staff member reporting the concern then is to support the child in any subsequent action.

APPENDIX

- CYF publication – “Let’s stop child abuse together”
- Ministry of Education Booklets - "Sexual Abuse and the School" and "Child Abuse and the School"
- Keeping ourselves safe units.