



Handbook for Volunteers

Catholic Education
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Handbook for Volunteers

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 positively promote their wellbeing.

Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) seeks to continue its adherence to legislative requirements, policy directives and duty of care to students by a commitment to the implementation of student protection strategies and processes.

The volunteer's role in the school

Our aim is to give students the sense of feeling safe, being safe and valued as people so that they are secure and ready to learn at their best. As a volunteer you play a significant role in the work of the school, form part of the school community and assist in providing the optimal learning environment for students.

This document outlines information you need to know as a volunteer in the vital area of student protection. It is important that you read this document, in conjunction with the **Volunteer Code of Conduct**, so you understand your responsibilities in the protection of our students.

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'

In Queensland 'harm' is legally defined as:

- 'Harm to a child is any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child's physical, psychological or emotional well being.
- 'It is immaterial how the harm is caused.'
- 'Harm can be caused by:
 - physical, psychological or emotional abuse or neglect or
 - sexual abuse or exploitation.'

- 'Harm can be caused by –
 - a single act, omission or circumstance; or
 - a series or combination of acts, omissions or circumstances.'

The Child Protection Act 1999

Sources of harm to a student.

They are:

- Harm to a student by a staff member, other employee or volunteer
- Harm to a student by a person who is not an employee or agent of the school or another student
- Harm by another student
- Self-harm by a student.

Forming a suspicion about harm

A volunteer may form a suspicion that a student may have experienced, is experiencing or is at an unacceptable risk of experiencing harm when:

- a student reports or discloses information of concern about him/her or about another person's behaviour
- another student reports or discloses information of concern about a student or about another person's behaviour in relation to that student
- a parent or another person reports information of concern about a student and/or another person's behaviour (This information may come from a relative, friend, acquaintance of the student, or sometimes could be anonymous)
- relevant observations (appearance, behaviours, and situations) are witnessed, or other relevant firsthand knowledge is gained.

What is a 'disclosure' of harm?

School personnel are often the first people students may tell when they are feeling unsafe. Sometimes a student may approach you and tell you about their experience of being harmed. This is described as a 'disclosure'.

It is important for volunteers to be aware of how children/young people disclose and how to respond in the most appropriate manner. If a student speaks to you about a concern, you need to be prepared so that you can be supportive of the student and clear about your own responsibility at the same time.

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

DO:

- listen attentively, actively and non-judgementally
- let the child use their own words
- respond calmly to the information the student provides
- only question the student if absolutely necessary and restrict yourself to questions such as, 'Tell me what happened, and/or 'Tell me more about that'
- reassure the student that they have done the right thing to tell e.g. 'I am pleased you have told me these things'
- reassure them they are not to blame for the behaviours of others
- provide pastoral support to the student and be aware of the privacy issues involved
- be honest about your responsibility for taking action
- pass the information onto the Principal or the school's nominated Student Protection Contact (SPC) immediately
- make detailed notes

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

DO NOT:

- react emotionally or accuse
- seek any more information than is absolutely necessary
- ask leading or probing questions or put words in the student's mouth
- make promises that you cannot keep – particularly about not telling others such as the Principal or other SPC about the information
- leave the student alone immediately after a disclosure
- discuss the situation with parents, caregivers or others (other than those designated e.g. Principal, or other SPC).

Who are Student Protection Contacts?

The Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Regulation 2001 requires non-State schools in Queensland to nominate at least two staff members to whom students can report concerns.

In BCE the Principal is nominated as one SPC and the Principal must also nominate at least one other staff member to be the school's other SPC. Students, staff, parents and others can report to the Principal or other SPC if they have concerns for students.

The names and identities of the SPCs must be made known to staff, students and parents. Be sure to find out the names of your school's SPCs.

Your reporting responsibilities as a volunteer

In your role as a volunteer at the school if in any instance:

- you form a reasonable suspicion that a student may have experienced, is experiencing or is at an unacceptable risk of experiencing significant harm you must report this as soon as possible to the Principal or other SPC
- please check with your school Principal about whom you are to report to if you have concerns about a student.

Confidentiality

Remember it is VITAL to maintain appropriate confidentiality for the protection of all involved.

What happens next?

Once you have reported the suspected harm of a student, the Principal or the SPC will do whatever is necessary to make sure the student is safe.

You can rest assured that your report will be taken seriously, dealt with immediately and reported to the appropriate State authorities where necessary.

Case Scenarios

Here are some scenarios for your consideration

Scenario 1

You work as a volunteer in the tuckshop. You notice a year 2 girl has a large bruise around her eye and she tells you that she had been hit by her mother. You know her mother well. Do you need to report this?

Scenario 2

You are a volunteer who assists with helping students to read. Another volunteer is working nearby with a student. You observe that the volunteer appears angry, is raising her voice at the student, poking the student on the shoulder. You have worked with this volunteer all year and usually have morning tea with her. Do you need to report this?

Scenario 3

You are a volunteer and assist with the school's year 8 netball team. You notice that a female student in the team has cuts on her arms and on her legs. You enquire about the cuts and she tells you she did it to herself because she felt unhappy. Do you need to report this?

Scenario 4

You are a volunteer parent assisting school staff take the year six class on an excursion. On the bus one of the year 6 girls tells you that one of the boys has been acting in a sexually inappropriate manner at the back of the bus. The male student is the son of a friend with whom you talk with regularly. Do you need to report this?

Answers to scenarios:

Yes, each of these situations must be reported to the Principal or SPC.

Remember you do NOT have to be sure that a student has been harmed to report – you just need to have a concern.

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. Your principal can assist you if required.

Finally, please sign the Volunteer Student Protection Information Sign off sheet on page 7 of this document to confirm you understand your student protection responsibilities as a volunteer.

References and Resources

More information on student protection in BCE can be found in the following documents which can be accessed on BCE's public website: www.bne.catholic.edu.au

- Archdiocese of BCE Council Student Protection Policy 2011
- Student Protection Processes
- Student Protection Brochure for Families 2011

Thank you

Brisbane Catholic Education thanks you for your support for our schools and our students.



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