
Macleans College - POLICIES & DIRECTIVES

SECTION NO: **1100**

POLICY NO: **1110**

ISSUE DATE: 15/05/06

TITLE: **SAFE SCHOOL POLICIES**

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Sexual Abuse

RATIONALE:

What is Sexual Abuse?

There is no single definition that is widely accepted. Most definitions make reference to children's bodies being used in a sexual way by an adult or a more mature child. This is done by the use of fear or threat or by obtaining the child's uniformed consent.

When sexual abuse occurs we need to intervene. While the immediate effect of abuse may not be noticeable, long term effects can be damaging and difficult to overcome.

Intervention is likely to be disruptive in the short term, but will have long term benefits for the child. Children can be helped to overcome the effects of sexual abuse but the healing process may take a long time. Often it is not until the children are teenagers that they will have the knowledge and maturity to put the abuse into perspective.

Children and young people may need support from a variety of sources, eg. school counsellor, form teacher, house leader, school nurse, Social Welfare, Police, Help Foundation, Maori Women's Welfare League, Rape Crisis, Pacifica and other ethnic groups.

BROAD GUIDELINES:

- 1 The child's interests and welfare are paramount. Immediate safety is the first priority.
- 2 The pattern of abuse needs to be broken and support given.
- 3 Confidentiality must be maintained to within the team working with the student (eg counsellor and outside agency).
- 4 One person will have responsibility for co-ordinating action. That person is the counsellor, although disclosure will often be made initially to a trusted teacher.
- 5 The counsellor is required to consult with an appointed senior staff member in the case of current abuse.

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- 6 If a teacher suspects sexual abuse of a student they must consult with the guidance counsellor who will take the matter further.
- 7 Accurate records of initial disclosure and action taken must be kept by guidance counsellor.
- 8 The student should have the opportunity to speak to a counsellor of the appropriate sex and cultural background.

School Staff Training

The guidance counsellor and appointed senior staff member are responsible for

- 1 Informing staff, Board of Trustees, parents etc on procedures for dealing with sexual abuse.
- 2 School publicity for creating an awareness of sexual abuse.

SPECIFIC GUIDELINES:

Current Abuse

What to do if abuse is reported to you

- 1 If the student is in danger or unsafe, act to secure their immediate safety.
- 2 Listen to the student and reassure them but do not make promises or commitments you cannot keep.
- 3 Write down what the student says.
- 4 Do not formally interview the student. Obtain only necessary relevant facts if and when clarification needed.
- 5 Inform the Principal and hold immediate discussion with guidance counsellor.
- 6 If necessary seek support for yourself from the guidance counsellor. See flow chart.

Flow Chart of Action

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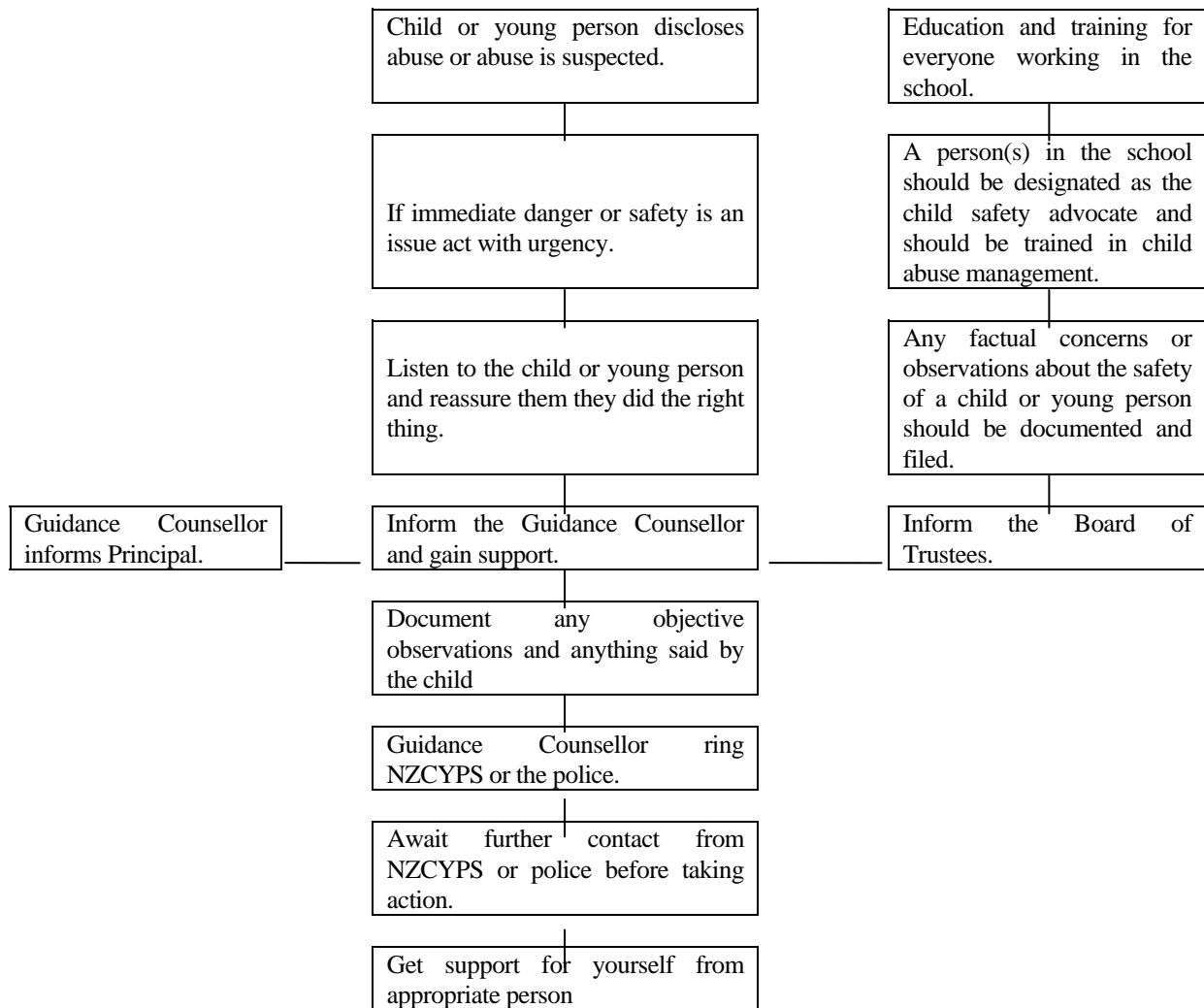
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Points to note:

- Documentation may subsequently be used in court as evidence for either side.
- Avoid making judgements simply record the facts.
- Interviewing of suspected abuse victims is a specialised procedure best left to those who are trained in such techniques.
- The child advocate should be responsible for ensuring that the child’s welfare remains paramount.

PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH A REPORTED INCIDENT:

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- 1 The counsellor or senior staff member will inform an agency with statutory responsibilities, eg Sex Abuse Unit, Otahuhu Police, or Children and Young Persons' Service.
- 2 If the student is unwilling for the statutory agency or family to be informed the counsellor will make a joint decision with the senior staff member regarding appropriate action.

This action may include

- a) No family or statutory agency contact but referral to an outside agency, eg. help for counselling.
 - b) Referral to statutory agency and/or family without the student's permission but their knowledge, eg if the accused is outside the student's immediate family the family will be informed with the student's knowledge.
- 3 Outside agencies interviews at school - see separate policy.
 - 4 Communication with other agencies regarding students should be through the guidance counsellor. It is the counsellor's responsibility to inform other staff if necessary.
 - 5 If a staff member is implicated the counsellor is obligated to inform the Principal who will:
 - a) Inform the Board of Trustees.
 - b) Advise the staff member to seek professional support eg Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) counsellor or legal advice.

Past Abuse

- 1 The counsellor through therapy will empower the student to tell the family. It is not the counsellor's responsibility to inform the family.
- 2 If the student wishes they may be referred to a specialist agency without the parents' consent.
- 3 The student may continue therapy with the school counsellor if the counsellor feels this is appropriate.

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CONCLUSION:

The school must at all times be seen as acting in the best interests of its students and also recognising its responsibility to the parents.