



POLICY

Child abuse prevention, reporting and response

Youth Futures Community School Hubs -
Community Schools, Anchor Point and
Comet Connect

Policy title & category	Child abuse prevention, reporting and response
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Contents

1. Purpose.....	2
2. Scope.....	2
3. Principles.....	2
4. Definitions.....	2
5. Policy statements	5
5.1 Prevention	5
5.2 Reporting.....	7
5.3 Response	11
7. Related documents and resources	12
8. Review process	13
9. Version control	13
9.1 Current.....	13
9.2 History	13

Acknowledgement of Country

Youth Futures students, staff and parents/carers acknowledge and respect the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters on which we live and are educated in Western Australia.

Child abuse prevention, reporting and response

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure Youth Futures Community School (YFCS) Hub staff meet their duty of care obligations to all children under 18 years regarding the prevention, reporting and responding of abuse and neglect occurring both within and outside of YFCS Hub services.

2. Scope

- This policy applies to all students enrolled at YFCS Hubs (Community Schools, Anchor Point and Comet Connect services).
- Abuse under this policy includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse (including psychological) and neglect.
- The obligations under this policy apply to all staff, volunteers, board members and contractors engaged by the YFCS Hubs

3. Principles

- The principles of [Trauma aware and responsive education](#), [Child Safe Organisations](#), and the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) underpin all the services and supports provided to students enrolled with YFCS Hubs.
- Any form of abuse towards a child under any circumstances is intolerable.
- YFCS Hubs takes its responsibility to protect the safety and wellbeing of children seriously and recognises that all children, without exception, have the right to be protected from abuse and to have access to safe environments and programs.
- Given the critical importance and priority given to this policy, it is essential that a regular review process is undertaken with meaningful collaboration and consultation with staff and students.

4. Definitions

Advocacy and support services:

Services which act alongside, or on behalf of, victims and survivors of child sexual abuse to support their rights and interests while providing both tangible and practical support.

Child:

A child is defined as a person who is under the age of 18 years or, in the absence of positive evidence of age, as a person who is apparently under 18 years of age. Students aged 18 and over may attend YFCS Hubs but are legally considered adults and as such the Department of Communities does not have a child protection mandate for them. They may be considered potentially vulnerable and in need of specialist services and YFCS Hubs do owe a duty of care towards them.

Child abuse:

Four forms of child abuse are covered by WA Law and are defined by the Department of Communities as physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect. Further information on each of these forms is outlined below.

Complainant:

The complainant is the student or former student against whom the alleged grooming and/or child abuse is claimed to have been committed.

Emotional abuse:

The [**Children and Community Services Amendment \(Reporting Sexual Abuse of Children\) Act 2008**](#) defines 'emotional abuse' as:

1. Psychological abuse and
2. Being exposed to an act of family and domestic violence.

Grooming behaviours:

Grooming is using a variety of manipulative and controlling techniques with a child or young person designed to establish trust and normalise sexually harmful behaviour. Behaviours could include giving personal gifts, talking about matters of a sexual nature, having one-on-one social outings, engaging on social media with a child or young person, or encouraging the keeping of 'special secrets'.

Indicators of sexual abuse:

The following is a list of possible indicators of child sexual abuse and should be considered in the context of the child or young person's medical history, developmental stage, capabilities and characteristic behaviours:

Physical signs that a child may have experienced child sexual abuse include:

- Headaches,
- Stomach aches,
- Bed-wetting,
- Change in appetite and/or weight loss,
- Nightmares and sleep disturbances,
- Bruises on soft parts of the body, like buttocks or thighs,
- Changes in the genital area, such as redness, swelling, or discharge and
- Pain or burning when going to the toilet.

Children and young people who are sexually abused may find it difficult to process and deal with their distress after the trauma they have experienced. Emotional or behavioural changes could include:

- Depression, anxiety and mood changes, including social withdrawal and disassociation,
- Self-harm or suicidal ideation,
- Poor self-care or personal hygiene,
- Harmful and volatile substance use,
- Over-compliance and eagerness to please,
- Aggressiveness and anger,
- Running away,
- Desexualisation – for example, wearing baggy clothes to hide their gender,
- Anxiety-related illnesses such as anorexia or bulimia and
- Fear and avoidance of certain people and places.

For children and young people with disability, there are extra signs to consider:

- Behavioural issues, particularly those the child or young person has not shown in the past, including emotional outbursts, self-harm and heightened aggression,
- Regression in developmental achievements,
- Developmental delays, for example, delayed speech, crawling or walking and
- Self-stimulatory behaviours, for example, rocking and head banging.

Neglect:

The Children and Community Services Amendment (Reporting Sexual Abuse of Children) Act 2008 defines 'neglect' as when children do not receive adequate food or shelter, medical treatment, supervision, care or nurturance to such an extent that their development is damaged, or they are injured. Neglect may be acute, episodic or chronic.

Physical abuse:

The Children and Community Services Amendment (Reporting Sexual Abuse of Children) Act 2008 defines 'physical abuse' as when a child is severely and/or persistently hurt or injured by an adult or caregiver.

Belief on reasonable grounds:

Professional judgement and objective observation help to identify warning signs or possible indicators of child sexual abuse and contribute to a staff member forming the belief on reasonable grounds. Knowledge of child development and consultation with colleagues or other professionals, whilst maintaining confidentiality, can also contribute to reasonable grounds.

Reasonable grounds may include:

- your own observations of a child's behaviour,
- your own observations of the behaviour of an adult interacting with the child,
- when a child tells you they, or another child, has been harmed and
- when you hear about it from someone who is able to provide reliable information - a relative, friend, neighbour or sibling of a child who is at risk.

Sexual harassment:

Sexual harassment is any unwelcome sexual behaviour designed to humiliate, offend or intimidate. Examples include:

- Unwelcome sexual advances,
- Repeated requests for a date and/or sex,
- Comments about a person's sexual activities or their appearance,
- Leering and/or staring,
- Jokes of a sexual nature,
- Displaying sexually offensive material including pornography in the workplace, and
- Emails or SMS communication involving sexually suggestive messages.

Sexual abuse:

The Children and Community Services Amendment (Reporting Sexual Abuse of Children) Act 2008 defines 'sexual abuse' to include sexual behaviour in circumstances where:

1. The child is the subject of bribery, coercion, a threat, exploitation or violence,
2. The child has less power than another person involved in the behaviour or
3. There is a significant disparity in the developmental function or maturity of the child and another person involved in the behaviour.

5. Policy statements

5.1 Prevention

YFCS Hubs are committed to implementing a broad suite of processes to prevent child abuse as follows:

1. Staff, student and parent/carer codes of conduct

The YFCS Hub Codes of Conduct will explicitly state that there is not to be any social and/or sexual relationships between staff and students, and staff are never permitted to engage in grooming behaviours. This includes not engaging with children or young people on private phones, emails or online in any context such as through social media. Using electronic devices or social media to distribute sexually explicit material or to sexually solicit or harass children or young people may constitute abuse and/or criminal behaviour and **must be reported to the Principal/Head of School immediately.**

2. Culture of safety and trust for students

Staff should contribute to an environment where young people are respected and encouraged to discuss their concerns and rights. Many young people are capable of and have the right to make decisions about their own lives. Young people, their parents/carers and other significant people in their lives have the right to be involved with the decisions which affect the young person, where appropriate. Any approaches implemented by YFCS Hubs to protect young people from abuse must be as transparent and empowering to the students as possible, particularly if they are not yet able to be self-determining. Furthermore, the young person's privacy must also be protected where possible.

When providing support to young people, YFCS Hub staff should ensure that they are provided with information regarding online and in-person advocacy and support services, which may be helpful. If required, staff should actively assist in accessing these services.

However, it is important to note that the:

- [Reportable Conduct Scheme](#) and
- [Mandatory Reporting Guide WA](#)

requirements may override the above trauma informed and child safe considerations.

3. Staff child protection training

All staff, including those with mandatory reporting responsibilities, will participate in [Child Protection Training](#) within six months of commencing employment with YFCS Hubs and repeat the program at a minimum of every two years to maintain currency.

Staff are highly encouraged to undertake a short online course on an annual basis to reinforce understanding and keep up to date with reporting obligations.

4. Keeping Safe Child Protection curriculum for students

All enrolled students at YFCS Hubs receive the [Keeping Safe Child Protection](#) curriculum which is:

- Age and developmental stage appropriate,
- Integrated into the YFCS Hub curriculum, making opportunistic and relevant subject matter links where appropriate,
- Inclusive of e-safety education,
- Capacity building in terms of building student self-protective skills and strategies, and
- Culturally safe and reflective of cultural values, enabling students to engage effectively with the information, attitudes and practices without offending cultural norms and expectations.

5. Keeping Safe Child Protection curriculum information for parents/carers

All parents/carers will receive information about the protective behaviours curriculum, all the codes of conduct i.e. student, parent/carer and staff, and how and whom to tell if they have any concerns about grooming, child abuse or other any other behaviour which is not permitted by YFCS Hubs.

6. Protocol re: young people charged with harmful sexual behaviours

YFCS Hubs acknowledge and adhere to the multi-agency protocol for [Framework for Guiding Harmful Sexual Behaviours](#). This includes undertaking a risk assessment and the development of a management plan for any such young person enrolled at YFCS Hubs.

7. Staff screening

All staff, volunteers, students on placement and regular visitors to YFCS Hubs must possess a current Working with Children Check (WWC) card and submit a renewal when it expires.

- All staff undertaking child related work or on a site with young people must supply a current WWC Check card or a receipt of their application before commencing a role. A copy of the card and/or receipt will be kept in their personnel file.
- All other staff have a maximum of 5 working days to apply for a WWC check from their commencement day.
- Applications for a WWC Check are available from authorised Australia Post outlets or by contacting the WWC Screening Unit (noting that forms cannot be downloaded online).

www.workingwithchildren.wa.gov.au

1800 883 979

checkquery@cpfs.wa.gov.au

- If YFCS Hubs receive a negative notice from the WWC Screening Unit, the staff member must be escorted from the premises by the Principal or the most senior staff member available and their employment ceased immediately.
- A staff member charged with any offence against children must notify the Principal immediately. The CEO must notify the WWC Screening Unit as soon as possible and if an interim negative notice is received, the staff member will be escorted from the premises by the Principal or the most senior staff member available. They will be stood down from all child-related work until a final outcome is determined by the WWC Screening Unit.

5.2 Reporting

YFCS Hubs are committed to the timely communication of information, facts and details to protect children from abuse or other harm while they are in their care or elsewhere. The purpose of this reporting is to inform others, meet legislative reporting requirements, document events by sharing as much detail as possible, or where required, initiate further action based on this information. Staff also commit to securely storing this information and retaining it in accordance with the [State Records Act](#).

All staff working with YFCS Hubs have reporting obligations to protect children from abuse and other harm. This abuse and/or harm may occur while they are in the care of the YFCS Hubs or elsewhere. If staff become aware of any incident, it is important to be aware that reports may need to be made to more than one agency as below:

Table 1 - Quick reference reporting guide

Issue	Agency to contact	Contact details
You have immediate concerns for a young person's safety or the safety of other young people in the care of YFCS Hubs.	WA Police	000
You believe criminal conduct or suspected criminal conduct is occurring or has occurred.	WA Police	000
You are a MANDATORY REPORTER and have formed a belief, on reasonable grounds, that a young person has or is being sexually abused.	Department of Communities Mandatory Reporting Service	1800 708 704
You are not a mandatory reporter and are concerned a young person is suffering abuse or neglect.	Department of Communities Central Intake Team	1800 273 889
REPORTABLE INCIDENT – deaths, serious injuries or illnesses, incidents requiring Police or emergency response, lockdowns, evacuations and school closure.	Principal to lodge with Director General, Department of Education within 48 hours of incident	(08) 9441 1906 NGSRegulation.Criticalincidents@education.wa.edu.au
Registered teacher may have engaged in serious misconduct or taught with serious incompetence and has been dismissed, suspended, resigned or ceased teaching.	Teacher Registration Board of WA	9223 9100 1300 652 911
REPORTABLE CONDUCT – allegations of and convictions for child abuse involving staff both within and external to YFCS Hubs. Five categories of reportable conduct include: 1. Sexual offences against, with or in the presence of a child. 2. Sexual misconduct against, with or in the presence of a child. 3. Physical assault against, with, or in the presence of a child. 4. Significant neglect of a child. 5. Behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child.	Ombudsman WA within seven working days	9220 7555 mail@ombudsman.wa.gov.au

1. Mandatory reporters

Under the WA Children and Community Services Act 2004, it is mandatory for certain professional groups to report a belief of child sexual abuse.

Mandatory reporters are:

- Assessors appointed under section 125A of the Act,
- Boarding supervisors,
- Departmental officer of the Department of Communities,
- Doctors,
- Early childhood workers,
- Ministers of Religion,
- Nurses and midwives,
- Out-of-home care workers,
- Police officers,
- Psychologists,
- School counsellors, and
- Teachers (including TAFE lecturers).

2. Mandatory reporting

When a mandatory reporter forms a belief on reasonable grounds that a young person is or has been the subject of sexual abuse one of the following reporting processes must be followed as soon as is practicable:

A mandatory report can be made:

- Via the [Mandatory Reporting](#) online form,
- E-mail mrs@communities.wa.gov.au to request a hard copy for completion,
- Phone 1800 708 704, or
- Sent by post to Mandatory reporting Service, P.O. Box 8146, Perth BC, WA 6849

A mandatory report can be made in writing or orally. If an oral report is made, it must be followed by a written report as soon as practicable after making the oral report (ideally within 24 hours).

Mandatory reporters must inform the Principal that a mandatory report has been lodged and provide the Principal with the receipt number of the mandatory report and documentation of the grounds on which they formed the belief. The mandatory reporter must also inform the Principal of the advice contained in the feedback letter received from MRS following the mandatory report.

In all instances, the Mandatory Reporter must comply with the direction of the Mandatory Reporting Services as to when, what and by whom information related to the matter may be given to the person against who the allegation is made, the complainant and his/her parents/carers, other affected students and their parents/carers, and the wider school community.

It is important to note that staff are protected from civil and criminal liability when they provide information to the Department of Communities or police for the purpose of investigating abuse.

3. Allegations against the Principal

Where the Principal is the person alleged to have committed the abuse or may be biased towards the person alleged to have committed the abuse, mandatory reporters must make a report to Director of Education or Standards and Integrity Directorate (SID) on 1800 655 985 or complaints@education.wa.edu.au and choose one of the following reporting processes:

- Make an online mandatory report at Mandatory Reporting Service (MRS) or
- Make a verbal report to the MRS which must be followed up with an online or written mandatory report and
- Not provide a copy of their mandatory report to the Principal for storage but store their own copy of the report.

4. Non-mandatory reporter staff

If a YFCS Hub staff member, who is not a mandatory reporter, forms a belief on reasonable grounds that a child has or is being sexually abused, the staff member should inform and consult with the Principal as soon as possible and document their concerns.

This documentation should include:

- Alleged and/or known facts about the suspected abuse,
- Dates and approximate times of observations e.g. behavioural, physical of the complainant,
- Dates and approximate times of abuse disclosure(s),
- Exact wording of statements made by the young person and
- Whether the issue was reported to the Department of Communities or police and any advice they provided.

Once the Principal receives a verbal and/or written report, the Principal will determine, based on the belief on reasonable grounds, whether to submit a mandatory report.

If a YFCS Hub staff member, who is not a mandatory reporter, forms a belief on reasonable grounds that a child has or is being physically or emotionally abused or is the victim of neglect they should immediately consult their line manager and/or Principal.

Once the line manager and/or Principal receives a verbal and/or written report, they will determine, based on their belief on reasonable grounds, whether to contact the Department of Communities Central Intake on 1800 273 889 for guidance and direction.

5. Reportable Conduct Scheme

This scheme applies to YFCS Hubs and addresses allegations of, and convictions for, child abuse involving employees (including volunteers and contractors) for conduct occurring within and external to schools.

There are five categories of reportable conduct:

1. Sexual offences against, with, or in the presence of a child,
2. Sexual misconduct against, with, or in the presence of a child,
3. Physical assault against, with, or in the presence of a child,
4. Significant neglect of a child and
5. Behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child.

If a staff member forms a belief, on reasonable grounds, that reportable conduct has occurred, this information should be shared with the Principal as soon as possible. The Principal has an obligation to notify the Ombudsman and cause an investigation to be undertaken.

5.3 Response

YFCS Hubs commit to acting and reacting appropriately to information or an incident to address the situation, mitigate harm and/or provide assistance when required.

At all times, staff will:

- Be focused on the best interests of students,
- Provide information, advocacy and support to the complainant,
- Report the matter promptly to the responsible government authority and comply with their direction and
- Comply with the responsible government authority as to when, what and by whom information related to the matter may be given to the person against who the allegation is made, the complainant and his/her parents/carers, other affected students and their parents/carers, and the wider school community.

Staff will **NEVER** attempt to undertake any investigative actions themselves, recognising the potential to compromise subsequent processes and taint evidence.

1. Support to students

If a student discloses/alleges abuse in front of a group of people, staff will adopt protective interrupting strategies. This will include gently interrupting the young person, acknowledging the importance of what they have said, requesting to speak to them in private, and quietly arranging to see the young person as soon as possible.

2. Counselling support

If a student discloses abuse in a private setting, staff will utilise counselling skills such as active listening and a non-judgmental approach while remaining calm, supportive and empathetic. Staff should reassure the young person that sharing this information is the right thing to do as any form of abuse towards a child or young person under any circumstances is intolerable. Staff should also remind the child or young person that the abuse was not their fault, and that they have a right to experience a safe environment. Staff should allow plenty of time for the young person to tell their story, in their own words, without pressing them for details that they may not yet be willing to share.

3. Confidentiality

Staff should reassure the student that plans will be put in place to ensure the young person's immediate safety, if required. Staff should also reassure the student that their privacy will be respected as much as possible and that the disclosure will only be shared with the Principal in the first instance. However, where relevant, feasible and safe to do so, the young person must be told that the suspected abuse will be reported to the Department of Communities, Police or other agencies.

4. Future planning

A student who has capacity must be given the opportunity to participate in decisions which affect them and be integrally involved in any subsequent reporting processes.

Staff should work with the young person on their desired future course of action, allowing them to be as self-determining as possible. This should initially include developing a plan with the young person to protect their safety.

Where possible, other services within Youth Futures and/or external agencies should be involved to provide support and staff should facilitate a referral where appropriate and required. Staff should consider culture, religion, disability, gender identity, maturity and other personal characteristics of the young person to determine the type of support provided.

Staff will presume young people are competent to assess and act in their own best interests. However, in some situations staff may assess that an individual lacks the capacity to make decisions regarding their safety. In these circumstances staff may have to make decisions in the young person's best interest, despite being against the young person's wishes.

6.14 Support for staff

Personal feelings such as shock, anger, distress and helplessness may be experienced by staff who identify suspect abuse or who have received information of suspected abuse. It is important to conceal these feelings from the young person and work through those feelings after the disclosure. Staff may choose to seek support from the Principal or the organisation's Employee Assistance Program to assist in managing these responses.

7. Related documents and resources

7.1 Student, Staff, and Parent/Carer Codes of Conduct

The three Codes of Conduct clearly articulate the behaviour required of YFCS Hub students, staff, and parents/carers and describe implementation approaches and regular review processes. The policies apply to students, staff and parents/carers at all YFCS Hubs as well as board members, contractors, students on practicum, volunteers and visitors.

8. Review process

YFCS Hubs are committed to continuous improvement and will undertake annual reviews of policies and procedures informed by the following approach:

- Establish a review framework,
- Assemble a review team,
- Gather 360-degree feedback from multiple sources i.e. students, parents/carers, teaching and key stakeholders from within and outside of YFCS Hubs,
- Analyse incident and practice data for systemic trends,
- Draft revisions to the existing policy and procedures and share widely,
- Obtain endorsement from the CEO and Principal,
- Communicate changes to all staff (and provide additional training where relevant) and
- Implement and monitor the updated policy.

9. Version control

9.1 Current

This version	Child abuse prevention, reporting and response V6
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9.2 History

Previous versions	Effective dates (inclusive)
Preventing and Responding to Abuse of Young People - Consolidated V5	2022
Preventing and Responding to Abuse of Young People - Consolidated V4	July 2021
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Preventing and Responding to Abuse of Young People - Consolidated V2	Feb 2021
Preventing and Responding to Abuse of Young People - Consolidated V1	2020