FV-09a | Child Safe Complaints & Reporting

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Anyone may raise a concern verbally, in writing, anonymously or through a support person. A child needs neither parental permission nor a form. Accept concerns about abuse, neglect, grooming, discrimination, boundary breaches, the code, unsafe practice or poor complaint handling, including historical and out-of-program conduct.

Protect and listen

Act immediately on safety. Call 000 for immediate danger or urgent medical help. Separate people safely where needed; do not confront or alert an alleged person if this increases risk or compromises evidence. Listen calmly, acknowledge the disclosure and explain that information will be shared with people who can help. Do not promise secrecy, investigate, ask leading questions or make a child repeat an account.

Record and escalate

Record date, time, location, exact words where possible, observations, people present and action taken; distinguish fact from interpretation. Preserve relevant messages securely. Do not copy or circulate unlawful abuse material. Tell the EO immediately, or the President if the EO is involved or unavailable, then the Vice President or an unconflicted Committee member. Anyone may bypass internal contacts and report directly to an authority. Never wait for a meeting, form or someone's return to work.

External duties

Anyone may contact Police or DFFH Child Protection. Child Protection reports concern significant harm from abuse or neglect where a parent has not protected, or is unlikely to protect, the child. Use the current regional intake contacts; urgent after-hours Child Protection is 13 12 78. An internal or school report does not automatically fulfil an individual external duty.

Under the Crimes Act, adults with a reasonable belief that an adult committed a sexual offence in Victoria against a child under 16 must disclose to Police unless a statutory reasonable excuse or exemption applies. People in authority must not negligently fail to reduce or remove a known substantial risk of sexual abuse by an associated adult against a child under 16. Seek urgent advice without delaying protection or a required report.

Statutory mandatory reporting to Child Protection applies to prescribed professions and roles, not automatically to every Fishcare volunteer. A person who is a mandatory reporter must meet their own duty. Fishcare separately requires every representative to report safeguarding concerns internally and externally where required or appropriate.

Respond fairly and follow through

The unconflicted lead assesses urgency, legal duties, support and interim controls; allocates a competent independent handler; acknowledges the complaint promptly where contact is possible; explains next steps and maintains contact. Consult the child in an accessible, culturally safe way. Protect reporters and witnesses from retaliation. Give the person complained about a fair opportunity to respond when safe and consistent with Police or regulator directions. Explain review/escalation options if dissatisfied.

Follow authority advice on family notification and investigation, particularly if family involvement could increase risk. Keep allegations and outcomes restricted; share only as necessary and lawful. Record decisions, external references, deadlines, support, updates and closure. Give appropriate outcome information without unlawful disclosure. Notify insurers or other bodies when required. Analyse incidents and complaints, improve controls and communicate relevant de-identified improvements.

Records for all concerns

The unconflicted safeguarding lead maintains a restricted Child Safety Concerns and Complaints Register for every concern, including boundary breaches and matters not assessed as reportable conduct. Record the reference, receipt date, facts or secure report location, responsible handler, immediate protection, assessment and reasons, external reports, support, follow-up and closure. Keep identifying details and evidence in restricted files, not shared activity forms or ordinary Committee minutes. A verbal report is sufficient to start a record; a reporter is not required to complete a form.

For a potential reportable allegation, open FV-09d Reportable Allegation Case Record and link it by reference. Avoid copying sensitive case details into multiple registers. Do not wait for a completed form, proof or a final threshold decision before taking protective action or making a required notification. Current reporting contacts are in FV-09c; use an independent alternative if a contact is involved.

Reportable Conduct Scheme procedure

Fishcare applies the full scheme framework across all regions and programs, including FishAbility and school activities. It does not rely on presumed exemptions. The statutory head remains accountable for legal compliance; support and delegation do not remove that accountability. The Committee records the lawful head or makes a nomination where legally required, establishes SSR access and keeps an independent reporting route for allegations about the head.

Recognise and escalate a reportable allegation

An allegation is reportable where a person forms a reasonable belief that an adult worker committed reportable conduct or misconduct that may involve reportable conduct concerning a child under 18. Proof is not required and the head need not

share the belief. The five categories are sexual offences, sexual misconduct, physical violence, significant emotional or psychological harm, and significant neglect. Seek SSR advice about thresholds without delaying a required notification.

Include employees, volunteers, contractors, office holders and other workers within the legal definition, even where their role has no direct child contact. Consider historical conduct and conduct outside work, including allegations raised after departure. Assess partner engagements and coordinate reports without assuming another entity has discharged Fishcare responsibilities. Adult-only harm follows other safety and complaints duties; a disclosure by an adult about abuse when they were a child may still engage the scheme.

Deadlines and required action

When	Action and owner
Immediately	Every representative protects the child and reports internally without delay. Call Police for suspected crime and DFFH where appropriate. The lead records when the head became aware; log both reporting deadlines from that trigger.
Within 3 business days of head awareness	The head ensures initial notification through the SSR online reporting form. Provide known worker details, allegation, risks, controls and Police report details. Do not wait for all evidence; identify missing information and supplement it.
As soon as practicable	The head appoints a competent unconflicted investigator and informs SSR of their name and contact details. Record scope, evidence, child support, fairness and communication arrangements. Obtain Police clearance before investigating suspected criminal conduct.
Within 30 calendar days of head awareness	The head provides the detailed allegation, response and investigation steps, disciplinary or other action proposed or taken, and the worker's written response if available. The deadline is not measured from the initial notification.
At investigation conclusion	Provide SSR with the final report, findings, reasons, recommendations, evidence and action taken or reasons for no action as soon as practicable. Record follow-up safeguards and appropriate outcome communication.

Independence and investigation

For an allegation about the EO or head, contact the President, then Vice President or an unconflicted Committee member, and notify SSR directly. Do not seek permission from the person involved. The Committee arranges independent handling and a competent investigator; it does not assume changing the internal contact transfers legal head responsibilities. Anyone may notify SSR directly.

Use a documented investigation plan, preserve evidence, offer accessible child support and avoid repeated questioning. Give the worker enough particulars and a fair opportunity to respond when consistent with Police directions; decide findings on the balance of probabilities with reasons and appropriate care for serious allegations. Keep protective action proportionate and separate from a finding. Record regular progress, delay reasons and communications with SSR. Seek urgent SSR direction if reporting arrangements or statutory coverage need confirmation; do not use uncertainty to defer this procedure.

Related documents and reporting guidance

Read with FV-09 Policy and Procedures, FV-09b Code of Conduct, FV-09c Public Commitment and Reporting and FV-09d Reportable Allegation Case Record. The consolidated legal source list is maintained in FV-09.

SSR reporting and investigation: https://www.vic.gov.au/information-sheet-7-reporting-social-services-regulator

SSR head responsibilities: https://www.vic.gov.au/information-sheet-3-responsibilities-head-organisation

Child Protection contacts: https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/child-protection-contacts