

## Family violence and child abuse

Post trauma, the importance of pastoral care becomes more pronounced. The time following a disaster, crisis or deeply distressing experience is difficult for everyone, and it is important to remember that this time can be even harder for some. Domestic abuse and all forms of family harm often increase due to the added pressure and stress, and students might witness, experience, or overhear abuse happening to someone close to them. Furthermore, any student from any and all cultures in any school or early childhood centre, from either a high or low socio-economic status, is vulnerable to family harm. Violence and abuse in all of its forms happens across all of society. Indeed, it has been said that abuse is simply 'better hidden' in wealthier communities<sup>1</sup>.

As educators prepare to physically return, it is important for all staff to closely review their child protection policy and procedures. It is worth noting that this is not just for teachers, boards and management: it is vital that all personnel know the content of the policy, and especially, the procedures and steps to follow once suspected abuse or a disclosure of it is made by a young person. Sometimes the most 'unlikely' person on the school grounds is the one a young person chooses to trust the most to talk with: this could be the school nurse, the front office person, someone who might regularly help with lost property, and/or the caretaker or gardener etc.

It is the duty of all personnel who work with young children and students to be able to recognise possible symptoms and identify abuse that may not be told directly to us – and to know exactly how to respond if it is disclosed. This is not an easy task and does not come automatically to most people. Therefore, by reviewing the workplace's policy and procedures with all staff regularly (and especially during times of crisis) is one way we can all be best prepared to help make the lives of young people a little easier.

The steps to take should any form of abuse be suspected or disclosed should be clearly outlined in your workplace's child protection policy and procedures. For example, just

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, D., & Webber, M. (2014). *The People's Report: The People's Inquiry into Addressing Child Abuse and Domestic Violence*. The Glenn Inquiry.



*Helping teachers work with children when they first return to education following major traumatic or life-changing events*

some of the procedures that must be taken include: actively listening to the young person; not promising to keep what they say secret; not asking leading questions; knowing to write down as soon as possible exactly what the young person said (that is, in the words they used); and to immediately take the information or suspicion on to the team leader/ manager/ principal and/or designated person for child protection.

If the school's procedures are not written down or are unclear, now is a great time for these to be reviewed, both as written policies at BOT level and as living documents that are regularly revisited at full-staff meetings.

Help is available for you to review and update your policy and procedures, for example via registered charities Child Matters ([www.childmatters.org.nz](http://www.childmatters.org.nz)) or Safeguarding Children Initiative ([www.safeguardingchildren.org.nz](http://www.safeguardingchildren.org.nz)). Both these websites have further information that is available online and each can tailor training and assistance for all personnel with the aim of ensuring young children are best protected