

Family Violence

1. Context

Workplace environments that are safe, inclusive of women, and receptive to the burden and hardship of family violence are critical to reinforcing the social norms of respect, non-violence and equity.

As a Respectful Relationships school Advance College of Education (ACE) is committed to creating a culture that supports respectful relationships, practices positive attitudes and behaviours and promotes a culture of nonviolence and gender equality in its school and in the broader school community. ACE is committed to developing and maintaining an environment that is supportive of victims of family violence and can identify clear pathways into gaining access to personal support. ACE has a role in, and responsibility for, responding to family violence. This policy sets out the support that is available for staff, students and parents/carers who have, or are experiencing, family violence or may be supporting a person experiencing family violence.

2. Purpose

Supporting school employees and the broader school community experiencing family violence, through promoting a culture free from all forms of violence, demonstrates ACE's commitment to the Victorian Charter of Human Rights.

This policy also recognises the need for Principals to be sensitive to an employee, student, parent/carer experiencing family violence and considerate of the impact this may be having on their work, ability to learn, attendance and/or performance/behaviour. No adverse action will be taken in relation to an employee, student, parent/carer where their attendance or performance at school or broader school community suffers as a result of that person experiencing family violence.

ACE is committed to the privacy of employees, students, parents or carers, however recognises that in certain circumstances there are legal obligations to report acts or threats of family violence to external bodies. Further information can be found in the Privacy and Confidentiality section of this policy.

ACE, as a Respectful Relationships school, encourages employees, students, parents/carers who wish to discuss, formally or informally, any issues related to family violence with the Principal, Education Support Coordinator or the School Psychologist.

3. Aims

This policy is aimed at ensuring that anyone in the school or broader school community experiencing violence or abuse in their family life is provided with information and advice about appropriate services and supports e.g. counselling, legal, police. If disclosure is from an employee, employees may need to be absent from school.

4. Legal and Regulatory Basis for Compliance

- Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic)
- Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)
- Health Records Act 2001 (Vic)

5. Key Definitions

- **Family Violence** as defined in the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic)* includes physical, sexual, financial, verbal, psychological or emotional abuse by a family member. Family violence includes the use of violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behaviour by an individual against a family member or someone with whom they have, or have had, an intimate relationship. A central element of family violence is behaviour aimed at power and control through fear. Family violence takes a number of forms, including physical and sexual violence, threats and intimidation, psychological, emotional and social abuse and economic deprivation.

- **Indicators of Family Violence**

In Students:

- Moving away or running away from home
- Dangerous, risk-taking behaviour
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Parent-child conflict
- Hanging around school outside school hours (not going home)
- Demanding, violent, aggressive or 'acting out'
- Overly compliant, shy, passive, withdrawn
- Depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts
- Taking on caretaker role to protect family members
- Absenteeism, lateness, school refusal

In Colleagues, Parents and Carers:

- Nervous, ashamed or evasive behaviour
- Describing their partner as controlling/prone to anger
- Uncomfortable/anxious around partner
- Accompanied by partner, who does the most talking
- Unconvincing explanation of injuries
- Anxiety, panic attacks, stress and/or depression

Additional Indicators for Colleagues:

- Showing up late
- Says they are having 'problems at home'
- Repeated phone calls during work time
- Crying or showing signs of distress during work
- Disengagement from school workplace community
- Partner shows up at workplace frequently
- 'Presenteeism' (such as working late or long hours)

6. Scope

The application of the policy is relevant to the governing board, the Principal, school staff, students and parents/carers

7. Roles and Responsibilities

Employees are Responsible for:

- familiarising themselves with and complying with this Policy
- making reasonable efforts to provide a safe workplace for themselves, other employees and students
- noticing, inquiring, believing and supporting
- developing a supportive environment to encourage other employees, students and parents/carers to come forward for help and support
- respecting privacy and maintaining the confidentiality of any employees or colleagues, students and parents/carers who are experiencing family violence

Employees who are Experiencing Family Violence Should:

- familiarise themselves with this Policy
- discuss the situation with a family violence support service
- discuss the issue, where appropriate, with the Principal
- discuss and agree appropriate options with their Principal
- ensure an emergency contact person who is outside their immediate family (and not involved in the family violence) is listed on their personnel records

- where a family violence intervention order (or other relevant court order) is obtained, consider requesting to include the workplace, and keep a copy on hand at all times. Consider providing a copy of that order to their Principal.

The Principal is Responsible for:

- familiarising themselves with this Policy and where appropriate participating in relevant training about supporting employees who are experiencing family violence
- maintaining appropriate confidentiality and privacy in relation to disclosures of family violence
- seeking advice from Independent Schools Victoria as required
- providing information about supports and services available to an employee who has disclosed they are experiencing family violence
- implementing reasonable measures to manage the actual or potential work-related impacts of family violence and providing a safe work place for employees
- complying with any commitments agreed to, recording these commitments and keeping this record securely
- checking with the employee that their emergency contact details have been amended to include someone who is outside their immediate family (and not involved in the family violence)
- making reasonable efforts to help employees who need time for medical and legal assistance, court appearances, counselling, relocation, or to make other safety arrangements as a result of experiencing family violence
- approving leave with or without pay or organising flexible working arrangements
- recognising the impact that family violence issues may have on an employee's performance at work and take this into consideration when assessing performance
- notifying the police where a criminal act has occurred or is threatened to occur
- accessing and understanding family violence leave support materials and training opportunities for Principals.

Responding to Disclosures and Incidents of Family Violence

All staff at ACE are required to complete internal training on providing appropriate responses, support and referrals to family violence.

Colleagues, Students and Parents/Carers Experiencing Family Violence

Six Key Steps

1. Ask – Know the signs and ask the question
2. Listen – Without interrupting or giving your opinion
3. Believe – Not being believed is their biggest fear
4. Consult – Seek advice from the Principal, School Psychologist, Education Support Coordinator or an expert
5. Explain – Tell them what you are going to do next
6. Refer -

Internal	External
Principal	Orange Door - Service for adults, children and young people who are experiencing or have experienced family violence and families who need extra support with the care of children.
	Safe Steps Family Violence Response (statewide crisis and emergency accommodation) - 1800015188
Education Support Coordinator	1800 Respect (nationwide counselling and support service)- 1800737732
School Psychologist	Local Family Outreach Services: Anglicare - 5986 9900 BSL - 8781 5900 Good Shepherd - 5971 9444
	Men's Referral Service (for perpetrators) Domestic Violence Resource Centre - 1300 766 491
	Child First (where the family is open to receiving support)- 1300 721 383.
	DHHS Child Protection - 1300655795

Employees Experiencing Family Violence

Support for Employees

In circumstances where a staff member discloses that they are experiencing family violence to a colleague, every effort will be made to support the person to bring the issue to the attention of the Principal or to refer the staff member to the relevant services identified in this policy.

While not limited to the options below, the types of support available to an employee experiencing family violence include:

- access to the School Psychologist
- temporary or ongoing changes to their span or pattern of hours of work
- temporary or ongoing job redesign or changes to duties
- temporary or ongoing relocation of their workplace
- a change to their telephone number or email address to avoid harassing contact
- other appropriate safety measures determined necessary
- any other appropriate measure including those available under existing provisions for family friendly flexible work arrangements

ACE recognises that the experience of family violence may affect an employee's attendance or performance at work. If an employee is experiencing family violence which they believe is affecting their work performance, they are encouraged to discuss this with the Principal so their circumstances can be taken into account. No adverse action will be taken in relation to an employee where their attendance or performance at work suffers as a result of that employee experiencing family violence.

Arrangements that are put in place to support an employee should be reviewed regularly by the affected employee and the Principal to ensure they are meeting the needs of the employee at that time. Any agreement to alter the working arrangements to support an employee must be recorded and kept securely by the Principal.

Confidentiality is a key element to supporting an employee experiencing family violence. For information on privacy in relation to family violence, see the Privacy and Confidentiality section below.

Should an employee have any concerns about their safety, or the safety of others in the workplace, the employee is encouraged to talk to their Principal regarding their safety concerns, and to work with their Principal to make any necessary adjustments to ensure their own safety and that of their colleagues.

Employees Supporting Someone Experiencing Family Violence

An employee who is supporting a person experiencing family violence may access their personal/carer's leave entitlement for this purpose. The Principal may require suitable evidence to verify that the employee is providing care and support to someone affected by family violence.

While not limited to the options below, types of support provided could include:

- Carer's leave to accompany the victim to court, hospital or to care for children
- Changes to span of hours or pattern of hours and/or shift patterns
- Other forms of leave approved in accordance with the applicable policy.

Leave

Leave Entitlements

ACE may provide up to 10 days paid leave (at the Principal's discretion) within a 12-month period for employees directly affected by family violence, additional to any other paid leave entitlements of the employee. This leave is not cumulative, however if the leave is exhausted and the employee continues to be affected by family violence, consideration will be given to providing additional leave.

While not limited to the circumstances below, paid leave would generally be approved to:

- support an employee's health and wellbeing that may be adversely affected as a result of family violence
- enable attendance to family matters, particularly the support of children
- enable attendance at medical appointments related to an incident of family violence
- enable attendance at appointments for professional support services the employee is accessing
- enable attendance at court hearings or other attendances necessary due to the family violence
- provide time for relocation activities related to family violence.

Employees experiencing family violence may also apply for other leave, both paid and unpaid, such as annual leave, personal leave, long service leave or leave without pay, for family violence purposes. Applications for other forms of leave should be made in accordance with the relevant policy.

Casual employees are entitled to access leave without pay for family violence purposes.

Leave Applications

Paid family violence leave will be subject to the approval of the Principal. Applications for leave made because an employee is experiencing family violence must be treated with understanding, sensitivity and confidentiality. Leave may be taken as consecutive or single days or as a fraction of a day and can be taken without prior approval.

Provision of any relevant information held by an employee can assist the Principal in providing the most appropriate support available. Requests for family violence leave must be submitted by filling in a general leave application form. Leave will be recorded in a way that protects the employee's confidentiality. Generally, the following steps would apply in relation to family violence leave:

Where the employee can provide prior notice of the leave:

- they should discuss their leave intentions with the Principal
- if for any reason the employee is uncomfortable speaking to the Principal about their reasons for applying for leave, the employee may seek advice and assistance from their direct manager or the Assistant Principal
- following this discussion, the employee should submit the signed Leave form to the Principal
- an employee may omit the reason for the leave in their application following discussion and agreement with the Principal
- leave cannot be approved until the relevant documentation has been sighted

Where the employee cannot provide prior notice of the leave:

- the employee must notify the Principal of that leave as soon as practicable and submit their leave application immediately on return to duty, and if needed, documentation supporting the absence
- an employee may omit the reason for the leave in their application following discussion and agreement with the Principal
- leave cannot be approved until the relevant documentation has been sighted and the leave is approved.

Evidence

Where an employee is disclosing exposure to family violence and is seeking to take leave the employee may be required to provide suitable evidence. This may take the form of a document indicating the employee is experiencing family violence, issued by one of the following:

- Victoria Police or another police service
- a Court
- a general practitioner, nurse, a district nurse or other registered health practitioner
- a Family Violence Support Service
- a maternal and child health nurse
- a lawyer.

A signed statutory declaration can also be offered as evidence.

Privacy and Confidentiality

ACE recognises the sensitivity of family violence situations, and as such, promotes the need for the highest degree of confidentiality to be exercised when supporting employees. ACE notes that respecting confidentiality may be critical to the safety of the employee and/or their family. No information will be kept on an employee's personnel file without their express written permission. Where permission is given, any documentation will be put in a sealed envelope marked 'Confidential – access limited to Principal only' and placed in the employee's personnel file.

All information relating to family violence matters provided to school will be treated in accordance with the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic), the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 and the Health Records Act 2001 (Vic). Such information is to be securely stored and used only for the purposes for which it was collected, except as otherwise required or permitted by law.

An employee who discloses they are experiencing family violence will be assured their information will be kept strictly confidential and only used for the purpose of providing support to the employee, except as required or permitted by law, for example:

- the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (Vic)(OHS Act) requires the employer to notify WorkSafe immediately of serious workplace incidents;
- where a criminal act has occurred or is threatened to occur, the police must be notified.

In ensuring the necessary family violence or other related leave can be approved, or supports put in place, liaison with the employee's Principal will be necessary. When an employee raises a family violence matter, they should be assured of confidentiality and be properly informed of necessary contact with the Principal before the matter is progressed.

Employees involved in a matter raised under this policy are required to respect the privacy of personal information and the sensitivity of the matters raised. Disclosure of personal information should be limited so that only employees directly involved are informed, and then only on a 'need-to-know' basis.

Employees can request that their colleagues are not made aware of their family violence issues. However, there may be circumstances where others in the workplace may need to be aware of the situation, for example if unwelcome telephone calls are occurring or there is a risk to the safety of the affected employee or any other employees. In these instances, disclosure of the circumstances should be kept to a minimum and should be on a 'need-to-know' basis for the purpose of maintaining safety in the workplace and supporting the employee.