



CHILD ABUSE POLICY

Bergvliet Primary School's Child Abuse Policy is based on the WCED policy document called "Abuse No More: Dealing Effectively with Child Abuse", and will use the procedures and guidelines of this policy document when dealing with any reported incident of child abuse (suspected or confirmed).

The Western Cape Education Department's published policy document "Abuse No More: Dealing Effectively with Child Abuse", provides detailed guidelines on how to approach incidences of child abuse and has been developed to provide schools, employees and learners of the Western Cape Education Department the skills to deal with any problem related to child abuse in an efficient and effective way.

Bergvliet Primary school supports the purpose of this policy, which is to put measures and procedures in place to respect and protect the rights of learners, particularly their rights to safety, personal security, bodily integrity, equal treatment and freedom from discrimination and especially to provide an environment where learners can maximise their opportunity to learn free from abuse.

Section 15 of the Child Care Act 96 of 1996 states that a physician, nurse, social worker or educator must report child abuse or the suspicion of child abuse. Educators are legally protected if their actions well intentioned. Failure to report child abuse or the suspicion thereof will be prosecuted.

Based on the WCED policy, all members of staff are involved in the process of identification, referral, support and intervention i.e. a multi-disciplinary approach is required. The WCED policy states that "reporting procedures contained in this policy may be used by learners, educators, employees, parents, caregivers or any other person.

The following refers to the WCED summary of the guidelines to the management of child abuse and key procedures:

Dealing effectively with child abuse

A brief guide for educators

Child abuse is a serious problem that exists in all our communities. Educators have a special role to play in dealing with this problem, along with doctors, nurses and social workers. In fact, people in these professions are required by law to respond to signs of child abuse.

The Western Cape Education Department has published a policy document called Abuse No More: Dealing Effectively with Child Abuse, which provides detailed guidelines on how to approach this sensitive issue.

This brief guide introduces key procedures covered by the guidelines. This guide should not replace a thorough reading of the longer document, given the legal obligations of educators in terms of Section 15 of the Child Care Amendment Act (Act 96 of 1996).

While intended for educators, this summary can also be referred to by learners, parents and others who would like to know more about the nature of child abuse, and how school personnel are obliged to respond to signs of child abuse among learners in their care.

This summary looks at:

- How to identify child abuse;
- Dealing with disclosure; and
- Dealing with alleged offenders.

1. How to identify child abuse

The following is a summary of the main types and typical symptoms of child abuse. The symptoms are covered in more detail in the Abuse No More document (pages 12 to 17). Symptoms must not be viewed in isolation. If you have any doubts about these symptoms, discuss your observations with your school principal or school social worker.

- Physical abuse, e.g. injuries over a period of time or at various stages of healing (cuts, bruises, burn marks, abrasions, fractures) which cannot be explained.
- Neglect, e.g. the child does not grow and/or loses weight, is pale and emaciated, is constantly vomiting and/or has constant diarrhoea or does not reach developmental milestones within normal age-range.
- Sexual Abuse, e.g. pain or unusual itching of genitals or anal area, sexually transmitted diseases, difficulty in sitting or walking, regular urinary infection or continual irritation and/or mouth sores (owing to forced oral sex).
- Emotional abuse, e.g. bedwetting, soiling and continual complaints of headaches, nausea, and/or stomach pain for which there is no physical cause.

Apply the following procedure if you suspect some form of child abuse:

- Gather information about your suspicion without implicating any person.
- Document your information in a file (e.g. information from the learner, information from other learners and/or parents, and reports from parents and educators).
- Treat this information as highly confidential (all information gathered must be placed on a separate file and stored in a strong-room or safe. This information must not be discussed with other educators, learners, or parents).
- Report your suspicions to your school principal, who will then follow the procedures outlined in the Abuse No More document (pages 18 and 19).

2. Dealing with disclosure

Disclosure of abuse can be a very traumatic experience for both the complainant and the educator assisting the child, and must be handled as sensitively as possible. Pages 20 to 22 of the policy document provide guidance on how to handle disclosure.

Remember to document all information gathered from the learner. You can use guidelines on pages 23 to 24 of the policy document to ensure that you have enough information about the disclosure. This will also help you should the South African Police Services (SAPS) require a sworn statement in a criminal case.

Please do not use the guidelines as a checklist during your discussion with the child concerned. The complainant must be given the opportunity to speak spontaneously.

Apply the following steps during or after disclosure. Please take note of your specific role in the process as well as the role of your school principal.

STEP 1 Ensure the safety of the learner (in collaboration with the SAPS and the social worker, ensure that the learner will not have direct contact with the alleged offender).

STEP 2 Explain to the learner that you will treat all the information in a confidential way, but in order to help her or him, you are legally obliged to report the case to other role-players such as the social worker and/or the SAPS. Explain the roles that they will play as well as the procedures that will be followed in steps 3 – 9.

STEP 3 Inform the school principal (unless he or she is implicated). No detailed information about the alleged abuse needs to be disclosed at this stage.

STEP 4 Assist the school principal in contacting the relevant role-players provided in the list below (within three days after the incident) in order to decide on the process of intervention. (If you are not sure which ones to contact, contact the school social worker or the WCED's Safe Schools Call Centre at 0800-45-46-47. Other contact numbers are provided on page 33 of the policy document.)

- The local welfare organisation;
- The school psychologist;
- The Child Protection Unit;
- The SAPS in the residential area of the complainant;
- Labour Relations, when employees are the alleged offenders;
- The complainant's parent(s) (with the consent of the complainant, if she or he is over 14), provided that they are not the alleged offenders;
- The Child Protection Centre;
- The Department of Health and the Department of Social Services;
- The school nurse (if available), or (if applicable) the ELSEN school nurse.

STEP 5 Assist the school principal in compiling a confidential report for the social worker and the SAPS. Ensure that confidentiality is maintained by following the procedures provided on page 27 of the policy document (after step 9).

STEP 6 Assist the school principal in meeting with the relevant role-players mentioned in Step 4, to draw up a plan of action to indicate the responsibilities of each participant in the intervention process. The school principal must then report the case or incident to the Head: Specialised Support Services at the relevant Education Management and Development Centre (EMDC).

STEP 7 The school principal will follow up with all the role-players, document the process and inform you of progress. He or she will also pass the information on to the Head: Specialised Support Services at the relevant EMDC.

STEP 8 Keep the learner and her or his parent(s) informed of the steps taken by the role-players and the outcome of the investigation.

STEP 9 Assist the school principal in monitoring the learner's emotional, mental and physical health, discuss it with his or her parents, and refer the learner for further professional help if necessary.

3. Dealing with alleged offenders

The following guidelines refer to situations where the alleged offender is another learner, an educator or school employee, or a school principal.

What to do when a learner is the alleged offender:

Follow steps 1 – 9 above to assist the alleged learner offender. This should be seen as an attempt to prevent the alleged offender from committing further abuse. Implement the following additional procedure if necessary:

- Contact the alleged offender's parents, inform them of the incidents and discuss a plan of action for support and intervention.
- Refer the alleged offender for emotional support and therapy if necessary.
- Arrange for temporary suspension of the alleged offender, depending on the circumstances and only if in the best interest of other learners and the school. (If the offence was serious enough to merit suspension or expulsion the school principal will refer the matter to the governing body of the school.)

What to do when an educator or school employee is the alleged offender:

- The parent, educator or employee to whom the disclosure was made should inform the school principal.
- The school principal will inform the Head: Specialised Support Services at the relevant EMDC, who will in turn inform the department's Labour Relations personnel.

What to do when the school principal is the alleged offender:

- The employee to whom the disclosure was made should inform the Head: Specialised Support Services at the relevant EMDC, who will then inform the department's Labour Relations personnel. The employee to whom the disclosure was made should also forward all relevant documents to the Head: Specialised Support Services at the local EMDC.

Copies of Abuse No More: Dealing Effectively with Child Abuse have been circulated to all schools, along with a training video. Educators can ask principals to make these available should she or he not have done so already.

For further information, contact:

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