



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE
OF MELBOURNE

Categories of Abuse

THIS DOCUMENT RELATES TO THE FOLLOWING CAPABILITY AREA

4 Systems, policies and procedures



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Child Physical Abuse

Physical abuse occurs when a child or young person suffers or is likely to suffer significant harm from intentional or inadvertent physically aggressive treatment.

Physical abuse behaviours

Physical abuse may involve behaviours such as:

- hitting (e.g. punching, kicking, slapping)
- assault with an object (e.g. belt, brush)
- choking or strangling
- scratching
- biting
- shaking
- burning
- making up or causing an illness or injury (illness fabricated or induced by carers).

Physical indicators

Possible physical indicators of physical abuse include:

- bruises or welts (e.g. bruises in unusual configurations or resembling the object used to inflict injury)
- burns (e.g. from boiling water, cigarette, iron)
- cuts and grazes
- bite marks
- bald patches where hair has been pulled out
- fractures
- poisoning or significant over-medicating
- internal injuries
- multiple injuries – old and new.

Behavioural indicators

Possible behavioural indicators of physical abuse include:

- concealment of injuries (e.g. wearing clothing that is unsuitable to the weather conditions)
- inconsistent or unlikely explanations for injuries
- regular and habitual absences (e.g. parent may keep a child home to hide signs of injury)
- fear of specific persons or situations (e.g. mistrust, hiding, reluctance to go home)
- frequent crying and/or distress
- poor memory and concentration contributing to academic difficulties
- alertness, nervousness, and hyper-vigilance
- withdrawal from people, daily routines or activities
- fearfulness in relation to loud noises e.g. children crying, adults shouting
- aggressive or controlling behaviour toward others

- little or no emotional reaction when threatened or hurt
- excessive friendliness with strangers
- over-compliance
- excessive shyness
- regressive behaviour (e.g. bed wetting, soiling)
- poor sleeping patterns (e.g. insomnia, fear of darkness and nightmares)
- drug or alcohol use
- self-harm including suicide attempts.

Child Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when a person uses their position of authority, force or power to involve or expose a child to sexual activity. Child sexual abuse can be perpetrated by an adult, adolescent or child. Child sexual abuse can occur in person or online, and be perpetrated in a family, organisational or community context.

It is illegal for any family member to engage in sexual activity with a child or young person who is a member of their family.

It is also illegal for a person in a position of care, trust, responsibility or authority over a child or young person under the age of 18 (e.g. teacher, coach, youth leader, religious leader, employer, health professional) to engage that child or young person in sexual activity, due to the imbalance of power, breach of trust and violation of professional boundaries.

Child sexual abuse within an organisational context remains a risk for children and young people in modern-day organisations (Moore 2018). The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and the Betrayal of Trust Inquiry documented numerous instances of child sexual abuse within organisational settings.

Sexual abuse behaviours

Sexual abuse may involve both contact and non-contact behaviours such as:

- fondling of genitals
- masturbation
- oral sex
- vaginal or anal penetration by finger, penis or any other object
- voyeurism
- exhibitionism
- sending or posting sexually explicit messages, emails or images
- taking part in sexual activity via the internet or phone
- sexual conversations in person; via phone, text or other online platforms
- exposure to pornography
- involving children in the making of child exploitation materials
- sexual exploitation – where the child receives something in return for participating in sexual activity
- prostitution.

Physical indicators

Possible physical indicators of sexual abuse include:

- injury to the genital or rectal areas (e.g. bruising, bleeding, discharge)
- bruising and other injuries to breasts, buttocks or thighs
- discomfort in urinating or defecating
- presence of foreign objects in the vagina or rectum
- sexually transmitted diseases
- pregnancy
- urinary tract infections
- regressive behaviour (e.g. persistent soiling or bed wetting, speech loss).

Behavioural indicators

Possible behavioural indicators of sexual abuse include:

- sexual behaviour that is persistent and inappropriate to the child's age and stage of development
- sexually explicit drawings and descriptions in stories that are not consistent with the child's age and stage of development
- excessive masturbation
- fear of specific persons or places (e.g. context where the abuse is occurring)
- relationship difficulties with family and peers
- poor self-care or personal hygiene
- obsessive and compulsive washing
- withdrawal
- wariness of physical contact with others
- sleep difficulties including the sudden onset of, or regression to bed wetting
- affection-seeking behaviour
- anxiety and/or depression and related illnesses (e.g. stomach pain, headaches, nausea)
- self-harm and suicide attempts
- promiscuity
- sudden interest, or disinterest in sexual topics and/or inappropriate jokes.

Grooming

Grooming behaviour is predatory behaviour committed by any person 18 years or over, with the intention of engaging a child under the age of 16 years in sexual activity. Grooming behaviour may occur in person or via mobile phones, social media or the internet. Widespread access to the internet has put children and young people at an increased risk of targeting by child sex offenders.

While the grooming offence in Section 49M of the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic) focuses on protecting children up to 16 years of age, the Archdiocesan duty of care extends to ensuring that young people over the age of 16 are equally protected.

Church personnel within our Church hold a position of responsibility, trust and authority, and any behaviour that is intended to involve a young person in sexual activity is a breach of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne's Safeguarding and Wellbeing of Children and Young People Policy.

The Betrayal of Trust report found that perpetrators of child abuse in organisations often obtained credibility, trustworthiness, and easy access to children from their position within the organisation.

Department of Justice and Regulation 2017

See "Grooming" section of the [INFORMATION SHEET: Safeguarding Legislative Context](#).

Grooming behaviour is often targeted at children, their families (parents/carers) or other adults who have care or influence over the child or young person in an organisational context (e.g. colleagues, supervisors) to enable access to the child or young person.

Male and female perpetrators of child sexual abuse engage in a broad range of grooming behaviours designed to establish a relationship with the child in order to create a situation where abuse can occur, in effect tricking the child or their parent/carer into thinking that they are in a safe and normal relationship. Some male perpetrators enlist female partners to enable access to children and young people. For example, the female partner may offer babysitting services and allow the male perpetrator to make contact with the children.

Perpetrators of child sexual abuse 'will exploit any vulnerability to increase the child or young person's dependence on them and reduce the likelihood of the child speaking out' (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) n.d.).

Grooming behaviours

- giving gifts including money
- paying special attention to the child to create a friendship or relationship
- contriving situations to promote close physical contact and gradually directing the behaviour in a sexual direction (e.g. tickling that moves from under the arms to the breast area; wrestling)
- showing favouritism
- communicating privately, in person or electronically, to single a child out for a 'special' relationship
- arranging contact or outings with the child offsite or beyond the parish, agency or entity's supervision
- the perpetrator ingratiating themselves with parents/carers to gain access to the child (e.g. offering to babysit or take the child on an outing or camping)
- using a child or young person's sense of trust, to isolate them from their support system both physically and emotionally
- providing a child with alcohol or drugs
- showing a child offensive, confronting or obscene content (e.g. pornographic material, online images).

Grooming may be difficult to detect because the perpetrator often strives to conceal the grooming behaviour by:

- creating opportunities for contact with the child beyond the organisation’s supervisory structures and the scrutiny of others (e.g. spending time with the child in an isolated and unsupervised setting, arranging meetings with the child offsite, communicating privately with the child via social media)
- manipulating the relationship that they have built with the child to ensure that the child keeps the grooming behaviour and/or sexual abuse a secret (e.g. telling the child that their friendship is special, and the sexual behaviour is an expression of love)
- involving the child in dangerous or illegal activities (e.g. smoking, drinking alcohol, being photographed in a state of undress), enabling the perpetrator to then entrap the child by threatening to expose the child’s behaviour to parents/carers or others
- undermining the child’s confidence (e.g. by telling them that they will not be believed) or confusing the child about the nature of the relationship (e.g. ‘He is hurting me, but he says that he loves me’)
- coercing the child to keep the grooming behaviour or sexual abuse a secret by using threats (e.g. “I will hurt your family”) or by telling the child that a disclosure would ‘destroy their family’.

It is important to note that some grooming behaviours may not on their own be criminal or abusive; however, often these behaviours constitute a breach of role or organisational boundaries. Defined role boundaries, in addition to organisational expectations of behaviour set out in a code of conduct, are an important protective factor.

Problematic Sexual Behaviour of Children and Young People

In addition to the risk posed by adults within an organisation, research undertaken by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2022) suggests that children and young people may experience sexual assault from other children and young people.

This may be referred to as peer-on-peer abuse. For more information on this topic, please see the [INFORMATION SHEET: Peer-on-peer Abuse](#).

‘Problematic sexual behaviour’ is a broad term used to describe the sexual behaviour of children and young people that is not age appropriate in its nature, frequency and persistence.

Problematic sexual behaviour

Problematic sexual behaviour is defined as sexual activity by and between children and young people that involves:

- coercion, bribery, aggression, manipulative or secretive behaviour or violence
- behaviour that is not appropriate to the age and/or developmental capability of the child or young person
- compulsive, excessive, forceful, threatening and/or degrading behaviour
- a substantial difference in age, developmental ability or power between participants (Department of Education and Children's Services (SA) (DECS) 2013).

It is worth noting that some children who demonstrate problematic sexual behaviour may have experienced abuse.

For example, the behaviour of a 3-year-old child who takes off his clothes at playgroup is consistent with the child's age and stage of development and is not concerning. By contrast, the behaviour of a 12-year-old who uses aggression and threats to engage others in sexual activity during youth group activities is concerning and requires action.

For information on age-appropriate sexual behaviours and problematic behaviours please refer to the [Age appropriate sexual behaviour in children and young people](#) table from the South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault.

Useful questions

Here are some useful questions to consider in determining whether you have a duty of care to act. If the answer to any of the following questions is 'yes', it is important to act:

- Is the behaviour a concern to others?
- Does the behaviour provide a potential risk to the child?
- Does the behaviour provide a potential risk to others?
- Is the behaviour developmentally inappropriate for the ages of the children involved?
- Does the behaviour interfere with the child's relationships?
- Is the behaviour against the law?
- Is the behaviour against organisational policy?
- Is the behaviour life threatening?

A child or young person who demonstrates problematic sexual behaviour requires support and therapeutic intervention. Church personnel are required to follow the reporting process if a child or young person engages in harmful sexual behaviour to ensure that the child or young person, and their family, is assisted and others are not placed at risk and/or experience harm.

Child Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse of a child or young person refers to a parent or carer's inappropriate verbal or symbolic acts and/or a pattern of failure over time to provide a child or young person with adequate non-physical nurturing and emotional availability (Australian Catholic Standards Limited (ACSL), 2022). These acts are likely to damage a child's self-esteem or social competence, and the child may experience feelings of being repeatedly rejected, isolated or frightened by threats or the witnessing of family violence to the extent where their health, wellbeing and emotional development is impacted. It is worth noting that non-family members can emotionally abuse children and young people too. Church personnel who in their role have an ongoing relationship with children and young people, such as youth leaders, need to be mindful of their behaviour and interactions towards them. Behavioural expectations for all Church personnel are documented in the [Safeguarding Children and Young People \(SCYP\) Code of Conduct](#).

Research has shown that emotional abuse is equally as harmful to a child and young person, as physical abuse and neglect (Vachon et al 2015).

Emotional abuse behaviours

Emotional abuse may involve the following behaviours:

- hostility e.g. insults, derogatory name-calling and put-downs
- persistent coldness
- shouting
- rejection
- humiliation
- intimidation
- isolation or confinement of the child.

Physical indicators

Possible physical indicators of emotional abuse are:

- signs of neglect (e.g. malnourishment, poor hygiene)
- speech disorders (e.g. language delay)
- delays in emotional, mental or physical development.

Behavioural indicators

Possible behavioural indicators of emotional abuse are:

- over-compliance and passivity
- withdrawal and emotional disengagement
- depression and/or anxiety
- fear
- distress
- avoiding persons or the context where the abuse is occurring (e.g. running away from home, hiding)

- mistrust
- poor self-image/self-esteem (e.g. fear of failure, overly high standards)
- poor academic performance
- poor social and interpersonal skills
- difficulties with peer relationships
- demanding or disruptive behaviour (e.g. attention-seeking behaviour, aggression, destructiveness)
- regressive behaviour (e.g. bed wetting and/or soiling)
- dishonesty (e.g. stealing)

Spiritual Abuse

Spiritual abuse refers to:

“abuse of a person that invokes a person's religious beliefs and faith to perpetrate harm. Spiritual abuse can occur as a secondary experience of abuse when abuse is perpetrated by someone in a position of spiritual authority and trust within the Church and can negatively impact a person's spirituality.”

Australian Catholic Safeguarding Limited (ACSL), National Catholic Safeguarding Standards Edition 2, 2022.

Spiritual abuse may include abuse that:

- occurs in a religious setting (e.g. church, religious school, youth group)
- is perpetrated by an adult or ‘religious’ representative (e.g. parent/carer, priest, nun, youth leader, catechist, teacher)
- involves the use of religious concepts, texts or practices to condone inappropriate or abusive behaviour
- exploits information revealed during confession, pastoral activities or counselling to manipulate and control a person
- invokes a child or young person’s faith to manipulate them into engaging in behaviour that they are not comfortable with, or that is abusive towards themselves or others (e.g. a member of the clergy who requires a person to reject their family because they are of a different faith to avoid damnation)
- prevents a person from participating in religious observances and practices.

Abuse by a trusted religious figure can destroy a child’s belief that the world is a safe place and makes the world seem chaotic and unstructured.

Family and Community Development Committee, 2013, vol. 1, p. 47.

Spiritual abuse behaviours

Spiritual abuse may involve the following behaviours:

- control
- domination
- coercion
- manipulation
- misuse of power
- isolation and rejection (e.g. as a punishment or in relation to disconnecting the person from those outside the Church, such as family or friends)
- increasing expectations of commitment (e.g. time, financial commitment, devotion)
- lack of accountability and transparency (e.g. rigid, controlling interpretations of liturgy)
- secrecy
- negation of personal identity
- bullying
- emotional, physical or sexual abuse.

A number of victims told the Committee that their experience of criminal child abuse had led to a loss of faith, particularly in the institution of the Catholic Church, but sometimes also in their God. Others felt fearful that they would go to hell because of the criminal child abuse they experienced.

Family and Community Development Committee 2013, vol. 1, p. 67

Indicators

Possible indicators of spiritual abuse are consistent with indicators of other forms of abuse, including:

- compliance and passivity
- withdrawal
- depression and/or anxiety
- fear
- guilt
- anger
- shame
- distress
- avoidance of the context where the abuse is occurring (e.g. church, parish)
- lack of trust
- poor self-esteem
- crisis of faith (e.g. questioning, rejection of faith)
- isolation (e.g. loss of friends, relationships and opportunities for social interactions)
- sense of loss or grief (Oakley & Oakley 2017).

Family Violence

Family violence is any threatening, coercive, dominating or abusive behaviour that occurs between people in a family, domestic or intimate relationship, or former intimate relationship, that causes the person experiencing the behaviour to feel fear.

Safe Steps n.d.

Family violence is a pattern of abusive behaviour which may involve physical, sexual, emotional abuse and/or neglect within a family context. Irrespective of whether the abuse is directed toward the child or young person, being a witness to family violence is distressing and harmful and may result in significant physical and emotional trauma.

Family violence behaviours

Possible behaviours that characterise family violence include:

- coercion and control
- physical abuse
- emotional abuse including verbal abuse such as name-calling, threats of harm, yelling, screaming
- sexual abuse
- financial abuse
- spiritual or cultural abuse
- stalking
- isolating the child or young person from others.

“I love my mum and dad but they were shocking providers and carers. They used to smash each other in our house. We were never beaten ourselves but when they hit each other they might as well have been hitting us with a baseball bat.”

Jimmy Barnes (quoted in Bennett 2016)

“It was the stuff that I had known since I was a child, but I had hidden it away, locked it away and tried not to think about it and tried not to feel it.”

Jimmy Barnes (quoted in Pryor 2016)

Physical indicators

Possible physical indicators of family violence include:

- physical injuries (see the [physical indicators of physical abuse](#) section, noted earlier in this document)
- failure to thrive (e.g. delays in development)
- speech difficulties (e.g. speech delay).

Behavioural indicators

Possible behavioural indicators of family violence include:

- violent or aggressive behaviour
- depression and anxiety (e.g. self-harm, suicidal behaviour)
- over-compliance or passivity
- fear of the perpetrator(s)
- withdrawal
- wariness
- acting out (e.g. cruelty to animals, violence toward peers)
- regressive behaviours (e.g. bed wetting, soiling)
- demanding or attention-seeking behaviours
- disengagement from school, academic difficulties
- taking a caretaker role in relation to other family members (e.g. protecting and caring for other family members, cleaning up after the incident, providing first aid to family members)
- significant conflict with parents/carers
- hiding or running away from the abuse
- reluctance to go home
- alcohol or substance abuse.

Research has consistently found that children who are exposed to family violence have higher levels of emotional and behavioural problems than children who are not. Children who are in violent homes are also at a greater risk of physical abuse or having their physical and emotional needs neglected.

Family Court of Australia 2013

Given the often-multidimensional nature of family violence, it is likely that children and young people may be experiencing a combination of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, or neglect; consequently, there may be relevant indicators as previously listed in each abuse category.

The Preamble to the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic) recognises that family violence 'is a fundamental violation of human rights and is unacceptable in any form' and that 'family violence is not acceptable in any community or culture'.

Child Neglect

Neglect includes a failure to provide the basic requirements for meeting the physical and emotional developmental needs of a child or young person. This may include a failure to provide an adequate standard of nutrition, medical care, clothing, education, shelter or supervision to the extent where the health and development of the child is significantly impaired or placed at risk.

Neglect can occur in a family or organisational context.

Five broad domains of neglect

Neglect can be categorised into five broad domains (Parkinson et al. 2017):

- physical neglect (e.g. failure to provide food, shelter, clothing, adequate hygiene)
- supervisory neglect (e.g. lack of supervision, failure to protect a child from harm, abandonment, exposure of child to drugs)
- medical neglect (e.g. failure to provide appropriate medical care, delays in seeking medical attention, overmedication)
- emotional neglect (e.g. inadequate nurturing or affection, absence of parent–child interactions)
- educational neglect (e.g. failure to meet a child’s educational needs).

Physical indicators

Possible physical indicators of neglect include:

- poor hygiene (e.g. dirty appearance, smell)
- inappropriate clothing for weather conditions
- living in unsafe, inadequate or unsanitary conditions
- hunger, tiredness and listlessness
- failure to thrive
- developmental delays
- propensity to illness
- weak, listless or sickly appearance
- untreated medical conditions
- lack of supervision (e.g. child left unattended for long periods).

Behavioural indicators

Possible behavioural indicators of neglect include:

- gorging of food when it is provided
- stealing or hoarding of food
- withdrawal
- irritability
- poor relationship with parent/carer
- excessive anxiety
- lack of confidence
- aggression
- excessive affection to strangers
- inappropriate behaviour for the child's age and stage of development
- poor social skills
- propensity to emotional outbursts – inability to control strong emotions
- poor, irregular attendance at school
- reluctance to go home
- adoption of a caring role (e.g. caring for a parent and/or siblings).

Discrimination

Discrimination is defined by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (2019) as treating or proposing to treat, someone unfavourably because of a personal characteristic protected and not subject to any exemption by law. Children and young people can be subject to discrimination based on a number of different characteristics such as age, sex, race, disability, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, race and religious belief or activity. Promoting the safety of children and young people requires that we remain vigilant to possible discrimination and victimisation.

Research among Australian children by Priest et al. (2016) found that children from visible minority backgrounds experienced more discrimination than children with Australian-born parents. In addition, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children reported higher risks of bullying, victimisation and racial discrimination in the community, while children and young people with a disability are at an increased risk of discrimination, violence and bullying within an organisational context.

Discriminatory behaviours

Possible behaviours that characterise discrimination include:

- inappropriate jokes
- insults
- name-calling
- inappropriate images (e.g. posters, cartoons)
- physical violence
- threats of harm
- restricting access to venues
- preventing participation in activities (e.g. exclusion)
- bullying
- refusal to make reasonable adjustments.

Physical indicators

Possible physical indicators of discrimination include:

- fear
- distress
- sleep difficulties
- trouble concentrating
- avoidance of the context where the discrimination is occurring
- changes to eating patterns e.g. loss of appetite, emotional eating
- self-harm.

Behavioural indicators

Possible behavioural indicators of discrimination are:

- low self-esteem
- anxiety
- depression and/or anxiety
- difficulty coping
- withdrawal and emotional disengagement
- wariness as a result of a lack of trust
- poor academic outcomes
- feeling suicidal.

Bullying (including cyberbullying)

The national definition of bullying for Australian schools defines bullying 'as an ongoing and deliberate misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that intends to cause physical, social and/or psychological harm'.

Australian Education Authorities/The State of Queensland, 2023. Bullying. No way!

Research evidence clearly supports the harmful impact that bullying has on the lives of children and young people and their families. Bullying is now recognised as a significant problem in Australian society and across the world. Its effects on individuals can result in poorer physical, psychological, cognitive and social outcomes for many involved, including the targets of bullying, perpetrators and often bystanders. These negative effects can persist into later life. Bullying can become entrenched. When an organisation tacitly condones it by failing to put in place explicit preventative and responsive measures, a culture emerges where power over others is endorsed, and which allows bullying to flourish.

Bullying may occur in person or online. 'Cyberbullying' refers to bullying that is carried out through the internet or mobile devices. The ready access that children and young people have to online environments means that bullying in person can be supplemented with online behaviour that targets the child or young person beyond the physical structure of an organisation.

- 84% of students who were bullied online were also bullied in person.
- 83% of students who bully others online also bully others in person.

Australian Education Authorities/The State of Queensland, 2023. Bullying. No way! 'Some facts about bullying and violence'.

Bullying behaviours

Possible behaviours that characterise bullying include:

- verbal assaults (e.g. threats, teasing, name-calling, inappropriate tagging of images online, insulting comments or messages)
- physical assault (e.g. hitting, kicking, pinching, spitting, tripping and pushing)
- sexual harassment (e.g. making inappropriate sexual comments)
- discrimination (e.g. based on sexual orientation, race, religion, (dis)ability, gender identity)
- excluding someone purposefully or influencing others not to interact with a particular person (e.g. creating hate sites on social networking sites, excluding others from online communication)
- engaging in gossip and the spreading of rumours
- sharing personal information and/or images online without consent to humiliate or embarrass others
- taking or damaging the possessions of others.

Approximately one in four Year 4 to Year 9 Australian students (27%) reported being bullied every few weeks or more often ...

Australian Education Authorities/The State of Queensland, 2023. Bullying. No way! 'Some facts about bullying and violence'.

Physical indicators

Possible physical indicators of bullying include:

- academic difficulties
- reluctance to attend school or other settings (avoidance)
- reluctance to talk about what is happening
- physical injuries (e.g. bruises, cuts, scratches)
- feelings of anxiety and fear
- feeling sick (e.g. frequent headaches, stomach aches) or the pretence of sickness to avoid situations
- changes in eating habits (e.g. not eating, skipping meals)
- changes in sleeping patterns (e.g. insomnia)
- loss of friends
- secrecy about online communication.

Behavioural indicators

Possible behavioural indicators of bullying are:

- helplessness
- depression
- low self-esteem
- hopelessness
- loneliness and isolation
- self-harm.

Online Abuse

Online abuse refers to abuse that occurs in the online environment. This can be categorised by psychological or emotional harm, manipulation or coercion of a person using images, texts, apps and/or social media platforms. All forms of abuse can be experienced online except physical abuse.

There are also certain types of abuse and harm that are unique to the online environment.

Some of these include:

- Image-based abuse - the non-consensual taking, sharing, or threatening to share of intimate images or videos of another individual.
- Viewing, creating, or distributing child exploitative material. Minors can also unintentionally create this illegal material by sending sexual images or explicit messages to others, otherwise known as sexting.
- Cyberbullying - bullying on the internet which may be perpetrated by an individual or a group. This may occur with the use of images, texts or through the act of exclusion. This can occur over multiple different platforms and can also be perpetrated anonymously.
- Cyberstalking - using the online environment to stalk, harass or threaten another person. Cyberstalking can involve sending harassing messages, doxing (publishing personally identifiable information without a person's consent), identity theft or making false accusations of an individual.

Indicators of online abuse

- Social isolation by peers
- Isolating oneself
- Low confidence
- Reluctance to participate in activities
- Changes in behaviour
- Aggression
- Anxiety or depression
- Self-harm

Online activities

The online environment can be a great tool for parishes to help connect with their community. Many parishes are already utilising online platforms for a plethora of activities. This can be as simple as streaming Mass through YouTube, informing the community of upcoming parish events through emails or using a digital platform such as *Whatsapp* to allow participants of a parish activity to easily communicate with one another.

However, it is important to remember that due to the innately private nature of the online environment, managing online platforms and maintaining oversight can be quite difficult and may be overlooked at times.

Therefore, an awareness of the platforms you use, and a thorough risk assessment is necessary to reduce the likelihood of online harm or abuse from occurring.

When hosting activities through online platforms with children and young people, either partially or completely, it is important to consider:

- What does the activity gain by using the online environment?
- Can the online platform/environment be easily monitored and supervised?
- Is the platform being used, secure and appropriate for your activity?
- Can the *Never Alone Rule* be followed in the online environment?
- Are contact details of children and young people, who are part of this activity, kept private?
- Are expectations of appropriate behaviour outlined to children and young people who are part of the activity – including the sharing of images, photos and contact information?
- Can you close the platform after the conclusion of the event or activity to avoid unsupervised use and communication?
- Does the online platform or group require permission to enter?
- When available, are parish email accounts or devices used instead of Church personnel personal devices and email accounts?
- Are parents/carers made aware of what online activities are occurring?
- Is a registration form in place that seeks consent from parents/carers?
- Are you aware of how to respond to inappropriate online behaviour or content?
- Can there be content filters applied to the platform you are using for your online activity?

Reporting online abuse

If you become aware of online abuse, you should follow the standard reporting process as outlined in the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne's [Safeguarding Children and Young People Reporting Procedure](#).

It is also important to know that certain information disclosed to you, or information that you become aware of, may be useful to relevant authorities.

This may include information about:

- The online platform where the abuse is alleged to have occurred
- Usernames and location of the material
- The date and time the content was sent, posted or shared
- What the content says or shows.

Important note

It may be easier to screenshot or take a picture of the content as evidence, however if it is child exploitative material i.e. sexualised or nude images of children or young people, **do not** take a photo or screenshot of that material. Instead, write a description of what the content shows. Storing images of child exploitative material, even to report, is illegal.

If the material is on a website or communicated through an app, you should also inform the [eSafety Commissioner](#) and, if applicable, the social media service so that the content can be removed.

The online environment can be confronting and confusing for those who are inexperienced, or who lack confidence when accessing it. At times, this can make it hard to identify when online abuse is occurring. If you are unsure, you can always reach out to your Safeguarding Officer or the Safeguarding Unit to seek advice at (03) 9926 5621.

Useful Resources

Australian Catholic Safeguarding Limited 2019, *Identifying perpetrators and impacts of abuse - CPSL interview with Robert Fitzgerald AM (video)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vb7cDsMMz0Y&feature=youtu.be>

Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation

[For parents & carers | ACCCE](#)

Australian Human Rights Commission

phone: 1300 656 419

<https://humanrights.gov.au/>

Bullying. No Way!

<https://bullyingnoway.gov.au>

Provides useful information about understanding bullying and responding to bullying.

Bully Stoppers

<https://www.vic.gov.au/bully-stoppers>

A resource website developed for schools to prevent bullying and provide support to those impacted by bullying. In addition to information sheets, online learning modules have been developed for primary and secondary school students.

Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA)

<https://casacv.org.au/fact-sheets-resources/>

Frequently Asked Questions – about children who display problem sexual behaviours.

Department of Justice and Community Safety

<https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/grooming-offence>

The Grooming Offence.

eSafety Commissioner resources:

- Cyberbullying
<https://www.esafety.gov.au/esafety-information/esafety-issues/cyberbullying>
- Communities
[Communities | eSafety Commissioner](#)
- E-safety Guide
www.esafety.gov.au/esafety-information/esafety-issues
- Image-based abuse
<https://www.esafety.gov.au/image-based-abuse>
- Offensive or illegal content
<https://www.esafety.gov.au/esafety-information/esafety-issues/offensive-or-illegal-content>
- Sexting
<https://www.esafety.gov.au/esafety-information/esafety-issues/sexting>
- Translated resources from the e-Safety commissioner
[Help in languages other than English | eSafety Commissioner](#)

Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia.

[http://www.fccoa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-09/The%20impact%20of%20family%20violence%20on%20children WEB_0921V1.pdf](http://www.fccoa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-09/The%20impact%20of%20family%20violence%20on%20children_WEB_0921V1.pdf)

The impact of family violence on children – Fact sheet.

Kids First

Runs the Therapeutic Trauma Program for children under the age of 18 who have experienced sexual abuse; children under the age of 10 who have displayed problematic sexualised behaviours; and young people aged 10–17 who have engaged in sexually abusive behaviour.

Phone: 9450 0900

Email: intake@kidsfirstaustralia.org.au

<https://www.kidsfirstaustralia.org.au/information-hub/>

Provides useful information sheets for parents and carers of children and young people displaying problematic sexual behaviour.

Raising Children Network

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/development/sexual-development/concerned-about-sexual-behaviour#where-to-get-help-for-concerning-childhood-sexual-behaviour-nav-title>

Provides guidance for responding to children and young people who are engaging in problematic sexual behaviour.

Safe Steps

Phone: 1800 015 188 (24 hours, 7 days)

website: www.safesteps.org.au

(Family Violence Response Centre) is a state-wide service for women, young people and children experiencing family violence.

South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault

Age appropriate sexual behaviour in children and young people

For information on age-appropriate sexual behaviours and problematic behaviours.

St Vincent de Paul Society

Phone: 1800 305 330 (Monday to Friday, 10am–3pm)

Welfare Assistance Line.

The Alannah & Madeline Foundation

Phone: 9697 0666

<https://www.alannahandmadeline.org.au/what-we-do/care-programs/children-ahead>

Provides the Children Ahead program of intensive and therapeutic support to help children recover from significant trauma or violence.

The Orange Door (replacing Child FIRST)

<https://www.orangedoor.vic.gov.au/>

Links vulnerable families, children and young people with relevant services.

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Legislation

Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) s 49M

Family Violence Protection Act, 2008 (Vic)