



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

Family violence and child abuse

Post trauma, the importance of pastoral care becomes more pronounced. COVID-19 has been trying for most of us, but more so for some. Domestic abuse and all forms of family harm have increased, and witnessing or overhearing it happening to someone in their bubble, or being on the receiving end, can have life-long impacts.

As schools prepare to physically return, it is timely that all to closely review their child protection policy and procedures. This is not just for teachers, boards and management: it is important that all personnel know the content of the policy, and especially, the procedures. Sometimes the most unlikely person on the school grounds is the one a young person trusts the most to talk with: perhaps the front office person (who might regularly help with lost property or scraped knees) or the caretaker (perhaps a lone friendly male adult in their world).

Any student in any school, high or low SES, is vulnerable to family harm. Violence and abuse in all its forms happens across all of society. Indeed, it has been said that it is simply 'better hidden' in wealthier communities¹.

Child protection policy and procedures are in place to be able to assist young people deal with issues they may not be comfortable to share. It is the duty of all school personnel 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, but reviewing the school's policy and procedures with all staff regularly is one way we can all 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 school's policy and procedures. For example, just 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; and to immediately take the information or suspicion on to the school's designated person for child protection or principal.

If the school's procedures are not written down or clear, 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) or *Safeguarding Children Initiative* (www.safeguardingchildren.org.nz). Both these sites have information that is available online and each can tailor training and assistance for all personnel. If you have one, your SWiS will be able to assist.

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