

HIGHVIEW COLLEGE

COMPLAINTS and RESOLUTION POLICY



Rationale

Highview College commits to ensuring procedural fairness is observed when dealing with complaints and grievances. The College believes that a process for the acceptance and resolution of conflict and grievances will help maintain a harmonious, supportive and productive College community.

- Open communication is a key to resolving grievances.
- Highview College is a community where individuals should feel safe to express their points of view openly, honestly and constructively.
- From time-to-time concerns may arise regarding educational, behavioural or school-based environmental issues. For this reason, Highview College has developed a set of procedures to work through unresolved situations.
- Grievance procedures provide guidelines for raising an unresolved issue or complaint and having it considered seriously.
- Additional support for students with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, students who are unable to live at home, and LGBTIQ+ students may require additional support throughout the complaints process.

Highview College Codes of Conduct for staff, volunteers, parents/guardians and students outline the expectations for behaviour of our community. The following procedures relate to any concerns that members of the community including current and former staff, parents, guardians, carers, students, contractors, agents and volunteers may have regarding the operations or services at Highview College.

Roles and Responsibilities

All Highview College staff have the responsibility to take all complaints seriously by responding promptly and thoroughly. A detailed explanation of specific roles and responsibilities for Leadership, Staff and Volunteers is outlined in the *Child Safe Framework and Mandatory Reporting Policy*.

Where staff are able to resolve informal complaints, the outcome should be recorded on the College Learning Management System, SEQTA.

Communication of this Policy

The Complaints Policy is publicly available on the Highview College website and can also be accessed by staff, parents/guardians, and students on College's Learning Management System, SEQTA under the Policy Tile.

Managing Complaints and Concerns

There are three categories of complaints:

- 1. Child Safe Concerns and Reportable Conduct**
- 2. Informal Complaints**
- 3. Formal Complaints**

1. Child Safe Concerns and Reportable Conduct

Misconduct or serious misconduct.

All complaints of alleged misconduct or serious misconduct by a teacher or staff member should be reported to the Principal of Highview College. The Principal will follow the reporting procedure outlined in the *Highview Reportable Conduct Policy*.

Child abuse (including sexual offences)

All complaints of alleged child abuse (including sexual offences) of a school student must be reported according to **Appendix One: Procedure for Responding to Complaints, Disclosures or Concerns related to Child Safety**

There are legal obligations on all adults to report child abuse to Police once a reasonable belief is formed that a sexual offence has been committed against a child. Failure to disclose a sexual offence against a child is a criminal offence under section 327 of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic.) and applies to all adults (18 years of age and over) in Victoria.

Communication with children under 16 years of age by teachers, staff, or any other person to prepare or 'groom' a child for future sexual activity is a criminal offence under section 49M (1) of the Crimes Act and must be reported to the Police. The offence of grooming applies to any person aged 18 years or over and does not apply to communication between people who are both under 18 years of age.

2. Informal Complaints

In general concerns, complaints or issues should be reported to the College via email. A list of suggested contacts are listed below.

Where staff are able to resolve informal complaints, the outcome will be recorded on the College Learning Management System, SEQTA.

Concerns and Complaints related to curriculum issues

In the first instance, raise the matter via email with the subject teacher. Complainants are strongly discouraged from sending or discussing confidential, contentious, or emotional information by email. This is best done via a meeting or phone call.

Concerns and Complaints related to wellbeing and pastoral care issues

Where the complaint relates to another student or a wellbeing, raise the matter via email with the child's DELTA teacher.

Where this complaint relates to a College staff member in the first instance, raise the matter via email with the relevant Head of Year.

Students making a complaint in relation to their physical and mental wellbeing

The contact person for complaints about Student Wellbeing is your DELTA Mentor.

If the complaint is about the DELTA Mentor, the contact person is the relevant Head of Year.

If the complaint is related to the Head of Year the contact person is the Principal.

Students can discuss the complaint in person, send an email or write a note.

Student complaint in relation to your learning

The contact person for complaints about teaching and learning is your relevant Teacher.

If the complaint is about the teacher the contact person is the relevant Head of Faculty or Head of Year.

Students can discuss the complaint in person, send an email or write a note.

3. Formal Complaints

Where a complaint cannot be resolved through the usual process or is of such a magnitude that it requires the immediate attention of the College Executive or College Board then following contacts should be informed.

Complaints relating to the Principal

In the case of a complaint relating to the Principal of Highview College, the Chair of the College Board is to be informed. boardchair@highview.vic.edu.au

Complaints relating to the clergy or other religious person

If the complaint relates to the clergy or other religious persons, the complainant is to contact and seek advice from the Victorian Professional Standards Office 1800 816 030.

Complaints related to occupational health and safety issues and infrastructure.

In the first instance, raise the matter via email using reception@highview.vic.edu.au The complaint will be directed to the correct staff member within the College who will contact the complainant.

Complaints related to the College's decision-making processes or philosophy

In the first instance, raise the matter via email using reception@highview.vic.edu.au. The complaint will be directed to the correct staff member within the College who will contact the complainant.

Procedures for informal and formal complaints and resolutions

Highview College has developed and maintains a fair, effective, and efficient complaint handling procedure so that complaints about events or decisions are addressed. The following steps can guide the procedure in making a complaint about issues arising at Highview College.

Informal resolution procedures

After receiving a complaint, the staff member will acknowledge the complainant's email within two working days. An informal discussion or email exchange between the parties will usually address the complaint. At times, parties may be assisted to resolve a misunderstanding, miscommunication, or lack of clarity through the support of another person, such as another member of the College Executive group. Where this is required

the staff member will explain this to the complainant and establish dates and times for both parties to meet and clarify when the complainant can expect to hear further information or have a resolution. If the matter cannot be resolved informally or if the complainant wishes then they can escalate their concern and make a formal complaint.

Formal resolution procedures

When a complaint cannot be resolved informally, or if the complainant wishes to make a formal complaint, then the complainant can contact a member of the College Executive group via email or inform the Principal.

Highview College has developed and maintains a fair, effective, and efficient complaint-handling procedure so that complaints can be addressed. The following steps can guide the procedure when making a complaint about issues arising at Highview College.

In all cases:

- Confidentiality is respected.
- The complainant is not victimised because of a complaint being made.
- The complainant may be accompanied to meetings by another person of their choice as a support person. The complainant is requested to notify the College in advance if they wish to bring a support person to the meeting.
- Enables in all cases the person against whom the complaint has been enabled to respond and to be accompanied to a meeting by a person.
- When a formal complaint is received, it will be acknowledged, and the complainant will be provided with a copy of this Policy so they can understand the procedures that will be followed in dealing with their complaint.
- Where the employer is considering termination of employment in relation to a formal complaint the employer will implement the procedures outlined in the Highview Christian College Enterprise Agreement 2023 - 2025. The principles of procedural and substantive fairness shall underpin the application of procedures.
- The complainant will be notified of the outcome of the inquiry in writing. Privacy laws may prohibit information being provided to the complainant of any specific action that has been taken in relation to individuals about whom the complaint has been raised.

Timeframe for dealing with formal complaints

In moving to more formal procedures, the Principal or a member of the College Executive group will undertake the inquiry in the following manner, ensuring procedural fairness is observed.

The College will acknowledge a formal complaint within two working days. The College will then respond to the complainant within ten working days to establish the timeframe

to conduct the inquiry. This will establish dates and times for parties to meet and clarify when the complainant can expect to hear further information or have a resolution.

Anonymous complaints

Highview College will endeavour to address and respond to all complaints. In some situations, Highview College might not respond to complaints that are made anonymously and lack sufficient detail to enable an investigation or resolution of the matter. To ensure procedural fairness, respondents have a right to know the particulars of the allegations being made against them and be given an opportunity to respond to them.

Recording complaints

The Principal is to be informed in writing of all complaints. This can be done by adding a note to the Learning Management System or emailing the Principal. The College is committed to fair and equitable procedures and practices; therefore, all complaints are taken seriously and formal discussions and procedures involving complaints will be documented by the College.

The following information about complaints received will be recorded on the Complaints Register:

- confidentiality is maintained
- contact details of the complainant
- date of complaint and method of communication
- nature of the complaint and if appropriate the requested resolution.
- name of the staff member handling the issue
- any actions and the timeframe taken, minutes of meetings, and communication.
- a statement of the outcome, including the closure date and date of advising the complainant of the outcome.

Support Person

A complainant/respondent may invite a support person to accompany him/her to any meetings that take place during the grievance resolution process, but the support person must not have an active role in the resolution process. It is not the role of the support person to be a spokesperson for the complainant.

Expectations of and information for parents and guardians

In making a complaint, the College requests and expects that the complainant will:

- raise the concern or complaint as soon as possible after the issue has arisen.
- communicate and respond in ways that are constructive, fair, and respectful.
- provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint.

- observe confidentiality and respect for sensitive issues.
- act in good faith to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties.
- have realistic and reasonable expectations about possible outcomes/remedies.

If the concern/complaint relates to a child's treatment by another student or students while at Highview College, the College expects that the complaint will be directed to the relevant Head of Year. In accordance with the Parent/Guardian Code of Conduct, complainants should not approach another student or their family to discuss an issue that pertains to issues or incidents that have arisen at the College.

Parents and guardians making complaints are to be respectful, confidential, and courteous. Parents who are unreasonable, threatening, or discourteous can expect their discussions with the College to be terminated until such time as an alternative discussion time is arranged by the College.

Outcomes of complaints

Outcomes to complaints and grievances may include but not limited to the following:

- apology – either verbal or written
- mediation – with an internal or external mediator
- official warning
- disciplinary action
- behavioural contract (in the case of a student)
- pastoral or spiritual care
- an understanding that the behaviour will not be repeated.
- a change in policy or procedure.

Complaints and the Media

The Principal should inform the Chair of the College Board prior to discussing matters relating to the media. As per board delegation - the Principal is the only person delegated the authority to speak to the media in relation to complaints, unless otherwise directed.

Staff Training in Management of Complaints

The Complaints and Resolution Policy and associated processes is a component of the compliance training at the beginning of each academic year and forms part of the induction program for all new staff.

Responsibility for the Maintenance of this Policy

The College Board in conjunction with the Principal is responsible for the overview and implementation of this policy. The College Board reserves the right to amend this policy at any time. The latest version will appear on the College's website.

To properly implement this policy, Highview College, the Board and/or the Principal must ensure:

- That staff students, parents, guardians and carers are aware of and familiar with this policy
- That this policy is incorporated into the Board's / Principal's record of current policies
- That this policy is incorporated into Highview College's induction program, to ensure that all employees are aware of the Policy, have read and understood the policy, and acknowledge their professional responsibility to comply with the policy
- That mechanisms necessary to establish the complaints and grievance process are in place.

Complaint Escalation

If the complaint is unable to be resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant, but the matter is finalised, the complainant has the right to seek alternative independent or other advice, or contact other entities listed below.

- **Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA)**

You have two options to submit your complaint:

1. [Complete the online form](#)
2. Send a letter:
Manager, Complaints Unit, VRQA, GPO Box 2317, Melbourne VIC 3001

- **Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority**

Suzy Chandler
Executive Director, Curriculum Division
Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
Level 7, 2 Lonsdale Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

- **Ombudsman Victoria**

Level 2, 570 Bourke Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000
+61 3 9613 6222

Withdrawal of a complaint

A complaint can be withdrawn at any stage during the complaint management procedures. A complaint should be retracted in writing by the complainant and addressed to the Principal.

General Reviews of Child Safety and Wellbeing Complaints Management

Highview College regularly reviews child safety and wellbeing-related feedback, comments and complaints to ensure that any child safety-related feedback, comments or complaints from the College community members and relevant stakeholders are captured, analysed and acted on where appropriate. Child safety and wellbeing-related complaints are regularly analysed to identify causes and systemic failures to inform continuous improvement. Our Complaints Policy is also itself regularly reviewed as part of our reviews of the Child Safety and Wellbeing Program.

Communication

This policy can be accessed via the Highview College website and is also saved on the Learning Management system under the parents documents tab. All students have been provided with training on how to make a complaint at Highview College.

Related Policies and Documents

- Codes Of Conduct: Staff, Parent/Guardian, Student
- Highview Christian College Enterprise Agreement 2023 - 2025
- IT Resources Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Student Anti Bullying Policy
- Whistle-blower Policy

Reporting and Review

Policy created: 2024.

Policy to be reviewed: 2027

Appendix One



Procedure for Responding to Complaints, Disclosures or Concerns related to Child Safety

Scope

This procedure applies to all members of the College's Executive Team, College Board, teaching and non-teaching staff members, coaches, casual relief teachers, volunteers and contractors engaged by the College.

Roles and Responsibilities

All Highview College staff have the responsibility to take all complaints seriously by responding promptly and thoroughly. For further detail regarding the specific roles and responsibilities of the College Leadership, College Board, Staff are detailed in the *Child Safe Framework and Mandatory Reporting Policy*.

All staff members who hold a current VIT Registration, school counsellors and registered psychologists are Mandatory Reporters. It is an offence in Victoria to not disclose information regarding a sexual offence against a child.

The failure to disclose an offence applies to adults including volunteers who have information that leads them to form a 'reasonable belief' that another adult has sexually offended against a child under 16 years in Victoria.

Child Safe Officers

While all members of Highview College have a responsibility to report all incidents of Child Abuse the Principal, Directors of Wellbeing and Heads of Year have allocated roles and responsibilities for child safety and to support staff and complainants throughout the process.

You can report all Child Safe Concerns via this email.

Childsafeconcerns@highview.vic.edu.au

Definition of Child Abuse

Child abuse includes any instance of physical or sexual abuse (including grooming), emotional or psychological harm, serious or significant neglect and family violence involving a child.

Responding to Complaints and Disclosures related to Child Abuse

All complaints must be taken seriously and responded to promptly and thoroughly. If you witness a child safe incident, form a suspicion or reasonable belief, receive a disclosure from a current student or former student you must act and follow the Four Critical Actions described below. In addition, the Four Critical Actions apply to complaints or concerns relating to child abuse made by or in relation to a child or student, as well as College's Executive Team, College Board, teaching and non-teaching staff members, coaches, casual relief teachers, volunteers and contractors engaged by the College.

Highview Child Safe Officers can support you with this process. Staff are not required to make a judgement about the truth of a complaint or concern relating to child abuse but rather form a reasonable belief. Reasonable belief is described in detail in the *Child Safe Framework and Mandatory Reporting Policy*.

Four Critical Actions

Follow the Four Critical Actions when responding to an incident, disclosure or suspicion of child abuse:

Action 1: Respond to an emergency

Actions you must take if a child has just been abused or is at **immediate** risk of harm.

Separate the alleged victim and others involved, ensuring all parties are supervised by a Highview staff member.

Arrange and provide urgent medical assistance where necessary by administering first aid assistance or calling 000 for an ambulance.

Call 000 for urgent police assistance.

Action 2: Report to authorities

You must report all incidents, suspicions and disclosures of child abuse. Failure to report physical and sexual child abuse may amount to a criminal offence.

Reportable Conduct

If the source of suspected abuse comes from a person within the school (this includes any form of suspected child abuse involving a school staff member, contractor, volunteer, allied health practitioner, visitor, officer or office holder, whether or not the

conduct is alleged to have occurred within the course of the person's employment or engagement with the school) you must inform the Principal or a member of the College Executive and follow the process outlined in the *Reportable Conduct Policy*.

The Principal or nominee will submit a notification to the CCYP within three days of becoming aware of the reportable allegation, meet the milestones and reporting requirements to the CCYP and make a report to Victoria Police if they believe a reportable allegation may involve criminal conduct.

Mandatory Reporting

If the source of suspected abuse comes from within the family or community, you must report to DFFH Child Protection. DFFH North Division - 1300 598 521

You must also report suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police and to the Highview Principal or Executive

If you witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a suspicion that a student is a victim of a student sexual offending, or a student has engaged in student sexual offending you must act immediately by following the Four Critical actions.

If you believe that a child is not subject to abuse, but you still hold significant concerns for their wellbeing, you should consider making a referral to Child FIRST/The Orange Door.

All staff need to be aware that they cannot not displace or discharge their obligations that arise if they reasonably believe a child is at risk of child abuse regardless of whether there is a legal obligation to report.

Action 3: Contact parents or carers

When to notify parents and carers if it is suspected their child is a victim of abuse.

The Highview Principal or Child Safe Officer must seek advice from Victoria Police or DFFH Child Protection prior to contacting parents. They will advise whether it is appropriate to contact parents or carers at this stage.

Action 4: Provide ongoing support

Actions that schools must take, where deemed appropriate, to support students who are impacted by child abuse. See Below.

Strategies for Managing a Disclosure

When managing disclosure of abuse, you must respond in an appropriate and supportive manner. It is essential for you to protect any child or student connected to the complaint or concern relating to child abuse until the complaint or concern is resolved. You can seek support from the College's Child Safe Officers.

All disclosures of abuse must be taken seriously and addressed immediately by following the [Four Critical Actions](#).

Disclosures from a student

It is the role of school staff members to listen and respond appropriately to a child's concerns. When disclosure of abuse is made, or you are concerned that a child has been abused or is at risk of being abused, you must help the child to understand that you need to seek assistance for them and cannot keep the discussion or their disclosure confidential between you and the student.

This should be done in language appropriate to the student's age and stage of development. For example:

to a younger student: 'I need some help to support you and am not going to be able to keep what you have told me between you and me, I will need to tell ...[who you will tell]....to work out what to do to support you, to an older student: 'The information you have given me has made me very concerned for your welfare and I will need to share this information with my manager to identify how we may be able to support you. I may also need to talk to people who work in the child safety area, to help keep you safe.'

In instances where the abuse involves a family member (such as family violence), it may be appropriate to reassure the child that sharing this information is an important part of making their family safer and that you will be talking with other professionals who will help identify the next steps. For further information, refer to [contacting parents and carers](#).

When managing a disclosure from a student, staff should

Listen to the student and allow them to speak.

Stay calm and use a neutral tone with no urgency and where possible use the child's language and vocabulary (you do not want to frighten the child or interrupt the child) be gentle, patient and non-judgemental throughout highlight to the student it was important for them to tell you about what has happened assure them that they are not to blame for what has occurred.

Do not ask leading questions, for example gently ask, what happened next? rather than Why?

Be patient and allow the child to talk at their own pace and in their own words.

Do not pressure the child into telling you more than they want to, they will be asked a lot of questions by other professionals, and it is important not to force them to retell what has occurred multiple times

Reassure the child that you believe them and that disclosing the matter was important for them to do.

Use verbal facilitators such as, 'I see, restate the child's previous statement, and use non-suggestive words of encouragement, designed to keep the child talking in an open-ended way ('what happened next?')

Tell the child in the age-appropriate language you are required to report to the relevant authority to help stop the abuse and explain the role of these authorities if appropriate (for a young child this may be as simple as saying 'I will need to talk to people to work out what to do next to help you').

When managing a disclosure from a student, staff should avoid.

Displaying expressions of panic or shock, asking questions that are investigative and potentially invasive (this may make the child feel uncomfortable and cause the child to withdraw), going over the information repeatedly (you are only gathering information to help you form a belief on reasonable grounds that you need to make a report to the relevant authority), making any comments that would lead the student to believe that what has happened is their fault.

Making promises to the child about what will occur next or that things will be different given the process can be unpredictable and different for each child depending on their circumstances (instead reassure them that you and others will do your best to help).

Disclosures from a parent/carer or sibling

There may be circumstances where a student's sibling, parent or carer discloses abuse. For example, a student's parent or carer may disclose family violence (noting that if a child's parent or carer is experiencing family violence it is highly likely that the child is experiencing abuse).

In this circumstance, it is important to draw on the same strategies that you would for a student (such as listening, being non-judgemental, patient, and not applying pressure).

Regarding experiences of family violence, it is particularly critical to remain non-

judgemental, avoid apportioning blame to the victim, or victims, and highlight that everyone has the right to feel safe.

This can be done by focusing questions to determine what the risk of harm may be and what (if any) supports and interventions are in place to protect the wellbeing of the child and avoiding statements like 'why don't you leave?'

For example, you could use questions to explore the victim's view about their level of risk and risk to their child, such as 'Do you think the violence will continue? Is the violence getting worse?'

It is also important to remember that many victims of family violence experience fear for their safety (and the safety of their children) in disclosing their experiences. They may have been threatened by the perpetrator of violence, or threats made about their children's lives. For further information, refer to [supports for students experiencing family violence](#).

Documenting your Actions

As a Highview staff member, you must keep clear and comprehensive notes relating to incidents, disclosures and allegations of child abuse. The following template provides clear guidelines. [Responding to suspected child abuse: template \(DOCX, 194KB\)](#)

This information may be sought later if the matter is the subject of court proceedings therefore needs to be stored securely and shared with appropriate staff at Highview and relevant authorities. Due to the nature of mandatory reporting and other child abuse reporting records, Highview College will ensure that the records are kept securely. If the disclosure is related to a current student, then the notes should be added to the students SEQTA file notes using the most confidential settings. Staff should ensure privacy and employment law obligations are met throughout this process in regard to any allegation. See the *Child Safe Framework and Mandatory Reporting Policy* for further detail regarding Reporting Child Safe incidents.