

Nuovo School Group

Reporting Code for Child Abuse and Domestic Violence

Purpose of the Reporting Code

The Reporting Code aims to quickly provide young people who are dealing with a form of violence or abuse with suitable help in order to put an end to the (threatening) situation. The Reporting Code targets all forms of violence in the domestic situation, such as abuse, sexual violence, genital mutilation and honour-based violence. Child abuse also includes witnessing domestic violence.

Legal framework

Since 1 July 2013, all professionals working with young people are required to adhere to a reporting code in case of suspicion of domestic violence. For secondary education, Article 3a of the Law on Secondary Education (WVO) provides the legal framework for this:

Article 3a. Reporting Code for Domestic Violence and Child Abuse

1. The competent authority or the natural person or the legal entity that maintains a school which is not paid for out of the public purse, must establish a reporting code for the personnel clearly stating step by step how to deal with signs of domestic violence or child abuse and which reasonably contributes to providing help as quickly and adequately as possible.
2. Domestic violence is defined as: domestic violence as referred to in Article 1.1.1 of the Social Support Act 2015.
3. Child abuse is defined as: child abuse as referred to in Article 1.1 of the Youth Act.
4. The competent authority or the natural person or the legal entity that maintains a school which is not paid for out of the public purse must promote knowledge of and use of the reporting code.
5. Which elements are in any case included in a reporting code will be determined by or pursuant to a government order.

In practice

Schools are responsible for implementing the Reporting Code in practice. This means embedding it into schools' care structures, going through the five mandatory steps of the Reporting Code and ensuring that all employees are familiar with the Code.

The five mandatory steps set out in the action plan make it clear to the employee what is expected of him/her if there are any indications to suggest child abuse and domestic violence, and how a decision is made in a responsible manner within the school about whether to file a report. Please note: there is no obligation for employees to report suspected domestic violence.

Schools are obliged to actively use the Reporting Code and implement it in their internal policies. The education inspectorate ensures compliance with legal requirements: that a school has a Reporting Code, that appropriate preconditions for its application are in place and the actual application of the Reporting Code.

The school ensures proper reporting of steps taken, actions, events and facts. The school records all signs (of suspected abuse), as well as (the outcome of) conversations held about these signs, subsequent steps taken, and the decision reached by the school.

Action plan for schools belonging to the NUOVO school group

NUOVO bases its approach to handling suspected cases of child abuse on 'The Reporting Code on Domestic Violence and Child Abuse in Secondary Education' as drawn up by the Netherlands Youth Institute. See also: <http://www.nji.nl/nl/Download-NJi/Publicatie-NJi/Meldcode-Huiselijk-Geweld-en-Kindermishandeling-VO.pdf>.

Step-1: Identifying the signs

The identification of something which is interfering with a pupil's development is an important part of the professional approach of teachers and mentors. In secondary education there is much less continuity of contact between pupil and mentor/teacher compared to primary education. It often takes more time and effort to adequately identify and note the signs. Regular structured discussions between teachers about their pupils is a good way to identify and discuss possible signs.

Information gathered can then be linked to any information already available, for example that provided during the transfer from the previous school and/or information obtained during an intake interview. If the development of the pupil is different than expected and desired, the mentor and teachers can agree to a specific approach. Signs identified, and the proposed approach, may then be shared with the pupil and his/her parent(s). What the underlying cause of signs of possible abuse is is not always immediately clear: signs may indicate child abuse but may also have to do with something else. If the school talks to a pupil and parent(s) about the signs and about their home situation, and if they exchange information about the development of the child, this should contribute to clarification, as well as the denial or confirmation of concerns. Any conversation with a pupil and parent(s) should be followed up with an action plan.

When signs indicate possible child abuse and/or domestic violence, it may be reasonable to assume that the pupil is at risk when discussing concerns with his/her parent(s). This is especially the case where a pupil has approached his/her teacher/mentor directly to talk about a threatening home situation. In such a case, it is not in the pupil's interest to immediately contact the parent(s) and the professional involved should go directly to step-2.

Step-2: Peer consultation

Suspicious of domestic violence or child abuse should be shared with the internal care officer(s). The majority of schools in the group organise a form of internal support consultation, where the signs identified by teachers and mentors can be discussed if they lead to questions of support. This consultation is the start of the internal school-support process.

During this consultation a decision should be reached as to whether those involved should ask for additional advice from the external advice and reporting center “Meldpunt Veilig Thuis” (www.veilig-thuis.nl) about the established concerns. Consideration should also be given to submitting a risk statement to the Referral Index (de “Verwijsindex” (VIR)), this is important because if signs are picked up on which are not clearly identifiable within the school setting or during a conversation with parents they may well be elsewhere. The VIR enables separate indications to be brought together.

During the internal support consultation those involved should also consider whether the support of a broader team is desirable. If the suspected issue is particularly complex it may be that a multidisciplinary view, with the possibility of intervention by external partners, is the best approach. Consideration is also given to what degree the pupil and/or parent(s) should be involved and feedback should be given to the individual who raised the suspicions in the first place. If necessary, Meldpunt Veilig Thuis can also be consulted on a no-names basis; this means no report is made but simply a request for advice.

Step-3: Multidisciplinary consultation

The following step is for the school to discuss the identified signs, the advice received from colleagues and the information gained during any interview with the parent(s) with a multidisciplinary team. The nature and the severity of the signs and the risk of child abuse or domestic violence are considered. The expertise of all partners involved is shared in order that consideration given to the case is as thorough as possible. Subsequently, a coordinated approach is agreed upon and implemented, with the primary aim of ensuring the safety of the child and also supporting the parents and teachers involved.

Step-4: Taking action

Those persons involved in the multidisciplinary consultation organise the necessary help and give advice to the school, the pupil and parent(s) (where possible) on what action should be taken. In addition, the participants in the multidisciplinary consultation must discuss whether to file a report with the Meldpunt Veilig Thuis and, if so, who should take responsibility for this.

If a report is made, the multidisciplinary team also need to agree what action the internal support team, or other members of the multidisciplinary team, can take to protect those involved against the risk of domestic violence or child abuse - within the boundaries of their usual roles or work. It may be appropriate for the responsible school official (be that the director or the care coordinator) - possibly together with a partner from youth care - to discuss the outcome of the multidisciplinary consultation with the pupil and/or the parent(s).

Step-5: Follow-up and aftercare

When the multidisciplinary consultation results in help being provided the team needs to agree who should coordinate the support offered. The school continues to observe the development of the pupil and the multidisciplinary team follows the effect of the help given and makes adjustments to the agreed approach as necessary. Finally, aftercare is offered and the approach taken is evaluated.

Action Plan

Steps in the support route

Step 1: observing, signs & supervision

Teachers and mentors supervise and observe the pupil; signs of interference in a pupil's development are noted.

↓ *Discuss with parents*

Step 2: peer consultation

Professional discusses with colleagues, internal supervisor and/or internal support officer. Have the same signs been identified by others? Confirm concerns. If necessary, seek advice internally or externally (Veilig Thuis)

↓ *Discuss with parents*

Step 3: multidisciplinary consultation

In consultation with professionals within the school and the youth care team assess the nature and severity of the signs and estimate the risks. On the basis of this, an approach is agreed. If necessary, a request for (integral) arrangements is prepared.

↓ *Discuss with parents*

Step 4: take action

Implement agreed actions such as further research or offer support/help to the pupil, parent(s) and teacher(s).

↓ *Discuss with parents*

Steps in the Reporting Code

Step 1: identifying signs

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Step 2: peer consultation and if necessary, seek advice from Veilig Thuis

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Step 3: discuss with the 'client' (pupil)

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Step 4: (multidisciplinary) consideration of signs

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Step 5: decision: offer help and/or report to Veilig Thuis

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Step 5: aftercare and evaluation

Step 6: follow up and conclude



Evaluation of advice offered, and interventions made, offer aftercare to children/parents and flag-up possible bottlenecks for policy advice for schools, care partners, school management and municipalities