Non-reportable investigations: interviewing a child who may be an alleged victim / or witness

When interviewing the alleged victim, and/or witnesses involved in an allegation some best practice points include:

- obtain parent/carer permission to interview any child – the alleged victim and any witnesses
- if recording also obtain parent/carer permission to make an electronic record of the interview
- reassure the child and the witnesses that they are not in trouble and you just want to talk to them
- record date of interview, persons present, start and finish time – see following page for a sample record of interview

At the commencement of the interview, it is important to put the child at ease. Commence by explaining your role and advising that the purpose of the interview is to find out more about their disclosure.

It may help to set the scene of the incident – you may have to provide some very general details of the incident to get the interview going.

Don’t assume anything and ask for clarification at all times. Sometimes this might lead to other information that may be relevant to the overall context of the incident.

Adapt the language to the age and maturity and developmental needs of the young person. Give consideration to language and cultural issues which may require an interpreter to be present.

It is important to establish the context of the incident – what was happening with the rest of the class or others who where there.

Suggested questions may include:

- Can you tell me what was happening just before…?
- Can you tell me about what happened after…?
- Can you tell me more about that?
- What were you doing at the time?
- Who else was there and may have seen it?
- What did the teacher (or person involved in that allegation) say?
- Where did this happen?
- In what room or area did it happen?
- What time of day was it? (you may have to use times like before lunch or after recess depending on the age of the child)
- What day was it?
- Who have you spoken to about this?
- Did you tell your mum or dad or anyone at home?
- Have you spoken to your friends about this at all?
- Can you describe it for me (the conduct alleged in the child’s own words)
- Did it hurt? (how much did it hurt out of ten?)
- Were there any marks? If so - Did you show anyone? Can you tell me what it looked like?
Sample record of interview

Date: ________________________

Present: ______________________________

Interview commenced: ________________________

Interviewer: refer to suggested interview questions for the interview process

Interview concluded: ________________________

Signed by the interviewer: ________________________

Signed by parent/carer or young person: ________________________