



The Reporting Code for domestic violence or child abuse (‘Meldcode’)

The Reporting Code (Meldcode) is intended to provide quick and effective help to young people who are experiencing abuse or violence and ensure that unsafe situations stop immediately. The Reporting Code is used for all forms of violence such as physical or sexual abuse, genital mutilation, and honour-based violence. It is also to be used in cases where the young person is witnessing domestic violence.

All professionals in The Netherlands are legally obliged to adhere to the Reporting Code whenever there are suspicions of domestic violence. All schools are obliged to provide their staff with a protocol setting out the steps to be taken when there are suspicions of domestic violence.

Suspicious:

It is important for all school staff to be aware that the reporting code refers to ‘suspicions’ and does not mean that you delay following the steps or taking action until those suspicions are proved. As professionals, we act and follow the steps if we have suspicions. We do not have to prove those suspicions. Suspicious can include a very wide range of ‘facts’ such as physical or psychological signs or things which children have said but suspicions can also include gut feelings which are to be taken seriously and explored in greater depth.

Recording:

Schools are required to meticulously record signs and suspicions as well as the outcomes of any conversations held with parents and care-givers. The child’s dossier should be complete and up to date at all times.

Signs:

There are thousands of possible signs of physical or sexual abuse of children. There are many signs of children having witnessed violence. Almost all the signs could have a perfectly innocent and logical explanation which is why it is important to talk to parents and share concerns with

them as soon as you notice them. Talking to parents in initial stages when concerns arise can be quite light-hearted conversations where both parties share their concerns for the well-being of the child. If you record all signs and start to notice a pattern or simply too many signs then concerns become greater.

The improved 5 step-plan

Step 1:

Record all signs (including 'gut feelings') as soon as you notice them. Keep records up to date and clear.

Step 2:

Talk with the Learning Support Coordinator about what you are seeing/hearing and feeling. Don't ignore gut feelings just because they seem unobjective but share them and explore together where they are coming from and what could possibly be behind them. Look at these gut feelings more deeply.

Step 3:

Arrange to meet and talk to parents/care-givers about what you have noticed, heard or feel concerned about. If a child has said something or used words which have made you concerned, then talk in an open and relaxed but completely honest way with the parents about what the child said. Use the same words which the child used. Emphasize that you and the parents share a concern for the child's well-being.

Step 4:

Reflect and evaluate on the conversation with parents and the signals you have noted and ask yourself the following questions:

1. On the basis of steps 1 to 3 do I suspect that domestic violence or child abuse is taking place?
2. Do I suspect acute or structural lack of safety?

Step 5:

Consider whether you need to make one of these decisions.

1. Is it necessary to report to 'Veilig Thuis' (The Dutch organisation for Child Protection). It is essential to make a report if there is either acute or structural lack of safety.
2. Is it (also) possible to get professional help in place? Professional help is possible if:

- (a) The professional concerned is able to organize and provide effective and appropriate support.
- (b) The parties involved are prepared to work together with the professional on the basis of the support being offered and organized.
- (c) The help being offered is expected to result in sustainable safety for those involved.

If any one of these points indicates that professional help cannot be given, then reporting to Veilig Thuis (the Dutch Child Protection/Domestic violence agency) is necessary and obligatory.