

AN EASY READ GUIDE

# Truth, recognition and healing

Report on victim-survivors' experiences of child sexual  
abuse in Victorian government schools and certain  
non-government schools before 2000

MAY 2026

**ISBN:** 978-1-7646719-3-4 (PDF)

# Support services



The Forum for Truth and Recognition understands this report may be upsetting to read.

**You are not alone. Support is available.**

If you or someone you know needs support, the following free services are available:



## **1800 RESPECT**

Call 1800 737 732 – 24-hour sexual assault and domestic violence support

## **Sexual Assault Crisis Line Victoria**

Call 1800 806 292 – 24-hour support for people who have experienced sexual assault

## **13 YARN**

Call 13 92 76 – 24-hour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander crisis support

## **Lifeline**

Call 13 11 14 – 24-hour crisis support

## **Beyond Blue**

Call 1300 224 636 – 24-hour mental health support



If it is an emergency, call triple zero (000) straight away.



# What is in this guide?

|                                          |    |
|------------------------------------------|----|
| Support services                         | 1  |
| Introduction                             | 4  |
| What was the Forum?                      | 8  |
| What did we hear?                        | 12 |
| Why did abuse happen?                    | 22 |
| How has child safety in schools changed? | 26 |
| A focus for the future                   | 30 |
| Key messages                             | 32 |

# Introduction

The background is a solid light blue. A large, thick, white curved line sweeps across the middle of the page. Below this line, there are three overlapping circles. The circles are filled with a slightly darker shade of blue and have a thick white outline. One circle is on the left, one is in the center, and one is on the right, partially cut off by the edge of the page.

# About this guide

This guide was prepared by the Forum for Truth and Recognition in Victoria.

**It is written in an easy to read way.**



The guide uses simple words and short sentences.

It uses boxes like this one to help explain important information.



If you are unsure, you can ask someone you know to help you read this guide.

You may want to have a family member or a friend with you for support.



This guide is a summary of the Forum's full report.

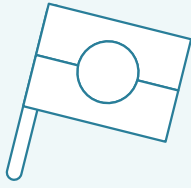
You can find the full report and videos on the Forum's website: [truthandrecognition.vic.gov.au](http://truthandrecognition.vic.gov.au).



The term **victim-survivor** is used in this guide.

A victim-survivor is someone who was sexually abused as a child.

# Acknowledgements



We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners of Victoria.



We acknowledge all victim-survivors. Your strength and bravery helped make this Forum happen.



We thank everyone we spoke to for trusting us with their experiences. We do not take that lightly.



Some people chose not to share their experiences with us. We hope this report still shows how important your experiences are.

# What is in the full report?

The report has 5 parts:



**Part 1** shares the experiences of victim-survivors in their own words.



**Part 2** uses research to explain what puts children at risk of sexual abuse at school.



**Part 3** looks at how child safety in Victorian schools has improved since 2000.



**Part 4** shares ideas on how to make schools safer and better support victim-survivors.



**Part 5** explains how the Forum worked and what we wanted to do.

There is also a summary at the front of the full report.

# What was the Forum?



The Forum for Truth and Recognition gave people who experienced child sexual abuse in schools across Victoria a chance to share their truth.



We gave victim-survivors a safe place to share what happened to them.



Their experiences were recorded to create a record everyone can read that will last forever.

## Who could take part?

The Forum was open to people who experienced child sexual abuse:



In a Victorian government school before 1 January 2000.



In some non-government schools before 1 January 2000, if the abuser had also worked in a government school and abused someone while working there.

# What did the Forum do?



We gave victim-survivors a safe way to share what happened to them.



We created a public record for the community and Victorian Government to learn from.



We wanted to support healing for people who were abused.



Our report helped the Victorian Government learn how to make schools safer for children.

# Why was the Forum set up?



In 2023, the Victorian Government looked into child sexual abuse at Beaumaris Primary School and some other government schools.



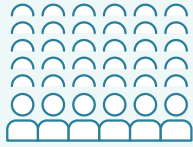
That inquiry said a truth-telling process was needed across all Victorian schools.



That is why the Forum for Truth and Recognition was created.

# What did we hear?

## Who shared with us?



**38** people shared their experiences.



**32** people had private meetings with the Forum.

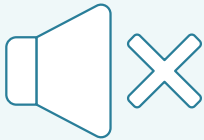


**18** people described what happened to them in writing or artwork.

# Looking back



Many victim-survivors talked about how things were different when they were growing up.



Children were expected to be seen but not heard.



People believed adults more than children.



Child sexual abuse was not talked about openly.



Many children did not understand what was happening to them.

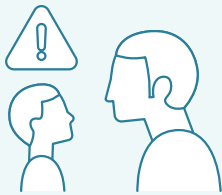
# The abuse



Almost all victim-survivors said they were groomed before the abuse happened.



Grooming is when an abuser tricks a child, their family and others to get close to the child and stop them from speaking up.



Some abusers used gifts and attention to make children feel special. Others used threats and fear to stop children from telling anyone about the abuse.



What abusers did was wrong. Victim-survivors told us things abusers did to hurt and upset them.

Some abusers:



Touched children's bodies in ways they did not like.



Asked children to take their clothes off for photos.



Made children do sexual things.

# Speaking up



Victim-survivors told us it can take many years to tell someone about the abuse.



Many felt too scared or ashamed to tell anyone.



Some did not understand they were being sexually abused.



Others were scared people would not believe them.



Some children who did speak up were not listened to. Some were even punished for telling the truth.

# How the abuse affected people



Victim-survivors told us that the abuse affected different parts of their lives, often for many years.

As children, victim-survivors had:



Feelings of confusion, shame, anger and guilt.



Deep worry and distress, including thoughts of hurting themselves.



Changes in the way they acted at home and at school.



Trouble with friendships and growing up.

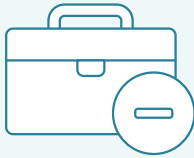
As adults, victim-survivors had:



Mental health problems like anxiety, depression and ongoing trauma.



Trouble trusting others and making friends or having relationships.



Problems with work, study and earning money.



Physical health problems like becoming ill for a long time.



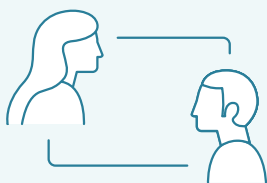
Trouble sleeping.

# Healing and recovery



Child sexual abuse can affect people deeply and for a long time.

Victim-survivors shared what helps them heal. They talked about:



Spending time with partners, family, friends and other victim-survivors.



Ways to care for their mind.



Exercise, being in nature and spending time with animals.



Helping others (especially children) through work, volunteering and speaking up.

# Actions for the government



The Forum asked the Victorian Government to do two things.



The first action is to make the report public and share it in libraries.



The second action is to better protect information victim-survivors told the Forum they wanted to stay private.

# Why did abuse happen?

# What people believed



What people believe affects how schools and staff treat children.



In the 1960s and 1970s, children were taught to always obey adults.



People trusted schools completely. Parents did not question what schools did.



Talking about sex or abuse was not ok. Many children were never taught what abuse looked like.

# How abusers avoided getting caught



Many abusers seemed friendly and popular.



Some abusers were people in charge. They were teachers and other adults at school. Children and families trusted them.



This made it hard for children, parents and staff to speak up or question them.



Abusers carefully planned how they groomed children, families and those around them.

# School culture and leadership



Some schools did not listen when people raised concerns.

In some schools one person often made all the decisions. This made it easier for abuse to happen.

Schools put children at greater risk when they:



Did not believe children who spoke up.



Made it hard for people to raise concerns.



Did not follow their own child safety rules.



Cared more about what people thought of them than children's safety.

# How has child safety in schools changed?



A lot has changed since 2000 to help prevent child sexual abuse in Victorian schools.

## In the community



People understand more about child sexual abuse today.



Children's rights are better understood.  
Children are listened to more.



Victim-survivors have helped change people's thinking by sharing what happened to them.

## In schools



All Victorian schools have rules to keep children safe.



Schools teach children what is safe and what is not safe.



Schools check that the people who work with children are safe.



School staff are trained to spot abuse and tell someone about it.

## In the law



Victoria Police has special teams to help children who have been abused.



New laws show that child sexual abuse is very serious.



Adults who work with children must pass a safety check.



There are rules about how schools must deal with complaints about staff.

# A focus for the future



Many victim-survivors shared what happened to them to help make schools safer for children.

Victim-survivors said they want:



More people to understand child sexual abuse.



Help for parents to talk with their children about staying safe.



Better protection for children at school.



School staff to feel safe speaking up about someone they work with.



Better support for victim-survivors.

# Key messages





Child sexual abuse hurts children deeply.  
We must do everything we can to stop it.



We did this work with care and hope.



Talking about what happened, and what  
is changing, helps people trust schools.



Real change takes time. We must keep going.



Everyone can help keep children safe at school.



Together, we can make a difference.





**truthandrecognition.vic.gov.au**

**ISBN** 978-1-7646719-3-4 (PDF)

