Helping the abused student in the classroom

The classroom can be the main environment which offers security and stability for a student who has been abused or whose family is undergoing an investigation due to a report of abuse occurring.

Teachers through their normal daily contact with students have an opportunity to make a significant contribution to the adjustment of students who are victims of child abuse and neglect. The following are some guidelines which can assist teachers in the classroom to meeting the special needs of abused students:

1. Maintain the student’s normal status within the class. Do not treat them differently from the rest of the class or do things that will set them apart from their peers.

2. Maintain consistency and practicability in the classroom routine, your teaching style and in your expectations of their behaviour and performance.

3. Abused students and those undergoing significant family upheaval will benefit from structure built into activities, lessons and set work. These students may need direction from you about what to do until they can again mobilise their own resources.

4. Respect and maintain the student’s privacy. A major fear of abused students is that their abuse will become common knowledge within the school.

5. Clearly define what is acceptable behaviour. Disruptive or anti social (which may include sexual promiscuity if the student has been sexually assaulted) behaviour should be consistently discouraged and appropriate behaviour encouraged.

6. Develop a sense of belonging in the classroom where students can feel included and accepted. Seat the abused student with friends or other caring and supportive students and foster the development of peer relationships.

7. Look for opportunities to incorporate specific self esteem activities and positive learning strategies within your daily program. Activities which include concepts of co operative learning, peer support and cross age tutoring can be useful. Self esteem resource references may provide further suggestions.

8. Give students information or feedback about themselves to assist their positive development of their identity. For example, ‘You are someone who makes friends easily’. ‘You really try hard to solve difficult problems’. ‘You are always on time’.

9. Respect students’ personal space. Show you care by refraining from touching. (It may be misinterpreted by the student). Instead, use other forms of encouragement such as smiles or nods.

10. Model an appropriate child/adult relationship by establishing sound adult/child behavioural boundaries and adhering to them consistently.