

MARCH 2023

Reporting code for domestic violence, child abuse and honour-related violence among students

Under Section 1.21 of the Higher Education and Research Act, higher education institutions are required to establish a reporting code for domestic violence and child abuse. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam has chosen to expand these regulations to include honour-related violence, because situations involving this theme have occurred several times among our diverse student population. This Reporting Code will help staff who are in direct contact with students to respond to suspected cases of domestic violence, child abuse or honour-related violence in a responsible manner.

Introduction

Staff who suspect that a student may be the victim of domestic violence, child abuse or honour-related violence can raise this with the designated safeguarding officer within Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The designated safeguarding officers work for the university as confidential counsellors for students. The same applies if there are signs that other members of the student's family may be the victim of some form of domestic violence, child abuse or honour-related violence. Staff members are not obliged to submit a report, but must discuss whether it would be appropriate to do so based on an assessment framework.

Often, professionals responsible for providing advice or support are not allowed to disclose information that they become aware of. This is part of their duty of confidentiality as professionals. They can only disclose information about students to a third party if the student concerned has consented to this. The purpose of the duty of confidentiality is to help students to talk openly. Nevertheless, it may sometimes be in the interest of the student for confidential information to be exchanged with colleagues or other parties. The Social Support Act establishes the right to report cases of domestic violence and child abuse (including honour-related violence). This means that professionals with a duty of confidentiality are entitled to report (suspicions of) domestic violence, child abuse or honour-related violence, even without the consent of those concerned.

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam has established this reporting code for staff members who see and speak to students on a regular basis. This includes lecturers, tutors, student counsellors, student psychological counsellors and academic advisors. The code indicates what these professionals can do and what they are required to do if, in their dealings with students, they see signs of domestic violence, child abuse or honour-related violence.

Support Centre for Amsterdam and surrounding area

Reports submitted in relation to this code must be sent to the [Veilig Thuis Amsterdam-Amstelland](#) support centre, which we will henceforth refer to as 'the Support Centre'. The social safety coordinators can submit these reports. The Support Centre is also available for consultation and advice on specific cases.

POSTAL ADDRESS
De Boelelaan 1105
1081 HV Amsterdam

Definitions

1. Domestic violence is violence committed by another member of the victim's household. It includes physical, psychological and sexual assault, harassment and threats, possibly by means of or accompanied by damage to items in and around the home.
2. Child abuse is defined as: any form of threatening or violent interaction involving a minor whether physical, psychological or sexual in nature, to which the minor is subjected actively or passively by parents or other persons, and which causes or presents a risk of serious harm to that minor in the form of physical injury or psychological damage.
3. Honour-related violence is the umbrella term for any form of coercion, psychological and physical violence committed for honour-related motives. This means violence that is used to prevent a member of the family from engaging in behaviour that undermines the family's honour in the community. It also includes violence directed against the (alleged) violator in order to restore the family's violated honour. Honour-related violence often also falls within the definitions of domestic violence or child abuse. However, it has a number of special characteristics that necessitate a specific approach.

Steps to take in the event of signs of domestic violence, child abuse or honour-related violence

In the case of immediate danger

1. If there are signs that indicate serious domestic violence, child abuse or honour-related violence, or the risk thereof, and the student requires immediate protection, contact the Support Centre and discuss what steps should be taken.
2. If the student is on the VU campus and seems to be in immediate danger, the university security staff must be informed. The security staff will investigate and assess the situation and take the necessary steps within their capabilities.
3. If it later becomes apparent that an unsafe situation has taken place at the university itself, please inform security staff of this.

In cases of suspected danger

1. If you see signs that may indicate that domestic violence, child abuse or honour-related violence has taken place, please contact one of the designated safeguarding officers. The designated safeguarding officer will provide you with guidance and support regarding the subsequent steps.
2. Unless you and the designated safeguarding officer conclude that there are insufficient grounds for taking further action, you should take the following steps:
 - a. talk to the student yourself (see the instructions below); or
 - b. ask the academic advisor to contact the student to try and talk to him or her
 - c. in both cases the aim is to find out whether the suspicions are correct.

3. If you or the academic advisor have spoken to the student and you and the designated safeguarding officer conclude that the suspicions are unfounded, no further action is to be taken. In all other cases, take the following step:

Raise the suspected case of domestic violence, child abuse or honour-related violence with a social safety coordinator; if necessary, do this together with the designated safeguarding officer.

- a. The social safety coordinators decide:
 - whether a report must be sent to the [Veilig Thuis Amsterdam-Amstelland](#) support centre; and/or
 - what other action should be taken; and
 - who will do this.
- b. The social safety coordinator records which steps are taken and the actions to be followed up in the SMILE registration system.

Conversation with the student

The conversation with the student must include the following:

1. explain to student concerned the purpose of the conversation;
2. describe the facts you have established and the observations you have made;
3. invite the student to respond to these;
4. only after the student has had the chance to respond and if necessary, explain your interpretation of what you have seen, heard and observed;
5. tell the student that you are considering making a report and what the aim of this is;
6. if the student has reservations about this, discuss how you can accommodate these reservations.

The University Student Council approved this reporting code on May 31, 2023.

Having taken the relevant advice into account, the Executive Board adopted the code on June 20, 2023 with due observance of the advice, the code has been adopted with retroactive effect with effect from March 1, 2023.