



Child safety and wellbeing policy

Our School and Kindergarten is committed to child safety and wellbeing. We want children to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers. We are committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all children.

We have zero tolerance of child abuse, either verbal or physical, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our policies and procedures. We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously. Our school and kindergarten are committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early and removing and reducing these risks. Our school and kindergarten have robust human resources and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers. Our school and kindergartens are committed to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks. We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers. We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse background, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability. We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our management team, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.

If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse phone 000.

Definitions (explicit descriptions of abuse)

Child: Young person who is under the age of 18 years

Child Abuse:

a) any act committed against a child involving:

1. a sexual offence
2. grooming offences under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958

b) the infliction, on a child, of:

1. physical violence
2. serious emotional or psychological harm

c) the serious neglect of a child including exposure to family violence and its effects

d) Emotional child abuse occurs when a child is repeatedly rejected, isolated, or frightened by threats. It also includes hostility, derogatory name-calling and put-downs, and persistent coldness from a person

to the extent that the child suffers, or is likely to suffer, emotional or psychological harm to their physical or developmental health.

e) Physical child abuse is any non-accidental infliction of physical violence on a child by any person. It can be inflicted in many ways, including beating, shaking or burning and assault with implements and female genital mutilation.

f) Child sexual abuse is when a person uses power or authority over a child to involve them in sexual activity. It can include a wide range of sexual activity. Sexual offences are governed by the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic.)

The Child Information sharing Scheme and the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (the Information Sharing Schemes) provide authorised organisations, including Victorian schools, with an expanded ability to share confidential information with other authorised services to promote the wellbeing or safety of children or to assess or manage family violence risk.

Child safety includes matters related to protecting all children from child abuse, managing the risk of child abuse, providing support to a child at risk of child abuse, and responding to suspicions, incidents, disclosures or allegations of child abuse.

Child sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse where offenders use their power, (physical, financial or emotional) over a child or young person, or a false identity, to sexually or emotionally abuse them. It often involves situations and relationships where young people receive something (for example: food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts or money) in return for participating in sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur in person or online, and sometimes the child or young person may not even realise they are a victim.

Duty of Care refers to the obligation of all staff working with students to take reasonable steps to protect them from reasonably foreseeable harm.

The Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic) defines family violence as:

a) behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour:

1. is physically or sexually abusive; or
2. is emotionally or psychologically abusive; or
3. is economically abusive; or
4. is threatening; or
5. is coercive; or
6. in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person; or

b) behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, behaviour referred to above.

Governance arrangements refers to the specific systems, processes, roles, responsibilities, and organisational arrangements that each school puts in place to operationalise school policy.

Governing body is defined in the Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 to mean: in a non-government school, the person or body responsible for the governance, conduct or management of the school

Grooming is when a person engages in predatory conduct to prepare a child or young person for sexual activity at a later time. Grooming can include communicating or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent or carer.

Information sharing refers to the collection, use and disclosure of personal information either within an organisation or between organisations. Information sharing can occur in many ways including:

- one organisation disclosing information (the disclosing organisation) to another (the receiving organisation)
- multiple organisations combining information in a database and making it available to each other
- the reciprocal exchange of information between organisations.

Mandatory reporting is the legal requirement for certain professional groups to report a reasonable belief of child physical or sexual abuse to child protection authorities. In Victoria, under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, mandatory reporters must make a report to child protection, if:

- in the course of practising their profession or carrying out duties of their office, position or employment
- they form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse.

Mandatory reporters are certain classes of professionals who are legally required to report a reasonable belief of child physical or sexual abuse to child protection authorities. In Victorian schools, this includes registered teachers, school principals, early childhood workers, nurses, registered psychologists, school counsellors and all people in religious ministry.

Neglect includes a failure to provide a child with an adequate standard of nutrition, medical care, clothing, shelter or supervision. The law differentiates between three different levels of neglect:

- 'Minor' neglect is low-level neglect that is trivial or temporary.
- 'Significant' neglect is medium-level neglect that causes harm to a child that is more than trivial or temporary.
- 'Serious' neglect is the highest level of neglect. It involves the continued failure to provide a child with the basic necessities of life and can also occur if an adult fails to adequately ensure the safety of a child exposed to extremely dangerous or life-threatening situations.

Reportable Conduct is defined as:

- a sexual offence, sexual misconduct or physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of a child
- behaviour causing significant emotional or psychological harm to a child
- significant neglect of a child, or misconduct involving any of the above.

The Reportable Conduct Scheme is a child safety mechanism introduced as a result of the [Betrayal of Trust](#) report. The Reportable Conduct Scheme complements the Child Safe Standards and other existing child safety measures.

School environment means any of the following physical, online or virtual places, used during or outside school hours:

a) A campus of the school

b) Online or virtual school environments made available or authorised by the school governing authority for use by a child or student (including email, intranet systems, software applications, collaboration tools, and online services)

c) Other locations provided by the school or through a third-party provider for a child or student to use including, but not limited to, locations used for:

1. camps
2. approved homestay accommodation;
3. delivery of education and training such as registered training organisations, TAFEs, non-school senior secondary providers or another school; or (iv) sporting events, excursions, competitions or other events.

school staff means:

a) in a government school, an individual working in a school environment who is:

1. employed under Part 2.4 of the ETR Act in the Government teaching service
2. employed under Part 2.3 of the ETR Act
3. a contracted service provider (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary) engaged by the school governing authority to perform child-related work

b) in a non-Government school, an individual working in a school environment who is:

1. directly engaged or employed by a school governing authority
2. a contracted service provider (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary) engaged by the school governing authority to perform child-related work
3. a minister of religion, a religious leader or an employee or officer of a religious body associated with the school.

Student means a person who is enrolled at or attends the school or a student at the school boarding premises.

Volunteer means a person who performs work without remuneration or reward for the school or school boarding premises in the school environment or school boarding premises environment.

Vulnerable students may include but are not limited to those who:

a) are deemed vulnerable by a government agency, funded family service or family violence service, or assessed as requiring education and care outside the family home

b) are identified as vulnerable as a result of a referral from a government agency, funded family service or family violence service, homeless or youth justice service; or mental health or other health service

c) self-identify or are identified by school staff or school boarding premises staff as a member of a vulnerable cohort.

Worker screening refers to the process of ensuring that only suitable people work with children. It involves gathering a range of information, including but not limited to a Working with Children clearance and qualifications relevant to the role being performed by staff and volunteers.

Our children

This policy is intended to empower children who are vital and active participants in our school and kindergarten. They have a unique voice and have opportunities to contribute to discussions about how they interact with adults within our school and kindergarten. We involve them when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. We ask them what makes them feel safe and unsafe and tell them about what we are doing to keep them safe. This is in an age-appropriate manner and the experience is a positive one. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say.

We promote diversity and tolerance in our school and kindergarten. People from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome. In particular we:

- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children.
- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate equally.

Our staff and volunteers

This policy guides our staff and volunteers on how to behave with children in our school and kindergarten. All of our staff and volunteers must agree to abide by our code of conduct which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. All staff and volunteers, as well as children and their families, are given the opportunity to contribute to the development of our code of conduct. We continually give our staff and volunteers the option to give feedback to the school in regard to child safety.

Training and supervision

Training and education are important to ensure that everyone in our school and kindergarten understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility. Our community culture aims for all staff and volunteers (in addition to parents, carers and children) to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. We train our staff and volunteers to identify, assess and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

We also support our staff and volunteers through ongoing supervision to develop their skills to protect children from abuse; and promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds, and the safety of children with a disability.

New employees and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand our school and kindergarten's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse, as well as checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate (please refer to this school and kindergarten's code of conduct to understand appropriate behaviour further and our guidelines on appropriate physical contact with children). Children will be empowered to discuss areas of adult behaviour that do not make them safe. They will be aware of how to communicate feelings of discomfort to a responsible adult. Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Education, Child Protection and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

Recruitment

We take all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children. We develop selection criteria and advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities. Our school and kindergarten understand that

when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations. These are outlined in the employment policy. We actively encourage applications from Aboriginal peoples, people from culturally and /or linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability.

All people engaged in child-related work, including volunteers, are required to sign our code of conduct and adhere to its requirements. This includes holding a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this check to the Business Manager prior to beginning work at the school or kindergarten. All new staff, CRT's and volunteers will be inducted as per the induction policy. We carry out thorough reference checks to ensure that we are recruiting the right people. If during the recruitment process a person's records indicate a criminal history then the person will be given the opportunity to provide further information and context. New staff will be required to sign the statutory declaration in regard to Child Safe Work and will need to sign the code of conduct and follow the requirements mentioned within it.

New staff will be monitored through our College Mentor program. All staff will be observed and reviewed annually. During every review, staff members will be given the opportunity to share their experience and their thoughts on child safety within the school and kindergarten. This feedback will be considered in the annual review of the child safety policies. Class and Kindergarten assistants will be reviewed annually by their class teacher and the report of these reviews will be communicated to the management team during the teacher's annual review. The management team will report to the Committee of Management throughout the year regarding child safety and occupational, health and safety issues throughout the year. Administration and grounds staff will be annually reviewed by the College of Teachers and feedback will be sought through the parent survey. The members of the management team will be annually reviewed by the College of Teachers, staff, parents through the annual parent survey and the Committee of Management. All reviews will have an element of the staff member's suitability for child-connected work. Reviews will be communicated through to the Committee of Management.

Fair procedures for personnel

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and just to personnel. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent and based on evidence.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form, including investigation updates. All records are securely stored under a double lock system. If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we will ensure the safety of the child/ren while the allegation is being investigated. This may include excluding the adult the child deems unsafe while the allegation is being investigated. We will provide continual updates to children and families on the investigation progress and any actions we as a school and kindergarten undertake.

Privacy

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be staff, volunteers, parents or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. We have safeguards and practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected. Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will have access to it. We undertake to share information regarding investigations about allegations only on a need-to-know basis. Records will be double locked in the front office and only the management team will have access to them. Once the investigation is finalised, only relevant records will be kept and will be locked in the staff records. Svantje Mertens, as the child safety officer, or Eric Hopf, as the Head of School, will make regular reports to the Committee of Management in regard to any investigations being undertaken.

Legislative responsibilities

Our school and kindergarten take our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

Failure to disclose: Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to the police.

Failure to protect: People of authority in our school and kindergarten will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.

Grooming: The offence targets predatory conduct designed to facilitate later sexual activity with a child and applies to offenders who are 18 years of age or over.

Any personnel who are **mandatory reporters** must comply with their duties.

Regular review

1. This policy will be reviewed annually, and following significant events, by the College of Teachers and a report given to the Committee of Management. Part of the annual review undertaken by the College will be to undertake the checklist on child safety which the College will then report the results and subsequent actions required to the Committee. We will ensure that families and children can contribute through the annual parent review survey. The teachers through their class meetings will ask for feedback from parents regarding child safety. All class meetings must include as a minimum the following things:
 - i. How child safety is supported in the classroom and the school.
 - ii. How each class teacher is empowering children in relation to child safety issues.
 - iii. Ensure parents know who they can speak to regarding child safety issues and that they are comfortable to do so (class teacher or a college member).
 - iv. Ensure parents know who their child can speak to regarding child safety issues.
 - v. Support parents to empower children to talk about child safety and ensure parents are communicating to their children who the child can speak to regarding child safety.
 - vi. Feedback from parents as to how they are feeling regarding child safety at the school.
 - vii. Feedback from parents as to how their children are feeling regarding child safety.

Allegations, concerns and complaints:

Our school and kindergarten take all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate all concerns thoroughly and quickly. Through staff meetings, training sessions, staff handbook and annual reviews, our staff and volunteers are trained to deal appropriately with allegations. The school and kindergarten will ensure all children, families, staff and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour. Please see the reporting an allegation of child abuse policy and the child protection reporting obligations policy. We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place (see information about failure to disclose above).

If an adult has a **reasonable belief** that an incident has occurred then they must report the incident.

Factors contributing to reasonable belief may be:

- A child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves).
- Behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed.
- Someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it.

- Observing suspicious behaviour.

Please see the child protection reporting obligations policy and the reporting an allegation of child abuse policy

Risk management

Ballarat Steiner School and Kindergarten will protect children when a risk is identified. In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to children. We have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess and take steps to minimise child abuse risks, including those outlined in the code of conduct.

The College of Teachers commits to considering the following situations in regard to risk assessment and management.

1. Identify the school's child safety risks across the range of school environments (including excursions, camps, online).
2. Identify any existing risk mitigation measures or existing controls.
3. Assess and rate the school's child safety risks given the existing controls in place, considering the likelihood of risk, and the likely consequence of the risk.
4. If the risk rating is more than the 'acceptable level', identify further risk management strategies through additional treatments or other prevention, detection or mitigation strategies and then re-assess the risk (once in place these treatments will then become controls).

The risk management process should be documented, recorded and reviewed periodically. Effective risk management strategies are dynamic and change over time as new risks arise and others may no longer be relevant.

Effective risk management strategies need to be transparent, well understood and diverse, to take account the increased level of risk associated with the specific nature of some activities and the vulnerability of particular groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children, culturally and linguistically diverse children and children with a disability. Risks need to be identified, assessed and mitigated.

We will analyse the identified risks post the annual review of checklists in regard to child safety. Inviting children, parents, staff and volunteers to participate in the review helps to identify areas of risk of harm or injury and encourages everyone involved to take a proactive approach to reducing risk. Any actions required will be discussed with the committee and undertaken within the earliest possible time frame.

All staff and committee members will be expected to attend any training the school and kindergarten undertake to give appropriate guidance and training about:

- Individual and collection obligations and responsibilities for managing the risk of child abuse.
- Child abuse risks in the school environment.
- The school and kindergartens current child safety standards.

Please see the risk matrix for further information.

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Written By: College of Teachers

Review Date:

Ratified by the Committee