



CHILD SAFETY POLICY

Child Safe Standard 2

RATIONALE

To help protect children from all forms of abuse Victoria has introduced compulsory minimum standards that apply to organisations that provide services for children. The child safe standards form part of the Victorian Government's response to the *Betrayal of Trust Inquiry*.

All Victorian schools are required to have a child safety policy or statement of commitment to child safety, which details:

The principles that guide the school in developing policies and procedures to create and maintain a child safe school environment and the actions the school proposes to take to:

- demonstrate its commitment to child safety and monitor the school's adherence to its child safe policy
- support, encourage and enable school staff, parents, and children to understand, identify, discuss and report child safety matters
- support or assist children who disclose child abuse, or are otherwise linked to suspected child abuse.

AIM

Child First is intended to promote child safety in the school environment (inclusive of physical and online environments) and to create and maintain a child safe organization; an entity to which the standards apply must have

- Strategies that embed a culture of child safety into the organization, including effective leadership arrangements
- A child safe policy or statement of commitment to child safety
- A code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children
- Screening, supervision, training and other human resource practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel
- Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse
- Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse
- Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children.

This policy guides our staff and volunteers on how to behave with children in our school.

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.

Our School

Ascot Vale Special School (AVSS) is committed to child safety. We want children to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers.

We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently. We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our leadership team, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.

We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously.

The school is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks.

We are committed to providing a safe environment for children with a disability, the cultural safety of Aboriginal children and cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds.

We have robust human resources and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers.

The school is committed to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks.

Our students

To promote child safety in the school environment we acknowledge the following:

All students have a right to:

- Take part in learning programs that meet their individual needs.
- Feel secure and to be safe in a caring and supportive environment.
- Work and play without interference in an atmosphere of harmony and cooperation.
- Receive respect, kindness and courtesy and to be treated with fairness.
- Have their learning continue without disruption in a supportive environment.
- Be valued for their individuality including race, gender, and cultural, physical or intellectual diversity.
- Expect the school rules to be fair, consistently implemented and respect the rights of all involved.
- 'Have a say' and participate in all relevant organisational activities where possible, especially on issues that are important to them.

All students have a responsibility to:

- Care and value themselves, others, teachers and the school community.
- Be safety conscious in relation to themselves and others.
- Treat others with respect and good manners in accordance with the School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) expectations.
- Adhere to the SWPBS guidelines for appropriate behavior, modelling and supporting school rules.
- Develop a sense of ownership, self-reflection and accountability for their own actions.
- Work to achieve their personal best whilst allowing others to do the same.
- Allow others to learn and to respect the rights of others.
- Explore their full potential in their learning.

School staff adheres to the following standards about the ways in which school staff are expected to behave with children:

- School staff provide opportunities for all students to learn
- School staff treat their students with respect and dignity in accordance with the schools SWPBS culture
- School staff work within the limits of their professional expertise
- School staff maintain objectivity in their relationships with students
- School staff are always in a professional relationship with the students in their school whether at school or not
- Children will be respected and in no way degraded, endangered, exploited, intimidated or harmed psychologically or physically.

IMPLEMENTATION

At Ascot Vale Special School

Every child at AVSS needs to be safe, and as a school, we have put in place a policy, procedures and systems to safeguard students.

It is the responsibility of the Principal to carefully monitor the supervision of children throughout the day and ensure that the following strategies are implemented:

For parents and carers

- Please sign your child into school at reception and an ES staff member will be called to collect your child from the reception area and take your child to their classroom.
- No parent, carer or any visitor are to enter classrooms with students present or a vacated class without approval from the school's leadership team.

For staff and volunteers

- Individuals or groups of children are not permitted to be withdrawn into areas where they are not visible by other staff members or taken into rooms that can be locked. Any room that has a lock needs to remain open when students are in it.
- Staff and volunteers are to be directed to ensure that students at all times remain readily accessible and within the visibility of other staff.
- Any major changes in behavior that are observed in children should be documented and reported to the Child Safety Officer (Christine Monahan)
- **Notify the Principal or Child Safety Officer (Christine Monahan) should you have any concerns regarding a child or adult's behaviour.**

CODE OF BEHAVIOUR FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS INVOLVED WITH CHILDREN

- AVSS staff and volunteers should be sensitive to the risks involved in taking part in some contact sports with young people. They should exercise caution in areas such as swimming pools, showers or changing areas
- Develop any 'special' relationships with children that could be seen as favouritism (for example, the offering of gifts or special treatment for specific children)
- Exhibit behaviours with children which may be construed as unnecessarily physical contact (for example inappropriate sitting on laps).
- Do things of a personal nature that a child can do for themselves, such as toileting or changing clothes. Some students will require assistance with toileting.
- Engage in open discussions of a mature or adult nature in the presence of children (for example, personal social activities, inappropriate jokes)
- AVSS staff and volunteers should not have a physical relationship with a young person
- Express personal views on cultures, race or sexuality in the presence of children
- Discriminate against any child, including because of culture, race, ethnicity or disability
- If AVSS staff provide transport for young people in the course of their involvement with children, there should if possible, be two or more young people or another adult in the car.
- Any transport should only be provided with the full knowledge and consent of the students' parents or carers.
- Have contact with a child or their family outside of our organisation without our child safety officer's knowledge and/or consent (for example, no babysitting). Accidental contact, such as seeing people in the street, is appropriate.
- Have any online contact with a child or their family (unless necessary, for example providing families with information via Seesaw, email or Compass)
- AVSS staff and volunteers must never physically punish or be verbally abusive to a young person.
- Ignore or disregard any suspected or disclosed child abuse.
- By observing these standards staff acknowledge their responsibility to immediately report any breach of this code to **Ascot Vale Special School's Child Safety Officer (Christine Monahan) or a leadership representative.**

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. The school understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

All people engaged in child-related work, including volunteers, are required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this Check. Please see the [Working with Children Check](http://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au) website (www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au) for further information

We carry out reference checks to ensure that we are addressing the person's suitability for the job and working with children. VIT registration is compulsory and we require proof of personal identity and any professional or other qualifications.

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.

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. All records are securely stored.

If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to children and families on progress and any actions we as an organisation take.

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.

RISK MANAGEMENT

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified (see information about failure to protect above). In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our children. We have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks, which include risks posed by physical environments.

Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse

Risk management strategies have been developed within the following school policies:

1. Child Safe Code of Conduct Policy
2. Student Engagement and Wellbeing Policy
3. Professional Code of Conduct Policy
4. Duty of Care Policy
5. Mandatory Reporting Policy
6. Child Safety Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures

Allegations, concerns and complaints

The school takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our staff and volunteers are trained to deal appropriately with allegations.

We work to 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.

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

DEFINING AND IDENTIFYING CHILD ABUSE

A child is defined as an unmarried person under the age of 18 years.

1.1 Neglect

Neglect can be defined in terms of an omission, where the child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, medical care or attachment to and affection from adults.

The threshold of significant harm is reached when the child's needs are neglected to the extent that their well-being and/or development are severely affected.

1.2 Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is normally found in the relationship between a care-giver (an adult person who has responsibility for a child in the short or long term) and a child rather than in a specific event or pattern of events. It occurs when a child's needs for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met. It is rarely manifested in terms of physical symptoms. Children show signs of emotional abuse by their behaviour (for example excessive clinginess to or avoidance of the parent or carer), their emotional state (low self-esteem, unhappiness) or their development. The threshold of significant harm is reached when abusive interactions dominate and become typical of the relationship between the child and parent or carer.

1.3 Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is any form of non-accidental injury or any injury that results from wilful or neglectful failure to protect a child. Examples of physical injury include-

- shaking
- use of excessive force in handling
- deliberate poisoning
- Suffocation
- Munchausen's Syndrome by proxy (where parents make up stories of illness about their child or cause physical signs of illness)
- allowing or creating a substantial risk of significant harm to a child

1.4 Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for their gratification or sexual arousal, or for that of others. Examples of sexual abuse include-

- exposing sexual organs or intentionally performing any sexual act in the presence of a child
- Intentional touching or molesting the body of a child, by a person or object, for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification
- masturbating in the presence of a child or involving the child in the act of masturbation
- engaging in sexual intercourse with the child, whether oral, vaginal or anal
- sexually exploiting a child
- consensual sexual activity between an adult and a child under 17 years

In relation to child sexual abuse, it should be noted that, for the purposes of criminal law, the age of consent to sexual intercourse is 17 years.

1.5 Aggressive Behaviour

While bullying is not a category in itself, it is important to be aware of it in relation to child abuse. Bullying can be defined as repeated verbal, psychological or physical aggression that is conducted by an individual or group against others. Bullying behaviour may take place in any setting - in schools, in the home or in a Children First setting.

As first response it is the responsibility of the staff member to deal with bullying that may take place within the organisation. The more extreme forms of bullying behaviour would be regarded as physical or emotional abuse, and are reportable to the statutory authorities.

Incidents should not be tolerated under any circumstances and should be dealt with immediately. For more information on bullying, 'Bully Stoppers' is a Department of Education and Training (DET) complete program that can be taught with students.

Legislative responsibilities (Refer to Child Protection Policy)

Ascot Vale Special School (AVSS) takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including reporting procedures:

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

Forming a belief on reasonable grounds

A person may form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection after becoming aware that a child or young person's health, safety or wellbeing is at risk.

Reporting a belief

Mandated staff members (Teachers and Principals) must make a report to Child Protection as soon as practicable after forming a belief on reasonable grounds that a child or young person is in need of protection.

FAILURE TO DISCLOSE OFFENCE

In addition to mandatory reporting and duty of care obligations, **any adult** who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under 17 must report that information to police. Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence except in limited circumstances, such as where the information has already been reported to Child Protection or the child is over 17 when the belief is formed.

Failure to protect

Any staff member in a position of authority, who becomes aware that an adult associated with their organisation (such as an employee, contractor, volunteer or visitor) poses a risk of sexual abuse to a child under the care, authority or supervision of the organisation, must take all reasonable steps to remove or reduce that risk. This may include, for example, removing the adult from child-related work pending investigation. If a staff member in a position of authority

fails to take reasonable steps in these circumstances, this may amount to a criminal offence. The offence applies only to adults in a position of authority within an organisation, including Principals, senior school staff, regional directors and other senior managers.

<https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/failure-to-disclose-offence>

REGULAR REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed every two years and following significant incidents if they occur. We will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute. Where possible we do our best to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

This policy was last ratified by AVSS School Council on: - 19/03/2019

REFERENCES

Department of Education and Training – Child Protection Reporting Obligations

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/childprotection/Pages/safeenviro.aspx>