

## CHILD SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

### Rationale

Protecting the safety and wellbeing of children in our school setting is our highest priority. In response to the Betrayal of Trust Parliamentary Enquiry, the Victorian Government has introduced Child Safe Standards across all organisations in the community where children spend time. The new standards support the work that Principals and Teachers do to protect all students from abuse and neglect. (Source: [DET Child Safety](#) and Department of Education and Training Secretary Gill Callister).

### Aims

This Policy

- sets out Whittlesea Secondary College's (WSC) approach to creating a child safe organisation where children and young people are safe and feel safe,
- provides the policy framework for our approach to the Department of Education and Training (DET) Child Safe Standards [DET Child Safe Standards](#) to build a stronger and more consistent approach to preventing and responding to child abuse, and
- embeds the Child Safe culture and practices, including the WSC Statement of Commitment to Child Safety (refer to Appendix A) and the WSC Child Safety Code of Conduct (Appendix B), into our school.

### Implementation

#### Scope

- This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, contractors and whether or not they work in direct contact with children or young people.
- The policy applies across a range of school forums (e.g. camps, online) and outside of school hours.
- Partner organisations (including parent volunteers) will be made aware of the policy and the school's underlying philosophy towards the care of children.

### Definitions

Ministerial Order 870 provides definitions, including:

#### Child abuse

Child abuse includes:

- any act committed against a child involving:
  - a sexual offence or
  - an offence under section 49B(2) of the Crimes Act 1958 (grooming)
  - physical violence or
  - serious emotional or psychological harm
  - serious neglect of a child.
- the infliction, on a child, of:
  - physical violence or
  - serious emotional or psychological harm
  - serious neglect of a child.

#### Child-connected work

Child-connected work means work authorised by the school governing authority and performed by an adult in a school environment while children are present or reasonably expected to be present.

## Child safety

Child safety encompasses 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 incidents or allegations of child abuse.

## School environment

School environment means any physical or virtual place made available or authorised by the school governing authority for use by a child during or outside school hours, including:

- a campus of the school
- online school environments (including email and intranet systems)
- other locations provided by the school for a child's use (including, without limitation, locations used for school camps, sporting events, excursions, competitions, and other events).

## School staff

School staff being any individual working in a school environment who is:

- directly engaged or employed by a school governing authority;
- a volunteer or a contracted service provider (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary); or
- a minister of religion.

## ***A Child-safe Culture***

- This policy is intended to empower children who are vital and active participants at Whittlesea Secondary College (WSC).
  - We involve them when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say.
- The school's culture encourages staff to raise, discuss and scrutinise concerns making it more difficult for abuse to occur and remain hidden.
- This policy includes the Whittlesea Secondary College Statement of Commitment to Child Safety (Appendix A) and the Whittlesea Secondary College Child Safety Code of Conduct (Appendix B).
  - It guides our staff and volunteers on how to behave with children in our organisation.
  - All of our staff and volunteers will be made aware of our code of conduct, which specifies the standards of behaviour required when working with children.
- We promote diversity and tolerance in our organisation, and 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.

## ***Personnel Understand their Roles and Responsibilities***

- The school's Child Safety Code of Conduct sets out clear awareness of the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.
- School leaders and managers will ensure that each person understands their role, responsibilities and the behaviour expected in protecting children and young people from abuse and neglect. Staff will comply with the school's Code of Conduct.
- For more information, consult the school's Child Safety Code of Conduct (Appendix B)

## ***Human Resources Practices and Training***

- 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 organisation understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.
- 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 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](http://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au) and the Whittlesea Secondary College Working with Children Check Policy for further information.
- We carry out reference checks and police record checks to ensure that we are recruiting the right people. Police record checks are used only for the purposes of recruitment and are discarded after the recruitment process is complete. We do retain our own records (but not the actual criminal record) if an applicant's criminal history affected our decision making process.
- 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.
- We will ensure that staff induction, education and training programs are a vital part of our commitment to safeguarding children and young people from abuse and neglect.

### **Reporting a Child Safety Concern or Complaint**

- The school has clear expectations for staff and volunteers in making a report about a child or young person who may be in need of protection.
- Reporting requirements are detailed in the WSC Child Protection Reporting Policy.
  - Immediate action should include reporting their concerns to the Department of Health and Human Services Child Protection or another appropriate agency and notifying the Principal or a member of the school leadership team of their concerns and the reasons for those concerns. The school will take action to respond to a complaint.

### **Legal Responsibilities to Report**

We 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
  - A person will not commit this offence if they have a reasonable excuse for not disclosing the information, including a fear for their safety or where the information has already been disclosed.
  - Further information about the failure to disclose offence is available on the [Department of Justice and Regulation website](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence) [www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence)

#### Failure to protect

- People of authority in our organisation 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.
  - Further information about the failure to protect offence is available on the [Department of Justice and Regulation website](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence) [www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence)
  - Any personnel who are **mandatory reporters** must comply with their duties.
    - Mandatory reporters (doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers (including early childhood teachers), Principals and police) must report to child protection if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse.
    - For more information about making a mandatory or protective report, refer to the Screen shot of the Four Critical Actions for Schools – Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse in Appendix C, [www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/protect/FourCriticalActions\\_ChildAbuse.pdf](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/protect/FourCriticalActions_ChildAbuse.pdf), also located in faculties and on our website.

## Listening to children

- The school has developed a safe, inclusive and supportive environment that involves and communicates with children, young people and their parents/carers. We encourage child and parent/carer involvement and engagement that informs safe school operations and builds the capability of children and parents/carers to understand their rights and their responsibilities.
- When the school is gathering information in relation to a complaint about alleged misconduct with, or abuse of, a child the school will listen to the complainant's account of things and take them seriously, check understanding and keep the child (or their parents/carers if appropriate under the circumstances) informed about progress.

## **Risk Reduction and Management**

- The school believes the wellbeing of children and young people is paramount, and is vigilant in ensuring proper risk management processes.
- The school recognises there are potential risks to children and young people and will take a risk management approach by undertaking preventative measures.
  - The school's risk management strategies are reviewed annually.

## **Confidentiality and Privacy**

- This school collects, uses and discloses information about particular children and their families in accordance with Victorian privacy law. The principles regulating the collection, use and storage of information is included in the WSC Privacy Policy.
- 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.

## **Policy Review**

To ensure ongoing relevance and continuous improvement, this policy will be reviewed in the context of school self-evaluation undertaken as part of the school accountability framework. The review will include input from students, parents/carers and the school community.

## **Related Legislation and Policies**

- [Ministerial Order No. 870](#)
- [Dept. of Justice and Regulation Betrayal of Trust](#)
- [Dept. Justice WWC checks](#)
- [DET Child Safe Standards](#)
- [DET Four Critical Actions...Child Abuse](#) (Appendix C)
- WSC Child Protection Reporting Policy
- WSC Statement of Commitment to Child Safety (Appendix A)
- WSC Child Safety Code of Conduct (Appendix B)
- WSC Working with Children Checks Policy
- WSC Privacy Policy
- WSC Camps Policy
- WSC Day Excursions Policy
- WSC Duty of Care Policy
- WSC External Providers Policy
- WSC ICT Acceptable Use Policy Procedures and Agreement
- WSC Visitors and Volunteers Policy

## **Appendices**

- Appendix A: WSC Statement of Commitment to Child Safety
- Appendix B: WSC Child Safety Code of Conduct

- Appendix C: Screen shot of the Four Critical Actions for Schools – Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

**Evaluation**

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's annual review cycle.

**This Policy was last ratified by School Council in: 2017**

## Appendix A

### Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

Whittlesea Secondary College is committed to safety and wellbeing of all children and young people. This will be the primary focus of our care and decision-making.

Whittlesea Secondary College has zero tolerance for child abuse.

We are committed to providing a child safe environment where children and young people are safe and feel safe, and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives. Particular attention will be paid to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children and children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as the safety of children with a disability.

Every person involved in our school has a responsibility to understand the important and specific role they play individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children and young people is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make.

In its planning, decision-making and operations Whittlesea Secondary College will

1. Take a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to the safety of the children in our care;
2. Empower children to participate in decisions which affect their lives;
3. Foster a culture of openness that supports all in our school to safely disclose risks of harm to children;
4. Respect diversity in cultures and child rearing practices while keeping child safety paramount;
5. Provide written guidance to all staff, contractors and volunteers on appropriate conduct and behaviour towards children;
6. Engage only the most suitable people to work with children and have high quality staff, volunteer supervision and professional development;
7. Ensure children know who to talk with if they are worried or are feeling unsafe, and that they are comfortable and encouraged to raise such issues;
8. Report suspected abuse, neglect or mistreatment promptly to the appropriate authorities;
9. Share information appropriately and lawfully with other organisations where the safety and wellbeing of children is at risk; and
10. Value the input of and communicate regularly with families and carers.

## Appendix B

### Child Safety Code of Conduct

Whittlesea Secondary College is committed to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. Our school community recognises the importance of, and a responsibility for, ensuring our school is a safe, supportive and enriching environment which respects and fosters the dignity and self-esteem of children and young people, and enables them to thrive in their learning and development.

This Code of Conduct aims to protect children and reduce any opportunities for child abuse or harm to occur. It also assists in understanding how to avoid or better manage risky behaviours and situations. It is intended to complement child protection legislation, Department of Education and Training (DET) policy, school policies and procedures and professional standards, codes or ethics as these apply to staff and other personnel.

The Principal and school leaders of Whittlesea Secondary College will support implementation and monitoring of the Code of Conduct, and will plan, implement and monitor arrangements to provide inclusive, safe and orderly school and other learning environments. The Principal and school leaders of the School will also provide information and support to enable the Code of Conduct to operate effectively.

All staff, contractors, volunteers and any other member of the school community involved in child-related work are required to comply with the Code of Conduct by observing expectations for appropriate behaviour below. The Code of Conduct applies in all school situations, including school camps and in the use of digital technology and social media.

#### **Expected behaviours**

As staff, volunteers, contractors, and any other member of the school community involved in child-related work individually, we are responsible for supporting and promoting the safety of children by:

- upholding the school's statement of commitment to child safety at all times and adhering to the school's Child Safe Environment policy
- treating students and families in the school community with respect both within the school environment and outside the school environment as part of normal social and community activities.
- listening and responding to the views and concerns of students, particularly if they are telling you that they or another child has been abused or that they are worried about their safety/the safety of another child
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of students with culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- promoting the safety, participation and empowerment of students with a disability
- reporting any allegations of child abuse or other child safety concerns to the school's leadership or child safety officer, who will support and encourage you about the next steps in responding to the information you have received or the belief you have formed, and assist in making a mandatory report if required.
- understanding and complying with all reporting or disclosure obligations (including mandatory reporting) as they relate to protecting children from harm or abuse.
- if child abuse is suspected, ensuring as quickly as possible that the student(s) are safe and protected from harm.
- making confidential contact with the Principal should they be involved in any matters where child safety is concerned, either in the school environment or any other context.

#### **Unacceptable behaviours**

As staff, volunteers, contractors, and any other member of the school community involved in child-related work we must not:

- ignore or disregard any concerns, suspicions or disclosures of child abuse

- develop a relationship with any student that could be seen as favouritism or amount to ‘grooming’ behaviour (for example, offering gifts)
  - In addition to the *Failure to Disclose* and *Failure to Protect* offences, Grooming is a criminal offence. See the website for the [Dept. of Justice and Regulation Betrayal of Trust](#)
- exhibit behaviours or engage in activities with students which may be interpreted as abusive and not justified by the educational, therapeutic, or service delivery context
- ignore behaviours by other adults towards students when they appear to be overly familiar or inappropriate
- discuss content of an intimate nature or use sexual innuendo with students, except where it occurs relevantly in the context of parental guidance, delivering the education curriculum or a therapeutic setting
- treat a child unfavourably because of their disability, age, gender, race, culture, vulnerability, sexuality or ethnicity.
- communicate directly with a student through personal or private contact channels (including by social media, email, instant messaging, texting etc) except where that communication is reasonable in all the circumstances related to school work or extra-curricular activities or where there is a safety concern or other urgent matter
- photograph or video a child in a school environment except in accordance with school policy or where required for duty of care purposes
- in the school environment or at other school events where students are present, consume alcohol contrary to school policy or take illicit drugs under any circumstances.

### Definitions

[Ministerial Order No. 870](#) provides definitions, including:

**Child abuse** includes—

- any act committed against a child involving:
  - a sexual offence or
  - an offence under section 49B(2) of the Crimes Act 1958 (grooming)
- the infliction, on a child, of:
  - physical violence or
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**Child-connected work** means work authorised by the school governing authority and performed by an adult in a school environment while children are present or reasonably expected to be present.

**Child safety** encompasses 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 incidents or allegations of child abuse.

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- a campus of the school
- online school environments (including email and intranet systems)
- other locations provided by the school for a child’s use (including, without limitation, locations used for school camps, sporting events, excursions, competitions, and other events).

**School staff** being an individual working in a school environment who is:

- directly engaged or employed by a school governing authority;
- a volunteer or a contracted service provider (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary); or
- a minister of religion.

## Appendix C

# Screen shot: Four Critical Actions for Schools - Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

### FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

## Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

PROTECT



#### YOU MUST TAKE ACTION

As a school staff member, you play a **critical role** in protecting children in your care.

- You **must** act, by following the 4 critical actions, as soon as you witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a reasonable belief that a child has, or is at risk of being abused.
- You **must** act if you form a suspicion/reasonable belief, even if you are unsure and have not directly observed child abuse (e.g. if the victim or another person tells you about the abuse).
- You **must** use the **Responding to Suspected Child Abuse** template to keep clear and comprehensive notes.

\*A reasonable belief is a deliberately low threshold. This enables authorities to investigate and take action.

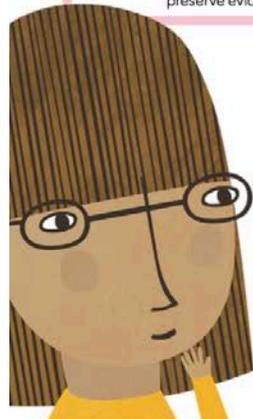
### 1 RESPONDING TO AN EMERGENCY

If there is no risk of immediate harm go to **Action 2**.

If a child is at immediate risk of harm you **must** ensure their safety by:

- separating alleged victims and others involved
- administering first aid
- calling **000 for urgent medical and/or police assistance** to respond to immediate health or safety concerns
- identifying a contact person at the school for future liaison with Police.

Where necessary you may also need to maintain the integrity of the potential crime scene and preserve evidence.



### 2 REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed you **must** report all incidents, suspicions and disclosures of child abuse as soon as possible. Failure to report physical and sexual child abuse may amount to a criminal offence.

Q: Where does the source of suspected abuse come from?

#### WITHIN THE SCHOOL

##### VICTORIA POLICE

You **must** report all instances of suspected child abuse involving a school staff member, contractor or volunteer to Victoria Police.

You **must also** report internally to:

- GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**
  - School Principal and/or leadership team
  - Employee Conduct Branch
  - DET Security Services Unit

##### CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

- School Principal and/or leadership team
- Diocesan education office

##### INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

- School Principal and/or school chairperson

#### WITHIN THE FAMILY OR COMMUNITY

##### DHHS CHILD PROTECTION

You **must** report to DHHS Child Protection if a child is considered to be:

- in need of protection from child abuse
- at risk of being harmed (or has been harmed) and the harm has had, or is likely to have, a serious impact on the child's safety, stability or development.

##### VICTORIA POLICE

You **must also** report all instances of suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police.

You **must also** report internally to:

##### GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

- You **must also** report to:
- School Principal and/or leadership team
  - DET Security Services Unit

##### CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

- You **must also** report to:
- School Principal and/or leadership team
  - Diocesan education office

##### INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

- You **must also** report to:
- School Principal and/or chairperson

If you believe that a child is not subject to abuse, but you still hold **significant concerns** for their wellbeing you must still act.

This may include making a referral or seeking advice from Child FIRST (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support), or to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police.

### 3 CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

Your Principal **must** consult with DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers. They may advise:

- not to contact** the parents/carer (e.g. in circumstances where the parents are alleged to have engaged in the abuse, or the child is a mature minor and does not wish for their parent/carer to be contacted)
- to contact** the parents/carers and provide agreed information (this must be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion).

### 4 PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

Your school **must** provide support for children impacted by abuse. This should include the development of a **Student Support Plan** in consultation with wellbeing professionals. This is an essential part of your duty of care requirements. Strategies may include development of a safety plan, direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals.

You **must** follow the **Four Critical Actions** every time you become aware of a further instance or risk of abuse. This includes reporting new information to authorities.

#### CONTACT

##### DHHS CHILD PROTECTION AREA

North Division **1300 664 9777**  
South Division **1300 655 795**  
East Division **1300 360 391**  
West Division (Rural) **1800 075 599**  
West Division (Metro) **1300 664 9777**

##### AFTER HOURS

After hours, weekends, public holidays **13 12 78**

##### CHILD FIRST

www.dhs.vic.gov.au

##### VICTORIA POLICE

000 or your local police station

##### DET SECURITY SERVICES UNIT (03) 9589 6266

##### STUDENT INCIDENT AND RECOVERY UNIT (03) 9637 2934

##### EMPLOYEE CONDUCT BRANCH (03) 9637 2595

**DIOCESAN OFFICE**  
Melbourne (03) 9267 0228  
Ballarat (03) 5337 7135  
Sale (03)5622 6600  
Sandhurst (03) 5443 2377

##### INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS VICTORIA (03) 9825 7200