

Child Protection and Safety Policy



The person of each individual human being, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ's teaching: that is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school (Congregation for Catholic Education 1997, n. 9).

Protection for children and young people is based upon the belief that each person is made in the image and likeness of God and that the inherent dignity of all should be recognised and fostered.

At St Catherine's School we hold the care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people as a central and fundamental responsibility of our school. Our commitment is drawn from and inherent in the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ, with love, justice and the sanctity of each human person at the heart of the Gospel ([CECV Commitment Statement to Child Safety](#)).

Our Child Protection and Safety Policy

St Catherine's has developed the following Child Protection and Safety Policy. This policy is an overarching document that provides key elements of our approach to protecting children from abuse. It is designed to be communicated through our public website as well as through other mediums such as newsletters, our annual report and in induction and welcome packs for School Advisory Board Members, staff and volunteers.

The Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to demonstrate the strong commitment of St Catherine's School to the care, safety and wellbeing of all students at our school. It provides an outline of the policies, procedures and strategies developed to keep students safe from harm, including all forms of abuse in our school environment, on campus, online and in other locations provided by the school.

This policy takes into account relevant legislative requirements within the state of Victoria, including the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards as set out in [Ministerial Order No. 870](#).

This policy applies to school staff, including school employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy.

Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

Child abuse includes sexual offences, grooming, physical violence, serious emotional or psychological harm, serious neglect and a child's exposure to family violence. St Catherine's is committed to the protection of all children from all forms of child abuse and demonstrates this commitment through the implementation of a comprehensive Child Protection Program designed to keep children safe.

At St Catherine's we have a zero tolerance for child abuse and are committed to acting in children's best interests and keeping them safe from harm. The School regards its child protection responsibilities with the utmost importance and as such, is committed to providing the necessary resources to ensure compliance with all relevant child protection laws and regulations and to maintaining a child safe culture.

St Catherine's commits to providing a safe and nurturing culture for all children and young people through:

1. Upholding the primacy of the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

At all times, the ongoing safety and wellbeing of all children and young people will be the primary focus of care and decision-making, with particular attention paid to the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as the safety of children with a disability.

To create and maintain a safe and nurturing culture, St Catherine's actively and continually develops and reviews policies, processes and practices, informed by emerging thinking and evidence.

2. Empowering families, children, young people and staff to have a voice and raise concerns.

St Catherine's, in partnership with families, will ensure children and young people, are engaged and active participants in decision-making processes, particularly those that have an impact on their safety.

This means that the views of staff, children, young people and families are taken seriously and their concerns are addressed in a just and timely manner. Children and young people are also provided with the necessary skills and knowledge to understand and maintain their personal safety and wellbeing.

3. Implementing rigorous risk-management and employment practices.

St Catherine's will systematically and continually identify and assess risks to child safety and will eliminate (where possible) or reduce all potential sources of harm. Effective risk management will be embedded in school life through effective, transparent and well-understood policies, procedures and practices. St Catherine's will employ highly competent and professional staff who are formed and challenged to maintain the safety of all students. The high-quality of staff appointments will be upheld through rigorous employment and staff review processes and practices. St Catherine's will stay abreast of current legislation and will meet their legislative duties to protect the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in their care, including the Victorian Child Safe Standards (Victorian Government 2016), mandatory reporting, grooming, failure to disclose and failure to protect requirements.

Child Safe Principles

The School's commitment to child safety is based on the following overarching principles that guide the development and regular review of our work systems, practices, policies and procedures to protect children from abuse.

- All children have the right to be safe.
- The welfare and best interests of the child are paramount.
- The views of the child and a child's privacy must be respected.
- Clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children are established in our Child Safety Code of Conduct and Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy.
- The safety of children is dependent upon the existence of a child safe culture.
- Child safety awareness is promoted and openly discussed within our School community.
- Procedures are in place to screen all staff, Direct Contact Volunteers** third party contractors and external education providers who have direct contact with children.
- Child safety and protection is everyone's responsibility.
- Child protection training is mandatory for all School Advisory Board Members, staff and Direct Contact Volunteers.
- Procedures for responding to alleged or suspected incidents of child abuse are simple and accessible for all members of the School community.
- Children from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds have the right to special care and support including those who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- Children who have any kind of disability have the right to special care and support.

***Direct Contact Volunteers are those volunteers who are involved in providing support, guidance and supervision directly to students and could potentially have direct unsupervised contact with students during the normal course of providing the volunteer service. Examples of Direct Contact Volunteer activities may include volunteers involved in School camps and excursions, coaching sporting teams or assisting in learning activities.*

Objectives

This policy provides the framework for:

- the development of work systems, practices, policies, procedures that promote child protection within the School;
- the creation of a positive and robust child protection culture;
- the promotion and open discussion of child protection issues within the School; and
- complying with all laws, regulations and standards relevant to child protection in Victoria.

Definitions

- **Bullying:** Repeated verbal, physical, social or psychological behaviour that is harmful and involves the misuse of power by an individual or group towards one or more persons. Bullying may involve cyber bullying, which refers to bullying through information and communication technologies. Conflict or fights between equals and single incidents are not defined as bullying. (Safe Schools Hub, 2015)
- **Child Abuse:** Any non-accidental behaviour by parents, caregivers, other adults or older adolescents that is outside the norms of conduct and entails a substantial risk of causing physical or emotional harm to a child or young person. Such behaviours may be intentional or unintentional and can include acts of omission (i.e. neglect) and commission (i.e. abuse). Child abuse is commonly divided into five main subtypes: physical abuse; emotional maltreatment; neglect; sexual abuse; and the witnessing of family violence. (Safe Schools Hub, 2015)
- **Child Neglect:** The failure by a parent or caregiver to provide a child (where they are in a position to do so) with the conditions that are culturally accepted as being essential for their physical and emotional development and wellbeing. This can be:
 - physical neglect, i.e. lack of safety, cleanliness, adequate clothing, housing, food and health care;
 - emotional neglect, i.e. a lack of caregiver warmth, nurturance, encouragement and support;
 - educational neglect, i.e. failure to provide appropriate educational opportunities for the child; and
 - environmental neglect, i.e. failure to ensure environmental safety, opportunities and resources. (Safe Schools Hub, 2015)
- **Child Physical Abuse:** Generally, child physical abuse refers to the non-accidental use of physical force against a child that results in harm to the child. Physically abusive behaviours include shoving, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, punching, kicking, biting, burning, strangling and poisoning. The fabrication or induction of an illness by a parent or carer (previously known as Munchausen syndrome by proxy) is also considered physically abusive behaviour. (Safe Schools Hub, 2015)
- **Child Protection:** Statutory services designed to protect children who are at risk of serious harm. (Safe Schools Hub, 2015)
- **Child Sexual Abuse:** Any sexual activity between a child under the age of consent (16) and an adult or older person (i.e. a person five or more years older than the victim) is child sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse can also be:
 - Any sexual behaviour between a child and an adult in a position of power or authority over them (e.g. a teacher). The age of consent laws do not apply in such instances due to the strong imbalance of power that exists between young people and authority figures, as well as the breaching of both personal and public trust that occurs when professional boundaries are violated.

- Any sexual behaviour between a child and an adult family member is always sexual abuse regardless of issues of consent, equality or coercion.
 - Sexual activity between peers that is non-consensual or involves the use of power or coercion.
 - Non-consensual sexual activity between minors (e.g. a 14-year-old and an 11-year-old), or any sexual behaviour between a child and another child or adolescent who, due to their age or stage of development, is in a position of power, trust or responsibility over the victim. Sexual activity between adolescents at a similar developmental level is not considered abuse. (Safe Schools Hub, 2015)
- **Mandatory Reporting:** The legal requirement to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect is known as mandatory reporting. Mandated persons include teachers, nurses, police, psychologists, psychiatrists and medical practitioners. (Safe Schools Hub, 2015)
 - **Reasonable Belief:** When staff are concerned about the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person, they must assess that concern to determine if a report should be made to the relevant agency. This process of considering all relevant information and observations is known as forming a 'reasonable belief'. A 'reasonable belief' or a 'belief on reasonable grounds' is not the same as having proof but is more than mere rumour or speculation. A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds.
 - **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) the school campus
 - (b) online school environments (including email and intranet systems)
 - (c) 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). ([Ministerial Order No. 870](#))
 - **School staff** means an individual working in a school environment who is:
 - a) directly engaged or employed by a school governing authority
 - b) a volunteer or a contracted service provider (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary)
 - c) a minister of religion. ([Ministerial Order No. 870](#))

Child Protection Program

St Catherine's is committed to the effective implementation of our Child Protection Program and ensuring that it is appropriately reviewed and updated. We adopt a risk management approach by identifying key risk indicators and assessing child safety risks based on a range of factors including the nature of our School's activities, physical and online environments and the characteristics of the student body.

Our Child Protection Program relates to all aspects of protecting children from abuse and establishes work systems, practices, policies and procedures to protect children from abuse. It includes:

- clear information as to what constitutes child abuse and associated key risk indicators;
- clear procedures for responding to and reporting allegations of child abuse;
- strategies to support, encourage and enable staff, volunteers (direct and indirect), third party contractors, external education providers, parents and students to understand, identify, discuss and report child protection matters;
- procedures for recruiting and screening School Advisory Board Members, staff and Direct Contact Volunteers;
- pastoral care strategies designed to empower students and keep them safe;
- policies with respect to cultural diversity and students with disabilities;

- a child protection training program;
- information regarding the steps to take after a disclosure of abuse to protect, support and assist children;
- guidelines with respect to record keeping and confidentiality;
- policies to ensure compliance with all relevant laws, regulations and standards (including the Victorian Child Safe Standards); and
- a system for continuous improvement and review.

As part of St Catherine's induction process, all staff and Direct Contact Volunteers are required to complete a selection of training modules on the content of our Child Protection Program.

All staff, Direct Contact Volunteers and School Advisory Board members are provided with additional, ongoing child protection training at least annually.

Staff, volunteers (direct and indirect), third party contractors and external education providers are supported and supervised by the School's Principal (or authorised delegate) to ensure that they are compliant with the School's approach to child protection.

Responsibilities

Child protection is everyone's responsibility. At St Catherine's all members of the School Advisory Board and staff, as well as direct and indirect volunteers, have a shared responsibility for contributing to the safety and protection of children. Specific responsibilities include:

- **School Advisory Board**
Each member of the School Advisory Board is required to ensure that appropriate resources are made available to allow the School's Child Protection and Safety Policy and the Child Protection Program to be effectively implemented within the School and are responsible for holding the Principal and Leadership Team accountable for effective implementation.
- **The Principal**
The Principal is responsible, and will be accountable for, taking all practical measures to ensure that this Child Protection and Safety Policy and the School's Child Protection Program are implemented effectively and that a strong and sustainable child protection culture is maintained within the School.
- **The School's Child Protection Contact Officers**
A number of senior staff members are nominated as the School's Child Protection Contact Officers. Our Child Protection Contact Officers receive additional specialised training with respect to child protection issues. They are the first point of contact for raising child protection concerns within the School. They are also responsible for championing child protection within the School and assisting in coordinating responses to child protection incidents.
- **Staff Members**
All staff are required to be familiar with the content of our Child Protection and Safety Policy and our Child Protection Program and their legal obligations with respect to the reporting of child abuse. It is each individual's responsibility to be aware of key risk indicators of child abuse, to be observant, and to raise any concerns they may have relating to child abuse with one of the School's Child Protection Contact Officers.
- **Direct Contact Volunteers**
All Direct Contact Volunteers, as defined in this policy, are required to be familiar with the content of our Child Protection and Safety Policy, our Child Protection Program and their legal obligations with respect to the reporting of child abuse.

It is each individual's responsibility to be aware of key risk indicators of child abuse, to be observant, and to raise any concerns they may have relating to child abuse with one of the School's Child Protection Contacts.

- **Indirect Contact Volunteers**

Indirect Contact Volunteers (or 'indirect volunteers') are those volunteers who are involved in providing support and services whilst not directly assisting a specific group of students. Indirect contact volunteers are not responsible for supervising students and do not have "unsupervised" contact with students during the normal course of providing the volunteer service.

All indirect volunteers are responsible for contributing to the safety and protection of children in the School environment.

All indirect volunteers are required by the School to be familiar with our Child Protection and Safety Policy and our Child Safety Code of Conduct.

Examples of Indirect Contact Volunteer activities may include assisting with School functions, or the School canteen and fundraising barbeques.

- **Third Party Contractors**

All Third Party Contractors (service providers) engaged by the School are responsible for contributing to the safety and protection of children in the School environment.

All service providers engaged by the School are required by the School to be familiar with our Child Protection and Safety Policy and our Child Protection Program.

The School may include this requirement in the written agreement between it and the service provider.

- **External Education Providers**

An external education provider is any organisation that the School has arranged to deliver a specified course of study that is part of the curriculum, to a student or students enrolled at the School.

The delivery of such a course may take place on School premises or elsewhere.

All external education providers engaged by the School are responsible for contributing to the safety and protection of children in the School environment.

All external education providers engaged by the School are required by the School to be familiar with our Children Protection and Safety Policy and our Child Protection Program.

St Catherine's may include this requirement in the written agreement between it and the external education provider.

Procedures

- St Catherine's School will use the **Child Safe Standards** to establish and embed a **Child Protection Program** which sets out in detail the internal policies, procedures and workplace systems it has adopted.
- All school staff at St Catherine's who identify concerns regarding the sexual, physical, psychological and emotional abuse or neglect of a child must respond according to Mandatory Reporting, Grooming, Failure to Disclose and Failure to Protect legislation and policies.

- When an allegation is directed against school employees (teachers, administrative staff, grounds staff or any other staff member), staff are to inform the CEO's Child Protection Officer in addition to following reporting requirements.
- Allegations directed against any clergy or members of religious institutes should be reported to police and the Bishop of the Diocese, via the Director of Catholic Education (as a member of the Professional Standards Committee). The reporting person(s) must also fulfill other relevant requirements, i.e. mandatory reporting.
- The Principal shall ensure that staff receive induction and ongoing professional learning in relation to the child safety and protection policies and procedures, inclusive of mandatory reporting, on an annual and ongoing basis.
- The Principal shall ensure the school's pastoral care structures reflect all child safety and protection policies and procedures.
- St Catherine's School will create a **Code of Conduct** for staff and volunteers.
- All school staff and volunteers will be required to follow the school's **Code of Conduct**

Where an employee is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this Policy, St Catherine's School may start the process under clause 13 of the *Victorian Catholic Education Multi Enterprise Agreement 2013* (VCEMEA) for managing employment concerns. This may result in disciplinary consequences.

Reporting Concerns

Our Child Protection Program provides detailed guidance for members of the School Advisory Board, staff and Direct Contact Volunteers as to how to identify key risk indicators of child abuse and how to report child abuse concerns to one of our School's nominated Child Protection and Safety Contact Officers. It also contains detailed procedures with respect to the reporting of child abuse incidents to relevant authorities.

Third party contractors, external education providers, indirect contact volunteers, students, parents/carers or other community members who have concerns that a child may be subject to abuse are asked to contact one of the School's Child Protection and Safety Contact Officers.

Communications will be treated confidentially on a "needs to know basis".

Whenever there are concerns that a child is in immediate danger the Police should be called on 000.

References

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) 2016, [Commitment Statement to Child Safety](#): A safe and nurturing culture for all children and young people in Catholic schools.

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) 2013, [Victorian Catholic Education Multi Enterprise Agreement 2013](#), CECV.

Commission for Children and Young People (2015), *A Guide for Creating a Child Safe Organisation*. <http://www.ccyp.vic.gov.au>

Congregation for Catholic Education 1997, [The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium](#), Vatican.

Safe Schools Hub 2014, [National Safe Schools Framework Glossary](#), Australian Government Department of Education and Training.

State of Victoria 2016, [Child Safe Standards](#) – *Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools: Ministerial Order No. 870*, Education & Training Reform Act 2006, Victorian Government Gazette No. S2.

Victorian Government Department of Justice 2016, [Betrayal of Trust Implementation](#).

Related Policies

- ***Risk Management Program***
- ***Compliance Program***
- ***Human Resources Program***
- ***Student Care Program***
- ***Occupational Health & Safety Program***
- ***Child Protection Staff Training***
- ***Recruitment & Selection Procedures***
- ***Induction Procedures***

Policy & Program Review

St Catherine's is committed to the continuous improvement of our Child Protection Program. The Program is regularly reviewed for overall effectiveness and to ensure compliance with all child protection related laws, regulations and standards.

Implementation Date: August 2016

Review Date: July 2021