

CHILD SAFETY AND WELLBEING POLICY

PURPOSE

The Melbourne Montessori School Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy demonstrates our School's commitment to creating and maintaining a child safe and child-friendly organisation, where children and young people are safe and feel safe.

This policy provides an overview of our School's approach to implementing [Ministerial Order 1359](#) which sets out how the Victorian Child Safe Standards apply in school environments.

It informs our School community of everyone's obligations to act safely and appropriately towards children and guides our processes and practices for the safety and wellbeing of students across all areas of our work.

SCOPE

This policy:

- applies to all School Staff, volunteers and service providers whether or not they work in direct contact with students. It also applies to School Board members where indicated
- applies in all physical and on-line School environments used by students during or outside of school hours, including other locations provided for a student's use (for example, a School camp) and those provided through third-party providers
- should be read together with our other child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures and codes – refer to the related School policies section below

DEFINITIONS

The following terms in this policy have [specific definitions provided by DET\(Vic\) click here:](#)

- child
- child safety
- child abuse
- child-connected work
- grooming
- mandatory reporting
- reportable conduct
- school environment
- school staff
- school governing authority (School Board)
- student
- volunteer

OUR STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

Melbourne Montessori School is a child safe organisation which welcomes all children, young people and their families.

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We are committed to providing environments where our students are safe and feel safe, where their participation is valued, their views respected and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives. Our child safe policies, strategies and practices are inclusive of the needs of all children and students.

We have no tolerance for child abuse and take proactive steps to identify and manage any risks of harm to students in our School environments.

We promote positive relationships between students and adults and between students and their peers. These relationships are based on trust and respect.

We take proactive steps to identify and manage any risk of harm to students in our School environment and activities. When child safety concerns are raised or identified, we treat these seriously and respond promptly and thoroughly.

Particular attention is given to the child safety needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, international students, students with disabilities, those unable to live at home, children and young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) and other students experiencing risk or vulnerability. Inappropriate or harmful behaviour targeting students based on these or other characteristics, such as racism or homophobia, are not tolerated at our School and any instances identified will be addressed with appropriate consequences.

Child safety is a shared responsibility. Every person involved in our School has an important role in promoting child safety and wellbeing and promptly raising any issues or concerns about a child's safety.

We are committed to regularly reviewing our child safe practices, and seeking input from our students, families, Staff, and volunteers to inform our ongoing strategies.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The School Board

The Melbourne Montessori School Board has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that in accordance with Ministerial Order No 1359:

- A strong child safe culture, in all School environments, is created and maintained;
- Child safety and wellbeing strategies, policies, practices and codes are effectively developed, in place, communicated and adhered to;
- Ensuring that appropriate and effective child safety risk management and internal controls systems are in place and effective; and
- Ensuring that child safety is a regular agenda item at School Board meetings and that the School Leadership Team report regularly to the Board on child safety and wellbeing matters, including the implementation and maintenance of strategies to retain a child safe environment and culture at Melbourne Montessori School.

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The School Directors will:

- Undertake annual training on child safety; and
- Act in accordance with the School *Code of Conduct* (particularly as it relates to child safety and wellbeing).

The School Principal

The School Principal is responsible for:

- Ensuring effective child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, codes of practice are in place, communicated to the School community and followed;
- Modelling a child safe culture that facilitates the active participation of students, families and Staff in promoting and improving child safety, cultural safety and wellbeing;
- Enabling inclusive practices where the diverse needs of all students are considered;
- Reinforcing high standards of respectful behaviour between students and adults, and between students; and
- Ensuring that all Staff, contractors (service providers) and volunteers are aware of relevant laws, organisational policies and procedures, and their obligation to observe the School's *Code of Conduct* (particularly as it relates to child safety and protection).

The Principal will:

- Deal with and investigate reports of child abuse;
- Appoint appropriate **Child Safety Officers** to act as a clearly identifiable support network for all students, parents, Staff and anyone in our community that has a concern about the safety of a child in our care; and
- Provide support for Staff, service providers and volunteers in undertaking their child protection responsibilities.

The School Leadership Team (SLT)

The SLT are responsible for:

- Modelling a child safe culture that facilitates the active participation of students, families and Staff in promoting and improving child safety, cultural safety and wellbeing;
- Enabling inclusive practices where the diverse needs of all students are considered;
- Reinforcing high standards of respectful behaviour between students and adults, and between students;
- Facilitating regular education for Staff, volunteers and parents (where appropriate) to build deeper understandings of child safety, cultural safety, student wellbeing and prevention of responding to abuse;
- Creating an environment where child safety complaints and concerns are readily raised and no-one is discouraged from reporting an allegation of child abuse to relevant authorities.
- Assessing the possible risks of child abuse within their area of control and eradicating/minimising any risk to the extent possible;

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- Facilitating the reporting of any inappropriate behaviour or suspected abusive activities; and
- Assisting and supporting the Principal in the various responsibilities allocated to that role as outlined above.

The School Leadership Team will act as a **Child Safety Officers** by:

- Supporting, encouraging and enabling School Staff, parents and children to understand, identify, discuss and report child safety matters;
- Raising awareness of our *Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy, Code of Conduct* and other legal responsibilities championing a culture of child safety across the School;
- Guiding child safety incident management and reporting; and
- Supporting or assisting children who disclose child abuse or are otherwise linked to suspected child abuse.

The School Leadership Team should be familiar with the types of abuse that might occur within their area of responsibility and be alert for any indications of such conduct.

All Staff, Volunteers and Service Providers will:

- Participate in child safety and wellbeing induction and training provided by the School, and always follow the School's child safety and wellbeing policies and procedures;
- Act in accordance with our Code of Conduct
- Identify and raise concerns about child safety issues in accordance with our Responding To Concerns of Child Abuse, Neglect and Safety procedures, including following the [*PROTECT Four Critical Actions for Schools*](#);
- Ensure students' views are taken seriously and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives;
- Implement inclusive practices that respond to the diverse needs of students;
- Support or assist children who disclose child abuse, or are otherwise linked to suspected child abuse: and
- Provide an environment that is supportive of all children's emotional and physical safety.

Fulfilling the roles and responsibilities contained in this policy does not displace or discharge any other legal obligations that arise if a person reasonably believes that a child is at risk of child abuse.

CODE OF CONDUCT

Melbourne Montessori Schools' *Code of Conduct* sets the boundaries and expectations for appropriate behaviours between adults and students. It also clarifies behaviours that are not acceptable in our physical and on-line environments.

All Staff, service providers and volunteers working directly with children at the School are required to read, agree to and abide by the *Code of Conduct*.

We ensure that students also know what is acceptable and what is not acceptable so that they can be clear and confident about what to expect from adults in the School.

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The *Code of Conduct* also includes processes to report inappropriate behaviour.

MANAGING RISKS TO CHILD SAFETY AND WELLBEING

At our School we identify, assess and manage risks to child safety and wellbeing in our physical and on-line School environments. These risks are managed through all our School policies, procedures and practices, and in our activity specific risk assessments, such as those we develop for on-site events, off-site activities, overnight camps, adventure activities and facilities and services we contract through third party providers.

We identify and manage the risks in our on-line environments through our ICT policies, procedures and system controls. We inform students and their families about appropriate use of the School's technology, safety tools and how to seek help and report concerns including cyberbullying and on-line grooming.

Our *Child Safety Risk Register* is used to record any identified risks related to child abuse and safety alongside actions in place to manage those risks. Our School Leadership Team and Board monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the actions in the *Child Safety Risk Register* at least annually.

ESTABLISHING A CULTURALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Melbourne Montessori School values and respects the cultural diversity of our students and is committed to ensuring that backgrounds of all students are sensitively recognised, catered for, celebrated and valued so that cultural differences do not compromise students' safety and wellbeing.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, we are committed to establishing an inclusive and culturally safe place where the strengths of their culture, values and practices are respected.

We recognise the link between Aboriginal culture, identity and safety and actively create opportunities for Aboriginal students, families and culture to have a voice and presence in our School environment and education programs.

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy outlines the strategies and actions we have in place to maintain an inclusive and culturally safe School for Aboriginal children and students.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT

Melbourne Montessori School recognises that our students are at the forefront of all we do. Their input, participation and empowerment to actively engage in processes and structures is integral to our democratic principles and statements on equity and inclusion. Students' voice on policy is upheld through use of the Community meetings lead by students representation Primary and Senior School.

All children and students at the School should feel safe, be safe, and be informed and empowered to speak up about any personal safety and wellbeing issue.

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Through our Pastoral, Child Safety and Wellbeing Programs the School ensures children and students are informed about all of their rights to personal safety, information and participation.

We recognise the importance of friendships and support from peers to help children and students feel safe and be less isolated. Staff are trained to signs of harm and will actively facilitate child-friendly ways for children and students to express their views, raise their concerns and participate in decisions affecting them.

The views of children and students will always be taken seriously, and their concerns are addressed in a just and timely manner.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

The School recognises that parents and guardians have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of their children. The School will involve parents and guardians in decisions related to child safety and wellbeing which affect their child.

Our families and the School community have an important role in monitoring and promoting children's safety and wellbeing and helping children to raise any concerns.

To support family engagement, Melbourne Montessori School is committed to providing families and community with accessible information about our School's child safe policies and practices and involving them in our approach to child safety and wellbeing. Information is provided through;

- Publishing all our child safety and wellbeing policies and procedures on the School website, Child Safety page and on *Sentral* (School intranet) under School Policies;
- Emails and bulletins which inform families and the School community about any significant updates to our child safety policies or processes, and strategies or initiatives that we are taking to ensure student safety;
- Information sessions and resources published in Community News

We will create opportunities for families to have input into the development and review of our child safety policies and practices and encourage them to raise any concerns and ideas for improvement.

We do this by:

- Encouraging feedback via direct conversations or email correspondence with Staff and our Child Safety Officers;
- At parent information sessions
- Parent surveys; and
- Via MMS Room Representatives .

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DIVERSITY AND EQUITY

As a child safe organisation we celebrate the rich diversity of our students, families and community and promote respectful environments that are free from discrimination. Our focus is on wellbeing and growth for all.

We recognise that every child has unique skills, strengths and experiences to draw on.

We pay particular attention to individuals and groups of children and young people in our community with additional and specific needs. This includes, but is not limited to, tailoring our child safety and wellbeing strategies and supports to the needs of:

- Aboriginal children and young people
- Children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Children and young people with disabilities
- Children unable to live at home or impacted by family violence
- International students
- Children from single sex families
- Children and young people who identify as LGBTIQ+ or gender diverse

We do not tolerate any discriminatory practices and seek to ensure a learning environment that actively celebrates diversity and deepens understanding and acceptance of each person as an individual.

SUITABLE STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

At Melbourne Montessori School we take reasonable steps to select and engage suitable skilled people to work with our students. We apply robust child safe recruitment, induction, training, and supervision practices to ensure that all Staff, service providers and volunteers are suitable to work with children.

1.1 Staff Recruitment

When recruiting Staff, we develop recruitment advertising and position descriptions for workers who engage with child-connected work that have a clear statement that sets out:

- The job's requirements, duties and responsibilities regarding child safety and wellbeing; and
- The job occupant's essential or relevant qualifications, experience and attributes in relation to child safety and wellbeing.

All applicants for jobs that involve child-connected work must be informed about the child safety practices of the School (including the *Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy* and the *Code of Conduct*).

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When engaging Staff to perform child-related work, we:

- Sight, verify and record the person's Working with Children Check or equivalent background check such as a Victorian Teaching Registration along with a current National Police Check;
- Collect and record:
 - proof of the person's identity and any professional or other qualifications;
 - the person's history of working with children;
 - references that address suitability for the job and working with children.

1.2 Staff Induction

All newly appointed Staff will be expected to participate in our child safety and wellbeing induction program. The program will include a focus on:

- The *Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy* (this document);
- The *Code of Conduct*;
- The *Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy* and Procedures; and
- Any other child safety and wellbeing information that the School considers appropriate to the nature of the role.

1.3 Ongoing supervision and management of Staff

All Staff engaged in child-connected work will be supervised appropriately to ensure that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate.

Staff will be monitored and assessed to ensure their continuing suitability for child-connected work. This will be done by observation of classes, regular reviews as part of the professional induction process and briefings prior to camps and tours.

Inappropriate behaviour towards children and young people will be managed swiftly and in accordance with our School policies and our legal obligations. Child safety and wellbeing will be paramount.

1.4 Suitability of volunteers

Volunteers are required to comply with all our child safety policies and procedures including the signing and abiding by our Code of Conduct. All volunteers undertake an induction as contained in the Volunteer and Service Provider Induction Information and are supervised and monitored in their direct interactions with children and students.

CHILD SAFETY KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND AWARENESS

Ongoing training and education are essential to ensuring that Staff understand their roles and responsibilities and develop their capacity to effectively address child safety and wellbeing matters.

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In addition to the child safety and wellbeing induction, our Staff will participate in a range of training and professional learning to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to maintain a child safe environment.

Staff child safety and wellbeing training will be delivered at least annually and will include guidance on:

- Our School's child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, codes and practices;
- Completing a detailed child safety on-line training course annually;
- Recognising indicators of child harm, including harm caused by other children and students;
- Responding effectively to issues of child safety and wellbeing and supporting colleagues who disclose harm;
- How to build culturally safe environments for children and students;
- Information sharing and record keeping obligations; and
- How to identify and mitigate child safety and wellbeing risks in the school environment.

Other professional learning and training on child safety and wellbeing, for example, training for our volunteers, will be tailored to specific roles and responsibilities and any identified or emerging needs or issues.

School Board training and education

To ensure our School Board is equipped with the knowledge required to make decisions in the best interests of student safety and wellbeing, and to identify and mitigate child safety and wellbeing risks in our School environment, the Board members are trained at least annually. Training includes guidance on:

- Individual and collective obligations and responsibilities for implementing the Child Safe Standards and managing the risk of child abuse;
- Child safety and wellbeing risks in our School environment; and
- Melbourne Montessori School's child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, codes and practices.

COMPLAINTS AND REPORTING PROCESSES

Melbourne Montessori School fosters a culture that encourages Staff, volunteers, students, parents and the School community to raise concerns and complaints. This makes it more difficult for breaches of the *Code of Conduct*, misconduct or abuse to occur and remain hidden.

We have clear pathways for raising complaints and concerns and responding which is documented in our School's Complaints Handling Policy and a student guide to Child Safety complaints.

If there is an incident, disclosure, allegation or suspicion of child abuse, all Staff and volunteers (including School Board employees and homestay providers) must follow our *Responding to Concerns of Child Abuse Neglect and Safety* procedures. Our policy and procedures address complaints and concerns of child abuse made by or in relation to a child or student, School Staff, volunteers, service providers, visitors or any other person while connected to the School.

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As soon as any immediate health and safety concerns are addressed, and relevant School Staff have been informed, we will ensure our School follows:

- The *Four Critical Actions* for complaints and concerns relating to adult behaviour towards a child; and
- The *Four Critical Actions: Student Sexual Offending* for complaints and concerns relating to student sexual offending.

Our Community Expectations Policy and Student Bullying and Harassment Policy cover procedures relating to student physical violence or other harmful behaviours.

COMMUNICATIONS

Melbourne Montessori School is committed to communicating our child safety strategies to the School community through:

- Ensuring that key child safety and wellbeing policies are available on our website, including the *Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy* (this document), *Code of Conduct*, and the *Responding to Concerns of Child Abuse Neglect and Safety* procedures;
- Informing the students through their Pastoral Programs
- Updates in our School Community News, emails or Sentral; and
- Ensuring that child safety is a regular agenda item at School Leadership meetings, Staff meetings and School Board meetings.

PRIVACY AND INFORMATION SHARING

Melbourne Montessori School collects, uses and discloses information about children and their families in accordance with Victorian privacy laws and other relevant laws. For information on how our School collects, uses and discloses information refer to the School's Privacy Policy

RECORDS MANAGEMENT

We acknowledge that good records management practices are a critical element of child safety and wellbeing and manage our records in accordance with our *Records Management Policy*.

REVIEW OF CHILD SAFETY PRACTICES

At Melbourne Montessori School we have established processes for the review and ongoing improvement of our child safe policies, procedures and practices.

We will:

- Review and improve our policy every two years or after any significant child safety incident;
- Analyse any complaints, concerns and safety incidents to improve policy and practice; and
- Act with transparency and share pertinent learnings and review outcomes with School Staff and our School community where appropriate.

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RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

This Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy is to be read in conjunction with other related School policies, procedures and codes. These include our:

- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy*
- *Code of Conduct*
- *Community Expectations Policy*
- *Complaints Handling Policy*
- *Student Gender Identity Policy*
- *ICT – Responsible use Policies Student and Staff*
- *Mandatory Reporting Policy*
- *Privacy Policy*
- *Records Management Policy*
- *Responding to Concerns of Child Abuse Neglect and Safety procedures*
- *Statement on Equity*
- *Student Bullying and Harassment Policy*
- *Inclusion and Equity Policy*
- *Behaviour Management Policy*

Other related documents

- [Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#)
- [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#)
- [Identifying and Responding to Student Sexual Offending](#)
- [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Student Sexual Offending](#)
- [Recording your actions: Responding to suspected child abuse – A template for Victorian schools](#)