

CHILD SAFE POLICY

Scope

Mooroolbark East Primary School is committed to the protection and wellbeing of all students whilst participating in school activities both during and outside school hours. This includes online school environments (eg. email and intranet systems). Staff have responsibility for building and maintaining a child safe environment. This responsibility extends to the identification and timely response to concerns regarding the possible sexual, physical, psychological and emotional abuse or neglect of a child.

This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, service providers and contractors whether or not they work in direct contact with the students.

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); and
- The infliction, on a child, of
 - physical violence; or
 - serious emotional or psychological harm; and
- Serious neglect of a child.

Purpose

The Child Safe Policy identifies the school's approach to creating an organisation where children feel safe. Its purpose is to:

- Embed a culture of child safety within the school community.
- Raise awareness within the school community of the importance of child safety.
- Raise awareness of the needs of all children.
- Increase awareness of the need for sensitive and diverse approaches to child safety issues due to Indigenous, cultural or linguistic background or disability.
- Define the roles and responsibilities of the school and staff in protecting the safety and wellbeing of students.
- Ensure awareness of the processes for reporting child abuse.
- Define the rights and responsibilities of students.

Legislative Responsibilities

Mooroolbark East Primary School takes 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.¹
- **Failure to protect:** people of authority in Mooroolbark East Primary School will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.²
- Any personnel who are mandatory reporters must comply with their duties.³

Statement of Commitment

Mooroolbark East Primary School is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children. This will be the primary focus of our care and decision-making. Mooroolbark East Primary School has zero tolerance of child abuse.

¹ 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.

² Further information about the failure to protect offence is available on the Department of Justice and Regulation website.

³ 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.

Mooroolbark East Primary School is committed to providing a child safe environment where children 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 and Torres Strait children, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with a disability and vulnerable children.

Every person involved in Mooroolbark East Primary School has a responsibility to understand the important and specific role he/she plays 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 Mooroolbark East Primary School will:

- Take a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to child safety.
- Value and empower children to participate in decisions which affect their lives.
- Foster a culture of openness that supports all persons to safely disclose risks of harm to children.
- Respect diversity in cultures and child rearing practices while keeping child safety paramount.
- Provide written guidance on appropriate conduct and behaviour towards children.
- engage only the most suitable people to work with children and have high quality staff and volunteer supervision and professional development.
- 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.

By abiding by this statement, you acknowledge your responsibility to immediately report any breach of this policy to the Principal or a member of the leadership team.

Implementation

- Mooroolbark East Primary School 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, volunteers and the parent community. We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait children, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with a disability and vulnerable children.
- We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our policies and procedures.
- We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we have a concern about a child's safety.
- Any staff member who believes that a child is at immediate risk of abuse must notify the Principal or a member of the leadership team immediately.
- Our school is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks.
- Our school has robust human resources and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers.
- Our school is committed to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks, including, but not limited to, completing Mandatory Reporting Modules.
- The school's Child Safe Policy will be publicly available to help raise awareness about the importance of child safety in our organisation and demonstrate our commitment to protecting children from abuse. It will be published on the school's website and provided to new families on enrolment.
- New staff will be provided with a copy and briefed on the school's attitude to child safety as part of the induction process.
- Through liaising with School Council and the Junior School Council, will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute to the development and review of this policy.

Code of Conduct

Mooroolbark East Primary School leaders will ensure that each person understands their role, responsibilities and behaviour expected in protecting children and young people from abuse and neglect. Staff, contractors, visitors and volunteers will sign and comply with the school's Code of Conduct which sets out clear awareness of the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.

Listening to Children

Mooroolbark East Primary School has developed a safe, inclusive and supportive environment that involves and communicates with children 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 parents/carers informed about progress where appropriate.

Our children:

- Have the right to be treated with respect and to be protected from harm.
- Have the right to feel and be safe in their interactions with staff, contractors, volunteers or visitors.
- Need to understand what is meant by 'feeling and being safe'
- Will have the support of designated staff whose role includes being an advocate for their safety and wellbeing.
- 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 in all aspects of school life.

Leadership Statement

Working with children can be very rewarding, and it brings additional responsibilities. Mooroolbark East Primary School Leadership Team must act to protect children from abuse and build an environment where children feel respected, valued and encouraged to reach their full potential.

The Leadership Team will:

- Create a culture of child safety throughout Mooroolbark East Primary School, so that child safety is part of everyone's everyday thinking and practice.
- Provide proactive leadership in demonstrating the appropriate values, attitudes and behaviours of an organisation.
- Ensure a child safe environment is the product of a range of strategies and initiatives.
- Foster a culture of openness, inclusiveness and awareness.
- Support children and adults in what to do if they observe, or are subject to abuse or inappropriate behaviour.
- Ensure all staff and volunteers consider the safety of all children at Mooroolbark East Primary School; and recognise the importance and cultural safety for:
 - Aboriginal children
 - children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
 - children with a disability.
- Clearly identify the person/people who are to be notified for promptly managing responses to matters concerning an allegation or disclosure of child abuse.

Human Resources

Our school culture aims for all staff and volunteers (in addition to parents/carers and children) to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. We train our staff and volunteers to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

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

New employees and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand our philosophy and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse, as well as checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate. Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported to the Principal or Assistant Principal.

Mooroolbark East Primary School takes all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children. We develop selection criteria and advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities. Our school understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

All prospective staff and volunteers are required to undergo a National Criminal History Records check and maintain a valid Working with Children Check. A current VIT registration or Working with Children Check are to be sited prior to commencement of any duties.

Reporting a Child Safety Concern

Mooroolbark East Primary School has clear expectations for staff and volunteers in making a report about a child who may be in need of protection. Immediate action should include reporting their concerns to the DHHS, Child Protection or another appropriate agency and notifying the Principal or another member of the leadership team of their concerns and the reasons for those concerns. The school will support this concern by ensuring appropriate action is taken.

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 observed⁵
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- observing suspicious behaviour.

Risk Reduction and Management

Mooroolbark East Primary School believes the wellbeing of children is paramount, and is vigilant in ensuring proper risk management processes. The school recognises there are potential risks to children and will take a risk management approach by undertaking preventative measures.

Confidentiality and Privacy

This school collects, uses and discloses information about particular children and their families in accordance with Victorian privacy law.