

EMPOWERMENT AND PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN

Children have the right to give their views and opinions about decisions that affect them and to be listened to.

Empowerment is about helping children to have their say. Acting to empower children should always guide the work of Mooroolbark East Primary School. Participation is important for children because it gives them an opportunity to have a say about issues and decisions that affect them. Children are more likely to speak up about their concerns about feeling unsafe, or make a complaint, if they feel their views are valued and welcomed.

Benefits of empowering & supporting the participation of children:

- Participation and empowerment are vital components of a child safe school that benefits children, families and staff.
- Involving and consulting with children enables Mooroolbark East PS to improve its policies, practices and services as children provide a unique voice regarding what makes them feel safe and unsafe.
- Facilitating the empowerment and participation of children enhances a culture of child safety and listening to children within Mooroolbark East PS.
- Children and young people learn new skills, build self-esteem and develop an understanding of collaboration and rights.
- Children are more likely to report abuse or concerns if they feel safe and empowered in their school.
- Children feel their views are valued and listened to. Children are more likely to support the outcome if they have been involved.

How to encourage the empowerment & participation of children:

- Ensure participation is designed to be:
 - Ethical.
 - Age appropriate and child friendly.
 - Culturally respectful.
 - Inclusive of a diverse range of children, demonstrating respect for children of all ages, abilities, social and cultural backgrounds.
 - Positive and fun.
 - Voluntary and with informed consent.
 - Be clear, honest and realistic about the boundaries of a discussion and what can change.
- Give adequate time to consult and make sure the venue is appropriate.
- Listen to what you are being told by children – they may have a very different view to you or what you expect. Acknowledge, value and take seriously the views put forward by children.
- Ensure the adults involved are skilful in facilitating the participation of children.
- Be clear if the discussion will be confidential or if the outcomes will be made public.
- Monitor the impact your consultation may have had on the children involved.
- Ensure you have procedures in place to provide support to any child who may be distressed as a result of their involvement or disclosure of concerns.
- Provide feedback to children about the ways their views have informed decision-making

Some of the programs and processes at Mooroolbark East PS to ensure the empowerment and participation of children include:

- Learning to Learn program at the commencement of each school year.
- Student Engagement and Wellbeing Policy
- Health Development
- Social skills targeted groups
- The Resilience Project

- Individual adult mentors for children
- School Chaplain
- School Psychologist
- Life Ed
- Junior School Council
- ICT usage agreements
- Cyber Safety
- eSmart school
- Class meetings
- Circle Time
- Student behaviour expectations
- Student Welfare Officer (Assistant Principal)
- Student focus groups