

CHILD SAFE ENVIRONMENTS POLICY

Rationale

- Carwatha College P-12 is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people. This will be the primary focus of our care and decision-making, with particular attention 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.
- The child safe environments policy sets out the school's approach to creating a child safe organisation where children and young people are safe and feel safe; and provides the policy framework for the school's approach to the Child Safe Standards.
- This policy detailing procedures, measures and practices was developed in accordance with Ministerial Order No. 870 – Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools.

Definitions:

(The following definitions are taken from *Ministerial Order No. 870 (Child Safe Standards- Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools)*)

Child: A child enrolled as a student at the school.

Child abuse includes:

- (a) Any act committed against a child involving:
 - (i) A sexual offence
 - (ii) An offence under section 49B (2) of the **Crimes Act 1958** (grooming) and
- (b) The infliction, on a child, of-
 - (i) Physical violence; or
 - (ii) Serious emotional or psychological harm; and
- (c) Serious neglect of a child.

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.

Child-Connected:

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.

School environment:

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) A campus of the school
- (b) On-line 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).

School staff:

- (a) In a Government school, an individual working in a school environment who is;
 - (i) Employed under Part 2.4 of the ETR Act in the government teaching service; or
 - (ii) Employed under a contract of service by the council of the school under Part 2.3 of the ETR Act; or
 - (iii) A volunteer or a contracted service provider.

Implementation

- At Carwatha College P-12 we have 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.
- This policy applies to all staff, homestay providers, volunteers, contractors and visitors, whether or not they work in direct contact with children or young people.
- This policy applies to any physical or virtual place made available or authorised by the school including:
 - The school campus
 - Online school environments (including email and intranet systems)
 - Other locations provided by the school including, without limitation, locations used for school camps, sporting events, excursions, competitions and other events.
- Every person involved in the 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 our planning, decision-making and operations, we 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
 - 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
 - Report suspected abuse, neglect or mistreatment promptly to the appropriate authorities

- Share information appropriately and lawfully with other organisations where the safety and wellbeing of children is at risk
- Value the input of and communicate regularly with families and carers.
- The following procedures outline our approach to the Child Safe Standards. They need to be read in conjunction with the Child Safe Code of Conduct.
 - Staff are encouraged to raise, discuss and scrutinise concerns making it more difficult for abuse to occur and remain hidden.
 - School leadership will ensure that each person understands their role, responsibilities and behaviour expected in protecting children and young people from abuse and neglect.
 - The school applies best practice standards in the recruitment and screening of staff, and will take all reasonable steps to ensure that it engages the most suitable and appropriate people. 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. All prospective staff and volunteers are required to undergo National Criminal History Records check and maintain a valid Working with Children Check.
 - The College has clear expectations for staff in making a report about a child or young person who may be in need of protection as outlined in our Child Protection Reporting policy.
 - Considerable importance is placed on safeguarding the confidentiality and privacy of information about particular children and their families.
 - Staff are also required to fulfil legislative requirements including failure to disclose and failure to protect.

Failure to disclose offence

- In addition to mandatory reporting and duty of care obligations, any adult who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under 16 must report that information to police.
- Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence except in limited circumstances, such as where the information has already been reported to Child Protection or the child is older than 16 when the belief is formed. More information about the offence can be found at the following web link:
<http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence>.

Failure to protect offence

- This applies where there is substantial risk that a child under the age of 16 under the care, supervision or authority of a school will become a victim of a sexual offence committed by an adult associated with that school.
- A person in a position of authority in the school will commit the offence if they know of the risk of abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do to.

- Organisations other than schools are also covered by the offence. Further information can be found at the following web link:
<http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence>.
- All Carwatha College staff must act as soon as they witness an incident that breaches student safety or when they form a reasonable belief that a child has been or is at risk of being abused.
- Carwatha College will record any child safety complaints, disclosures or breaches of the Code of Conduct (and subsequent action) and store these to DET and Carwatha College security and privacy conventions.
- To make processes, understandings and obligations clear, our College has appointed a dedicated Child-Safety Officer (Student Wellbeing Co-ordinator) which staff must liaise with on all child safety areas.

Taking Action – Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

- Staff members of Carwatha College P-12 play a critical role in protecting children in their care; including:
 - Staff must act, by following the four critical actions, as soon as they witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a reasonable belief that a child has, or is at risk of being abused.
 - Staff must act if they form a suspicion / reasonable belief, even if they are unsure and have not directly observed child abuse (e.g. if the victim or another person tells them about the abuse).
 - Staff **must** use the *Responding to Suspected Child Abuse* template to keep clear and comprehensive notes.
 - Staff do not require the permission of parents, carers or guardians to make a report to Child Protection, nor are they required to tell parents, carers or guardians that they have done so.
 - Reports to Child Protection and Victoria Police are confidential unless you consent, or a court or tribunal decides that it is necessary in the interests of justice for your identity to be disclosed.

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, the staff member 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
 - Liaising with Carwatha College's Child Safety Officer at the school who will confer with Police on the specific incident.

Action 2: REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES

- As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed, the staff member **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.
- If the source of suspected abuse is from within our College, all staff members must report all instances of suspected child abuse and sexual abuse involving a school staff member, contractor or volunteer to Victoria Police.
- School staff **must also** report the incident **internally** to:
 - School Principal and/or leadership team
 - Employee Conduct Branch
 - DET Security Services Unit

- If the source of suspected abuse is from within the family or community, all staff **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.

Action 3: CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

- The 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 / carers (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 parents / carers 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).

Action 4: PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

- Carwatha College P-12 **will** provide ongoing support for children impacted by abuse via Student Support Plans, liaison with DET / External agencies, SSGs and wellbeing strategies.
- If a staff member believes that a child is not subject to abuse, but still holds **significant concerns** for their wellbeing, they 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.

Strategies in support of a child may include liaison and communication with, but not limited to, the following:

- DHHS Child Protection and Victoria Police;
- Regional Office and engagement of Student Incident and Recovery Unit (SIRU);
- Parents/carers of all impacted students (where appropriate, following advice from authorities);
- If an international student is impacted, liaison with International Education Division (Government schools);
- If an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Student is impacted, liaison with Koorie Education Officer;
- Liaison with Victoria Police;
- Ongoing communication and action as set out by the Employee Conduct Branch (Government schools).

Strategies of ongoing support of a child may include (but not limited to), the following:

- Overseeing the development of a short-term action plan for all children impacted by suspected abuse in consultation with the Region and the Student Incident and Recovery Unit (SIRU);
- Ensuring ongoing education and support services are provided for all children involved via formation of a Student Support Group (SSG), overseen by the Child Safety Officer and representatives from a number of support agencies, including Student Incident and Recovery Unit (SIRU);

- Developing, implementing and reviewing a **Student Support Plan** in partnership with children and their parents/carers, allied health workers and external support agencies where appropriate (this plan should list appropriate school-level and non-school based supports and should assist students in returning to school);
- Addressing concerns as they arise.

Provision of school-based wellbeing services for a child may include (but not limited to), the following:

- Continued monitoring of the situation and the health and wellbeing of impacted children and staff members;
Ensuring the provision of ongoing support for the children, families and staff members involved.

The Principal (or representative) will undertake a **review process between 4-6 weeks** after a report is made.

Please note: if a staff member believes that a child is not subject to abuse, but still holds **significant concerns** for their wellbeing, they 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.

Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed as part of the College's three-year cycle.

This policy was last ratified by School Council in

2018