

Vermont Primary School and Kindergarten

Child Safe Policy



Purpose

This Child Safe Policy is an overarching document that provides an overview of key elements of Vermont Primary School's approach to child safety.

Victorian organisations that provide services to children are required under the Child Safety and Wellbeing Act and Ministerial Order 870 to ensure that they implement compulsory child safe standards to create child safe environments and protect children from harm.

To create and maintain a child safe organisation, an entity to which the Child Safe Standards apply must have:

1. Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements.
2. A child safe policy or statement of commitment to child safety.
3. A code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children.
4. Screening, supervision, training and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel.
5. Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse.
6. Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse.
7. Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children.

Statement of Commitment

Vermont Primary School and Kindergarten is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people and is the primary focus of our care and decision making.

- We want children to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers in all school and kindergarten environments and outside of school hours care.
- We are committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all children.
- We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures.
- We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously.
- We are committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks. The school has robust human resources and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers and regularly trains and educates staff and volunteers on child abuse risks.
- We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers. We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, children from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability.
- We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our leadership team, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.
- **If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse phone 000.**

Guidelines

Our children

This policy is intended to empower children who are vital and active participants at Vermont Primary School and Kindergarten. We involve them when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say.

We promote diversity and tolerance in our organisation, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome. In particular we:

- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children
- 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

The students participate in an annual Child Safety Day where they take part in lessons and activities designed to empower them to know their rights, recognise unsafe situations, react and report.

Our staff and volunteers

This policy guides our staff and volunteers on how to behave with children at Vermont Primary School and Kindergarten.

All of our staff and volunteers must agree to abide by our code of conduct which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. All staff and volunteers, as well as children and their families, are given the opportunity to contribute to the development of the code of conduct.

Training and supervision

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone in our organisation understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility.

Our organisational 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 and promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, 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 Vermont Primary School and Kindergarten's commitment to child safety 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 through appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

Relevant child safety information will be included in enrolment, parent, contractor and volunteer induction packs. Volunteers to the school undertake induction, are expected to sign the Child Safety Code of Conduct and must have a current Working with Children Check.

Recruitment

Vermont Primary School takes 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. Vermont Primary School and Kindergarten understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

We actively encourage applications from Aboriginal peoples, people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability.

All people engaged in child-related work, including volunteers, are required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this Check.

We carry out reference checks and police record checks to ensure that we are recruiting the right people. Police record checks are used only for the purposes of recruitment and are discarded after the recruitment process is complete. We do retain our own records (but not the actual criminal record) if an applicant's criminal history affected our decision making process.

If during the recruitment process a person's records indicate a criminal history then the person will be given the opportunity to provide further information and context.

Fair procedures for personnel

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and just to personnel. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form, including investigation updates. All records are securely stored.

If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to children and families on progress and any actions we as an organisation take.

Privacy

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be staff, volunteers, parents or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. Vermont Primary School and Kindergarten have safeguards and practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected. Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will have access to it in accordance with the Department's Privacy Policy.

Legislative responsibilities

Vermont Primary School and Kindergarten 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.
- **Failure to protect:** People of authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.
- Any personnel who are **mandatory reporters** must comply with their duties.
- Non-teaching staff have an obligation to report if they form a reasonable belief that a child is at risk of harm.

Allegations, concerns and complaints

Vermont Primary School and Kindergarten takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our staff and volunteers are trained to deal appropriately with allegations.

We work to ensure all children, families, staff and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour. This is located in the Allegations of Abuse Procedures.

We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place.

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 observed¹
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- observing suspicious behaviour.

Risk management

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified. In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our children.

We have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks, which include risks posed by physical environments (for example, any doors that can lock), and online environments (for example, no staff or volunteer is to have contact with a child in organisations on social media).

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years and following significant incidents if they occur. We will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute. Where possible we do our best to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

This policy works in conjunction with:

- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Child Safety Allegations of Abuse
- Engagement and Wellbeing Policy and Procedures
- Bullying and Harassment Policy and Procedures
- eSmart Policy and Procedures
- Working with Children's Check Policy and Procedures
- Mandatory Reporting Policy and Procedures
- Professional Development Policy and Procedures
- Child Safety Day Curriculum and Parent Brochure

Further Information

- Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority child Safe Standards website www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/childsafes
- Victorian Institute of Teaching www.vit.edu.au
- Department of Human Services www.dhs.vic.gov.au