

## COLAC SECONDARY COLLEGE

### CHILD SAFETY POLICY

#### PURPOSE

Colac Secondary College is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all young people. This will be the primary focus of our care and decision-making. Colac Secondary College has a commitment to **zero tolerance of child abuse**. We support and respect all young people as well as our staff and volunteers.

Colac Secondary College is committed to providing a child safe environment where children and young people feel safe, and their voices are heard when decisions are made that affect their lives. We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability.

We want all children at this school to be safe, happy and empowered. Every person involved in Colac Secondary College has a responsibility to understand the importance 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. We have legal and moral obligations, which we follow rigorously, to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety.

#### SCOPE

- To ensure all children feel safe and supported at school.
- To prevent child abuse by identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks.
- To ensure that processes and procedures are in place to protect children from child abuse.
- To value and empower children in decision-making processes.
- To ensure that all staff (including contractors), volunteers, visitors to the school and parents/carers, understand the school's child safety guidelines and how to behave appropriately with and towards children.
- To comply with Ministerial Order No. 870 and the Child Safety Standards.
- To comply with the Working with Children Amendment Act 2016 (Vic).
- To comply with the Wrongs Amendment (Organisational Child Abuse) Act 2017.
- To comply with the requirements of The Reportable Conduct Scheme.
- To comply with reporting obligations under child protection law and criminal law.

#### DEFINITIONS

**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 abuse** includes any act committed against a child involving:

- a sexual offence
- a grooming offence; or
- the infliction on a child of physical violence, serious emotional or psychological harm or serious neglect.

**School staff** includes individuals working in a school environment who are:

- employed under Part 2.4 of the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (ETR Act)
- in the government teaching service; or
- employed under a contract of service by the council of the school under Part 2.3 of the ETR Act; or
- volunteers or contracted service providers (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary).

**Child-connected work** includes all 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** includes 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 campus of the school;
- online school environments (including email and intranet systems); and
- 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).

Definitions taken from the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) website: <http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/childsafes/Pages/default.html>

**Child safety reforms:**

#### **The Reportable Conduct Scheme**

The Reportable Conduct Scheme requires principals to bring all allegations of 'reportable conduct' by employees, contractors, volunteers, allied health staff and school council employees to the attention of the Department's Employee Conduct Branch.

#### **Organisational Duty of Care**

A statutory duty of care has been created under the *Wrongs Amendment (Organisational Child Abuse) Act 2017* (see Part XIII of *Wrongs Act 1958*) to ensure there is a clear legal duty placed on organisations to take reasonable steps to minimise the risk of child abuse, perpetrated by organisational representatives.

## **WWCC**

On 1 August 2017, a series of changes were introduced to the Victorian Working with Children Check (**WWCC**) scheme through the *Working with Children Amendment Act 2016 (Vic) (the Amending Act)*. These changes are intended to further strengthen the scheme by implementing recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse (**Commission**).

**See WWCC Policy**

## **Child Safety Principles**

Colac Secondary College is committed to child safety. In its planning, decision-making and operations we will:

1. Take a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to child safety;
2. Value and empower children to participate in decisions which affect their lives;
3. Foster a culture of openness that supports all persons to safely disclose risks of harm to children;
4. Respect diversity in cultures and child rearing practices while keeping child safety paramount;
5. Provide written guidance on appropriate conduct and behaviour towards children;
6. Engage only the most suitable people to work with children and have high quality staff and volunteer supervision and professional development;
7. 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;
8. Report suspected abuse, neglect or mistreatment promptly to the appropriate authorities;
9. Share information appropriately and lawfully with other organisations where the safety and wellbeing of children is at risk; and
10. Value the input of and communicate regularly with families and carers.

## **Strategies to embed a child safe culture**

Colac Secondary College's culture encourages staff, students, parents and the school community to raise, discuss and scrutinize child safety concerns. This makes it more difficult for abuse to occur and remain hidden. Child safety is everyone's responsibility.

**All school staff** are required to:

- Act in accordance with the school's Child Safety Code of Conduct, which clearly sets out the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour
- Act in accordance with the Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedures at all times, including following the [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#) where necessary
- Act in accordance with their legal obligations, including:
  - Failure to disclose offence (applies to all adults)
  - Duty of care (applies to all school staff)
  - Mandatory reporting obligations (applies to all mandatory reporters, including teachers, principals, registered psychologists, and registered doctors and nurses)

- Failure to protect offence (applies to a person in a position of authority within the school)
- Reportable conduct obligations (applies to all school staff in reporting conduct to the principal, and applies to the principal in reporting to Employee Conduct Branch)
- Organisational duty of care (applies to the school as an organisation)
- For more information on these obligations, see [Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#).

### **Our Children:**

This policy is intended to empower children who are vital and active members of the Colac Secondary College community. We will involve them when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. We will listen to their views and respect what they have to say. We will promote diversity and tolerance at this school and promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of all children. We will promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children and Torres Strait islanders. We will promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds. We will work to ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate equally. Colac Secondary College staff will endeavour to deliver appropriate education about child abuse awareness and prevention to the students.

Colac Secondary College has developed a safe, inclusive and supportive environment that involves and communicates with children, young people 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. Our school is committed to supporting and encouraging students to use their voice to raise and share their concerns with a trusted adult at any time of need.

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 and take them seriously, check understanding and keep the child (and/or their parents/carers, as appropriate) informed about progress.

Colac Secondary College staff will endeavour to promote the Child Safe Standards in ways that are readily accessible, easy to understand, and user-friendly for children, including:

- PROTECT Child Safety posters will be displayed across the school
- School newsletters will inform students and the school community about the school's commitment to child safety, and strategies or initiatives that the school is taking to ensure student safety
- Age-appropriate discussion of child safety with students
- Students making and displaying their own child safety posters.

The school will use its health and wellbeing programs, to deliver appropriate education to its students about:

- standards of behaviour for students attending the school;
- healthy and respectful relationships;
- resilience; and

- child abuse awareness and prevention.

**Recruitment:**

Colac Secondary College follows the Department's Recruitment in Schools guide to ensure child safe recruitment practices, available on the [Department's website](#). We take 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.

When recruiting staff and volunteers we are aware that we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

- All people engaged in child-connected work, including volunteers, are required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this check.
- When employing staff we carry out reference checks and police record checks.
- All teachers employed at this school must be registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching.
- All prospective volunteers are required to comply with our school's Volunteers Policy, including in relation to assessing the suitability of prospective volunteers and obtaining checks required under this policy.

**Staff and Volunteers:**

This policy as well as our **Child Safety Code of Conduct** guides the school's staff and volunteers on how to behave with children in our organisation. All staff and volunteers must agree to the **Child Safety Code of Conduct** which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children.

**Training and Supervision:**

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone in our school understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility. Training includes developing skills to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse. This training occurs annually or more often as required.

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

New employees and volunteers will be inducted into the school, including being referred to the Child Safety Policy (this document), the Child Safety Code of Conduct, and the Child Protection Reporting Policy on the school website. New employees and volunteers will also be regularly supervised. This is to ensure they understand the school's commitment to child safety and that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate, with reference to the school's **Child Safety Code of Conduct**.

All employees of our school will be monitored and assessed via regular performance review to ensure their continuing suitability for child-connected work. Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported by school staff to the Principal or Assistant Principal and will be managed in accordance with Colac Secondary College's Child Protection Reporting Policy where required.

### **Allegations, Concerns and Complaints:**

Our school culture aims for all staff and volunteers as well as parents/carers and children to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. We are aware that some people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds may face barriers reporting allegations of abuse or that for some communication in English may be a barrier. We will endeavour to be sensitive to these issues and meet people's needs where possible.

Colac Secondary College has protocols and procedures in place to enable all staff and volunteers as well as parents/carers and children, to raise any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. All staff (including school council employees) must follow the school's Child Protection Reporting (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy, including following the [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#) if there is an incident, disclosure or suspicion of child abuse. Immediate actions should include reporting their concerns to DHHS Child Protection, Victoria Police and/or another appropriate agency and notifying the principal or a member of the school leadership team of their concerns and the reasons for those concerns.

Colac Secondary College will never prohibit or discourage school staff from reporting an allegation of child abuse. The school will always take action to respond to a complaint in accordance with the school's Child Protection Reporting (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy. In accordance with Action 4 of the Four Critical Actions for Schools, Colac Secondary College will provide ongoing support for students affected by child abuse.

Depending on the severity and urgency of the matter any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels which may include:

- The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) – Child Protection
- Victoria Police

**Legislative responsibilities:** - This school takes its 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 police.
- **Failure to protect:** A person in a position of authority in an organisation will commit this 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 so.

### **Child Abuse:**

Colac Secondary College takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to respond quickly and thoroughly. Such issues can be reported to:

- The Principal
- The Child Safety Officer-Assistant Principal
- Teachers at the school.

Our staff have been trained to deal appropriately with allegations, as well as how to support or assist children who disclose child abuse or are otherwise linked to suspected child abuse. In such situations the school will follow actions outlined in the Child Protection Reporting Policy. This policy outlines our clear expectations for all staff and volunteers in making a report about a young person who might be in need of protection.

The Department of Education & Training (DET) guide 'Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools' includes comprehensive, detailed guidance and support for all staff.

**First and foremost, we will ensure that children are safe from harm** after which we will follow the procedures outlined in this document. This process includes making appropriate reports, following up and ensuring that children and any others involved receive appropriate support. We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns on Compass as a chronicle entry for individual students. All information is considered confidential and reports will be held securely.

Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported to DHHS Child Protection/Police/Child FIRST Report depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

We each 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/protect). 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 observed
- Someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- Observing suspicious behaviour.

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.

#### **Risk Management:**

Colac Secondary College believes the wellbeing of children and young people is paramount, and is vigilant in ensuring proper risk management processes. The school recognises there are potential risks to children and young people and will take a risk management approach by undertaking preventative measures. We will identify and mitigate the risks of child abuse in school environments by taking into account the nature of each school environment, the activities expected to be conducted in that environment and the characteristics and needs of all children expected to be present in that environment. Colac Secondary College monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of the actions it takes to reduce or remove risks to child safety.

The school has risk management strategies to identify, assess and take steps to minimise child abuse risks which include risks posed by physical environments and online environments.

The school's risk management includes:

- The Child Safety Code of Conduct – outlines acceptable and unacceptable behaviour with respect to child safety and child abuse. The Child Safety Code of Conduct is publically available.
- Child Safety Policy
- Child Safety Risk Register
- Child Safety Officer works towards embedding the above articulated strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety
- Strategies to embed an organisational culture of Child Safety

- Strategies for promoting the empowerment and participation of children
- Screening as part of the staff recruitment process
- Working With Children checks, Police Record checks, reference checks
- Sign in processes at the school office
- On and off site supervision of children during recess and lunch breaks as well 15 minutes before and after school – staff carry mobile phones
- ICT Acceptable Use Agreement for students
- Teacher supervision of student internet usage
- Cyber safety lessons
- Protocols to ensure children do not move around the school individually during class time
- Out of bounds areas in the school to ensure that children are not placed at risk
- Staff and volunteer training
- Child safe environments information and awareness for visitors, staff, volunteers and contractors
- Visitors and Volunteers Policy
- Adequate monitoring of visitors, staff, volunteers and contractors
- Refresher training for staff, including eLearning mandatory reporting module.

### **Confidentiality and privacy**

This school collects, uses and discloses information about particular children and their families in accordance with Victorian privacy law. The principles regulating the collection, use and storage of information is included in the Department of Education and Training’s [Schools’ Privacy Policy](#).

### **Related policies AND RESOURCES**

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/protect/Pages/chilsafestandards.aspx>  
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/safety/Pages/child-protection.aspx>

- Risk assessment register
- [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](#)
- [School Policy and Advisory Guide – Child Protection Reporting Obligations](#).

### **Appendices:**

Appendix A: Child Safety Code of Conduct

### **EVALUATION**

This policy will be reviewed every three to four years or more frequently if necessary due to changes in regulations or circumstances.

Council Approval date	June 2021
Review date	2024
DET/VRQA required	Yes



## **APPENDIX A: CHILD SAFETY CODE OF CONDUCT**

Colac Secondary College is committed to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. Our school community recognises the importance of, and has a responsibility for, ensuring our school is a safe, supportive and enriching environment which respects and fosters the dignity and self-esteem of children and young people, and enables them to thrive in their learning and development.

This Code of Conduct aims to protect children and reduce any opportunities for child abuse or harm to occur. It also assists in understanding how to avoid or better manage risky behaviours and situations. It is intended to complement child protection legislation, Department policy, school policies and procedures and professional standards, codes or ethics as these apply to staff and other personnel.

The Principal and school leaders of Colac Secondary College will support the implementation and monitoring of the Code of Conduct, and will plan, implement and monitor arrangements to provide inclusive, safe and orderly schools and other learning environments. The Principal and school leaders of Colac Secondary College will also provide information and support to enable the Code of Conduct to operate effectively.

All staff, contractors, volunteers and any other member of the school community involved in child-related work are required to comply with the Code of Conduct by observing expectations for appropriate behaviour below. The Code of Conduct applies in all school situations, including school camps and in the use of digital technology and social media.

### **Acceptable Behaviours**

As staff, volunteers, contractors, and any other member of the school community involved in child-related work individually, we are responsible for supporting and promoting the safety of children by:

- upholding the school's statement of commitment to child safety at all times and adhering to the school's Child Safety Policy.
- treating students and families in the school community with respect both within the school environment and outside the school environment as part of normal social and community activities.
- listening and responding to the views and concerns of students, particularly if they are telling you that they or another child has been abused or that they are worried about their safety/the safety of another child.
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of students with culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- promoting the safety, participation and empowerment of students with a disability.
- reporting any allegations of child abuse or other child safety concerns to the school's leadership or child safety officer.
- understanding and complying with all reporting or disclosure obligations (including mandatory reporting) as they relate to protecting children from harm or abuse.

- making reasonable efforts to ensure as quickly as possible that the student(s) are safe and protected from harm if child abuse is suspected.

### **Unacceptable Behaviours**

As staff, volunteers, contractors, and any other member of the school community involved in child-related work we must not:

- ignore or disregard any concerns, suspicions or disclosures of child abuse.
- develop a relationship with any student that could be seen as favouritism or amount to 'grooming' behaviour (for example, offering gifts).
- exhibit behaviours or engage in activities with students which may be interpreted as abusive and not justified by the educational, therapeutic, or service delivery context.
- ignore behaviours by other adults towards students when they appear to be overly familiar or inappropriate.
- discuss content of an intimate nature or use sexual innuendo with students, except where it occurs relevantly in the context of parental guidance, delivering the education curriculum or a therapeutic setting.
- treat a child unfavorably because of their disability, age, gender, race, culture, vulnerability, sexuality or ethnicity.
- communicate directly with a student through personal or private contact channels (including by social media, email, instant messaging, texting etc.) except where that communication is reasonable in all the circumstances, related to school work or extra-curricular activities or where there is a safety concern or other urgent matter.
- photograph or video a child in a school environment except in accordance with school policy or where required for duty of care purposes.
- in the school environment or at other school events where students are present, consume alcohol contrary to school policy or take illicit drugs under any circumstances.