

NEERIM DISTRICT SECONDARY COLLEGE CHILD SAFETY POLICY

Rationale

Neerim District Secondary College 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. Neerim District Secondary College has a commitment to zero tolerance of child abuse. We support and respect all children as well as our staff and volunteers.

Neerim District 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 and also vulnerable children.

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

Purpose

This policy guides our staff, volunteers, visitors, contractors connected to the school environment on how to behave with children in our school.

- 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 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
- an offence under section 49B(2) of the Crimes Act 1958 (grooming)
- the infliction on a child of:
 - physical violence or
 - serious emotional or psychological harm or
 - serious neglect of a child

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 VRQA website:

<http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/childsafes/Pages/default.html>

Guidelines

Neerim District Secondary College is committed to child safety. In its planning, decision-making and operations Neerim District Secondary College 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.

- Neerim District Secondary College's School Council and leadership team will rigorously monitor the school's adherence to this child safety policy.
- All of our staff (including contractors and volunteers) must agree to abide by the school's Child Safety Code of Conduct which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children.
- Neerim District Secondary College has specific policies and procedures in place to support our leadership team, staff and volunteers to achieve our commitments.
- Neerim District Secondary College is committed to supporting and enabling our staff and volunteers through provision of regular training and education on child abuse risks.
- Child Safety will be a standard agenda item for school council and school meetings.

- Neerim District Secondary College has 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.
- The Principal or Delegate, will assume the role of the primary Child Safety Officer, acting as a source of support, advice and expertise to staff on matters of child safety.
- This policy covers all school environments both during and outside of school hours, including any physical or virtual place made available or authorised by the School Council or the Principal.
- In implementing the minimum child safety standards Neerim District Secondary College will take account of the diversity of all children, including (but not limited to) the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with disabilities, and children who are vulnerable; and make reasonable efforts to accommodate these matters.
- Neerim District Secondary College is committed to lifelong learning by providing an inclusive, supportive and nurturing community in which diversity is valued and celebrated. This underpins our commitment to child safety and the Child Safety Standards.
- Neerim District Secondary College will make reasonable efforts to communicate our child safety policies and procedures to the Neerim District Secondary College community.

Staff and Volunteers:

This policy as well as the **Child Safety Code of Conduct** guides the school's staff and volunteers on how to behave with children in our organisation. Anyone who comes into direct contact with children as part of their paid or voluntary work at the school, must agree to the school's **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.

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 and Torres Strait Islander 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 and also vulnerable students.

New employees and volunteers will be regularly supervised. This is to ensure they understand the school's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse. It is also for the purpose of checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate with reference to the school's **Child Safety Code of Conduct**.

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.

Recruitment

Neerim District Secondary College will 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.

Fair Procedures for Personnel

The safety and well-being 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.

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. We 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.

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. Neerim District 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.

Our school 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. We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place (see failure to disclose information below).

Fulfilling the role and responsibilities contained in the reporting procedure does not displace or discharge any other obligation to report to DHS/The Police or Child First, if a person reasonably believes that a child is being abused or at risk of abuse.

Staff will consult with the Principal or Acting Principal (if the Principal is away) when making a report. The Principal/Acting Principal will support the staff member through the reporting process if required. This does not absolve the staff member of their legal obligation to report.

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 disclose information to Victoria Police (by calling 000 or local police station) as soon as practicable may amount to a criminal offence unless a person has a 'reasonable excuse' or exemption from doing so. For more information about this reporting obligation, see the Department's *School Policy and Advisory Guide: [Failure to disclose offence](#)*.

- **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. Any personnel who are mandatory reporters must comply with their duties.
If a school staff member in a position of authority fails to take reasonable steps in these circumstances, this may amount to a criminal offence.
For more information about this reporting obligation, see the Department's *School Policy and Advisory Guide*: [Failure to protect offence](#).

Any personnel who are mandatory reporters must comply with their duties.

Child Abuse:

Neerim District 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
- Teachers at the school
- Any other responsible adult 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 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 using the Child Safety Incident Report form. All information is considered confidential and written 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:

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified. In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, Neerim District Secondary College proactively manages risks of abuse to children by removing and reducing these risks and follows the Child Safety Standards.

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 publicly available.
- Appointing a Child Safety Officer
- 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
- 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
- Adequate monitoring of visitors, staff, volunteers and contractors
- Refresher training for staff - see eLearning mandatory reporting module

This policy was last updated on May 8th 2019 and is scheduled for review on May 2020

References

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/protect/Pages/childsafestandards.aspx>

<http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/childsafe/Pages/default.html>

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/Pages/spag.aspx>.

‘Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools’

‘Protecting children from abuse: for parents and carers’

Related Policies

- Child Protection Reporting Policy
- Child Protection Step by Step Guide
- Child Safety Incident Report form
- 4 Actions
 - On-Site Supervision Policy
 - Bullying and Harassment Policy
 - Critical incident Policy
 - Duty of Care Policy
 - Excursions/Incursions Policy
 - Student Engagement and Wellbeing Policy
 - Visitors and Volunteers Policy
 - Working with Children Policy

Appendices

Appendix A: Child Safe Code of Conduct