



# CHILD SAFETY IN SCHOOLS

Prepared by: Elle Guthrie

# BACKGROUND

The Child Safe Standards (the Standards) are compulsory minimum standards for all organisations that provide services to children including Victorian schools. The aim of the Standards is to ensure organisations are well prepared to protect children from abuse and neglect.

The Standards provide a framework to identify gaps and improve policy and practices around child safety. On 26 November 2015, the Victorian Parliament passed the Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment (Child Safe Standards) Bill 2015 to introduce seven child safe standards (the Standards) into law. The Standards apply to all organisations involved in child-related work in Victoria.

**Ministerial Order No. 870** provides the framework for how schools will be required to comply with the Standards. It came into effect on 1 August 2016. To implement the minimum Standards in accordance with the Order school governing authorities must:

- a) 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
- b) make reasonable efforts to accommodate such diversity.

Overall responsibility for ensuring compliance rests with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA).

# CHILD SAFE INCLUSION PRINCIPLES

The Child Safe Standards are underpinned by the understanding that all children are vulnerable. However, three overarching principles require organisations to consider the increased vulnerability of:

- Aboriginal children
- those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- children with disabilities.

These groups of children and young people may be particularly vulnerable to being victimised and may face challenges in reporting an incident of abuse.

We also encourage you to consider the needs of same sex attracted and intersex children and young people, and recognise gender diversity in providing a safe environment.

Research shows that providing safe environments for vulnerable children has positive, lifelong impacts that cannot be underestimated.

# STANDARD ONE

## Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety

Schools must plan, implement and review strategies that will embed a culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements.

It is crucial that child safety is part of the everyday thinking and practice of all within the school or the community.

**What does it mean to have a culture of child safety?** <https://youtu.be/wG0xB13A68U>

### **How does the School achieve this?**

- Allocation of a designated Child Protection Officer
- Regular agenda item at all SAC meetings, governance meetings and staff meetings
- Commitment to achieving a culture of Child Safety

# STANDARD TWO

## A child safe policy or statement of commitment to child safety

Child Safe Standard 2 requires schools to develop and publicly communicate a Statement of Commitment to child safety and/or a school child safe policy.

A Statement of Commitment to child safety helps raise awareness about the importance of child safety in the school and the community and affirms the organisation's commitment to child safety and expectations.

A child safe policy is an overarching document that provides key elements of an organisation's approach for child safe environments.

### **What does a Child Safe Policy and Statement of Commitment cover?**

<https://youtu.be/5kN1p1fz21M>

### **How does the School achieve this?**

- **Child Safety Policy and Procedure**
- **Statement of Commitment to Child Safety**

# STANDARD THREE

**A code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children**

Child Safe Standard 3 requires schools to develop a Child Safety Code of Conduct.

A Code of Conduct lists behaviours that are acceptable and those that are unacceptable. It identifies professional boundaries, ethical behaviour and how to avoid or better manage difficult situations.

<https://youtu.be/CVJHEF9LKNY>

**How does the School achieve this?**

- **Child Safety Code of Conduct**

# STANDARD FOUR

**Screening, supervision, training and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel**

Child Safe Standard 4 requires schools to use policies and procedures for recruitment, supervision, training and managing performance that support a child safe school environment.

Strong human resources practices promote child safe school environments and reduce the risk of child abuse.

<https://youtu.be/6ymDBvCiQcl>

**How does the School achieve this?**

- **Follows the CECV Guidelines on the Employment of Staff in Catholic Schools**
- **Conducts thorough background checks on all employees**
- **Induction program which including Child Safety**
- **Strategies statement which outlines how the school will address this standard.**

# STANDARD FIVE

## Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse

Organisations have a responsibility to promote and provide an environment in which children, staff and volunteers are encouraged to speak up when they are uncomfortable or concerned.

<https://youtu.be/-80NSH-2LRg>

**How does the School achieve this?**

- **Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures**
- **Displaying the Protect resources**
- **Enforcing the completion of the Mandatory Reporting e-Learning Module.**

# STANDARD SIX

## Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse

Child Safe Standard 6 requires schools to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate risk management strategies to ensure child safety in school environments.

A child safety risk management strategy is a formal and structured approach to managing risks associated with child safety.

### **How does the School achieve this?**

- **Strategies statement which outlines how the school will manage the risk of child abuse.**
- **Detailed Risk Assessment which is regularly reviewed.**

# STANDARD SEVEN

Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children.

<https://youtu.be/U4xXPkALQxc>

Children have unique insights into their lives, their needs and the world around them. They have a right to be heard and have their concerns and ideas taken seriously, particularly on matters that affect them – including how to keep them safe.

Enabling and promoting the participation of children includes:

- supporting children and young people to understand their rights, contribute to child safety planning and raise concerns
- promoting and encouraging children's participation in decision-making
- valuing and respecting children's opinions
- seeking children's views about what makes them feel safe and unsafe
- establishing an environment of trust and inclusion that enables children to ask questions and speak up if they are worried or feeling unsafe.

**How does the School achieve this?**

- **Strategies statement which outlines how the school will encourage participation and empowerment of children**
- **Student Friendly Version of the Child Safety Policy developed by students.**
- **Delivers appropriate education about:**
  - standards of behaviour for students attending the school
  - healthy and respectful relationships (including sexuality)
  - resilience
  - child abuse awareness and prevention.

# ACHIEVING COMPLIANCE

On 15 November 2016, legislation was passed to amend the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 in Victoria. This legislation gives us powers to oversee and enforce organisations' compliance with the standards.

## **What are the steps to becoming Child Safe Standards compliant?**

### **1. Identify risks**

- Start conversations about child safety;
- scan your physical and virtual environments for risks;
- think about how your activities and staffing and processes might impact risks;
- understand the vulnerabilities of the children who you work with;
- look at any previous reports or incidents in your organisation and how you responded; and
- understand the social and cultural factors that contribute to child safety risks.

### **2. Assess and evaluate the risks**

- Understand the nature of the risks, assess the likelihood of the risks occurring, and the harm that could occur if the risk is not removed or reduced.

### **3. Take steps to reduce or remove the risk**

- Develop an action plan for your organisation to eliminate or reduce the risks to child safety you identify; and
- make sure you think about all of the standards in this process and actions taken to meet the standards.

### **4. Review and improve your strategy**

- Your child safe approach and process should be regularly reviewed and improved. Developing a culture of child safety in your organisation or business required ongoing attention and focus.

# CONSEQUENCES OF UNACCEPTABLE PERFORMANCE OR FAILURE TO COMPLY

The Commission for Children and Young People has a number of legislative tools available to use in enforcing compliance with the Child Safe Standards under the Act.

- Requesting Information
- Conducting on-site inspections
- Issuing a notice to produce
- Issuing a notice to comply
- Reporting
- Civil penalties
- Court action as a last resort enforcement tool.

# CONCLUSION

Every Child has the right to a full and productive life. It is up to all of us to ensure our children grow up in environments that build confidence, friendship, security and happiness, irrespective of a person's family circumstances or background.

The challenge of protecting children is everyone's responsibility: parents, schools, communities, governments and businesses. Everyone has a role to play. We commend this joint protocol to you.

## QUESTIONS?