Child Protection Policy

Introduction

Yarra Valley Grammar is committed to promoting and protecting the interests and safety of children. The School has a zero tolerance for child abuse. Everyone working at the School is responsible for the care and protection of children and for reporting information about child abuse.

If any person believes a child is in immediate risk of abuse, telephone 000 and ask to speak to the Police.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

(a) Prevent child abuse occurring within the School
(b) Promote an organisational culture of child safety
(c) Ensure that all parties are aware of their responsibilities for identifying possible occasions for child abuse and for establishing controls and procedures for preventing such abuse and/or detecting such abuse when it occurs
(d) Provide guidance as to action that should be taken should abuse be suspected within or outside of the School
(e) Provide assurance that any and all suspected abuse will be reported and fully investigated.

Scope

This policy applies to all students (over the age of 18 years), employees, volunteers, contractors, and Board members of the School, whether they work face-to-face, online or remotely with children.

Note that a child is defined as a person under the age of 18 years, or as according to the applicable legislation.

Guiding principles

This policy is based on the following guiding principles:

(i) the School has zero tolerance for child abuse
(ii) the best interests of the child are paramount
(iii) child protection is a shared responsibility
(iv) all children have a right to feel safe and be safe at school, and have equal rights to protection from abuse
(v) the School may consider the opinions of students and use their opinions to develop child protection policies and procedures
(vi) the School is committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, and those from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for students living with a disability
(vii) everyone covered by this policy must also comply with the School’s Code of Conduct, which sets stringent standards for personal behaviour
(viii) all children, regardless of their gender, race, religious beliefs, age, disability, sexual orientation, or family or social background, have equal rights to protection from abuse.
References:
YVG Staff Code of Conduct
YVG Privacy Policy
YVG Social Media Policy
YVG Bullying and Violence Policy
YVG School Interaction on On-line Social Networks Procedures
VRQA Child Safe standards

Child Safety Officers

Nominated and trained Child Safety Officers (CSOs) are available to listen, discuss and clarify issues confronting individuals in relation to child physical and sexual abuse. The CSOs will make reports on behalf of the School and ensure that adequate records are maintained. The CSOs at Yarra Valley Grammar are the Student Wellbeing staff at Junior and Secondary School levels and the School Chaplain.

Recognising child abuse

Child abuse may be divided into four categories: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional and psychological abuse and neglect:

Physical abuse: Physical abuse is any form of non-accidental physical injury, injury or violence which results from wilful or neglectful failure to protect a child or young person;

Sexual abuse: Sexual abuse is when a child or young person is used by another person for his or her gratification or sexual arousal or for that of others (this includes grooming behaviour);

Serious emotional and psychological abuse: Emotional and psychological abuse is when a child has suffered or is likely to suffer emotional or psychological harm of such a kind that the child’s emotional or intellectual development is or is likely to be, significantly damaged and the child’s parents have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from harm of that type;

Neglect: Neglect is an omission, where the child or young person suffers serious harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment to and affection from adults, medical care.

Reporting obligations

Mandatory reporting obligations

Certain professionals must make a report to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) when, in the course of their position or employment:

(a) they form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection because the child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical injury or sexual abuse; and

(b) the child’s parents or caregiver have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from harm.

At the School, mandatory reporters include the Principal, registered teachers, nurses, youth and child welfare workers (Mandatory Reporters).
Mandatory reporters are required by law to notify DHHS as soon as practicable after forming such a belief, and after each occasion on which they become aware of any further reasonable grounds for the belief.

It is not mandatory to report emotional and psychological abuse or neglect, but all staff are at liberty to do so.

**Reasonable Grounds for Belief**

Reasonable grounds to notify exist when:

(a) a child states that he/she has been physically or sexually abused

(b) a child states that they know someone who has been physically or sexually abused (sometimes the child is talking about themselves)

(c) someone else, such as a relative, friend, acquaintance or sibling of the child, tells you that a child has been abused

(d) your observations of the child’s behaviour or knowledge of children lead you to believe that the child has been abused; or

(e) you observe physical signs or indicators of abuse (e.g. bruises, cuts etc.).

**Voluntary reporting**

Any person who believes on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from child abuse, may disclose that information to the Police or the DHHS. If a person would like internal guidance or support with addressing their concerns, they are encouraged to speak with a Child Safety Officer at the School. This will help the School to meet its obligations to protect children from potential abuse to the greatest extent possible.

**Prevention**

**Recruitment**

The School undertakes a comprehensive recruitment and screening process for all employees, volunteers and contractors which aims to:

(a) promote and protect the safety of all children at the School

(b) identify and recruit the safest and most suitable candidates who share the School’s values and commitment to protect children; and

(c) prevent a person from working at the School if they pose an unacceptable risk to children.

All employees, volunteers and contractors engaged by the School as classroom teachers must be registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching, which includes Working with Children Checks (WWCC). Teachers must provide evidence of such registration before they commence employment, and are informed of the School’s Child Protection Policy, Code of Conduct and Procedures within their Letter of Appointment.

All non-teaching employees, volunteers and contractors engaged at the School are required to have a current and valid WWCC prior to being engaged by the School. The School records all WWCCs which are validated annually to determine who requires a renewal.
School Board members are also required to have current WWCCs, which are recorded and checked by the Corporate Services Manager.

The School will conduct thorough and documented reference checks to ensure the suitability of all candidates prior to their engagement or appointment to the Board. Once engaged, employees, contractors, volunteers and Board members must review and acknowledge their understanding of the Child Protection Policy, Code of Conduct and Procedure as a part of their Induction process.

**Communication**

The School is pro-active in the area of prevention and will communicate and disseminate the Child Protection Policy, Code of Conduct and Procedure in the manner below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENTS</th>
<th>PARENTS, GUARDIANS, COMMUNITY, SPONSORS, PARTNERS</th>
<th>EMPLOYEES, BOARD MEMBERS</th>
<th>VOLUNTEERS, CONTRACTORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Website • School assemblies • School Health and Wellbeing curriculum • Information to Senior School students prior to turning 18</td>
<td>• Conditions of enrolment • Website • Parent information evenings • School newsletter</td>
<td>• Website • Letters of appointment/contracts • New employees, and board members Induction Training and refresher training • Annual Training Session • Performance Development and Coaching sessions (as applicable)</td>
<td>• Website • Contracts • Application forms • Induction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Responding & Reporting**

In the case of an allegation being made against an employee, contractor, volunteer or Board member at the School, the Child Safety Officer will follow the Child Protection Procedure in consultation with the Principal or delegate. The School will take all steps to ensure that the safety of the child is paramount.

The first step is to withdraw the accused person from active duty, which could entail standing down (with pay, where applicable), re-assignment to other duties that do not have direct contact with children, or to work under increased supervision while the matter is being investigated.

**Case Management**

In the event of a child or young person disclosing an incident of abuse to someone they trust it is essential that it is dealt with sensitively and professionally.

**Investigations**

The Principal or delegate will conduct an independent investigation into the allegation to the extent that it will not interfere with investigations by DHHS or the police, and will co-operate with the authorities as required.
All individuals covered by the Child Protection Policy must co-operate fully with any investigation by DHHS, the police or the School.

The Principal will make every effort to keep any such investigation confidential; however, from time to time other employees, volunteers, contractors or Board members (if applicable) may need to be consulted in conjunction with the investigation (e.g. to provide witness statements).

The outcome will depend on the findings of the investigation, but may include withdrawal from active duty, re-assignment to duties with no contact with children, increased supervision, disciplinary action, dismissal or criminal prosecutions.

**Record keeping**

All reports of alleged abuse or harm, or risk thereof, must be recorded in the form of an Incident Report. Reporting should be factual and not conjectural or interpretative. Places, times, dates, names of people, observable behaviours or evidence of harm are what is recordable. Reports must be to be securely stored by the Principal or delegate.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**

**Principles**

There are two guiding principles in respect to a child or young person’s privacy:

(i) First, the School will operate on “the best interests principle”. The Principal, all employees, volunteers, contractors and Board members will do what they believe to be in the best interest of the child or young person. This principle supersedes all others.

(ii) Second, the School will respect a child or young person’s right to privacy except in situations where it conflicts with “the best interests principle”.

As much as is reasonably possible, an individual’s right to privacy is to be protected. Both those who are making reports and those about whom accusations are being made are entitled to privacy. Where there is suspected abuse or misconduct, employees, volunteers, contractors and Board members must not disclose or make use of the information in a manner that breaches confidentiality, other than to report and act consistent with the Child Protection Policy and Procedures, and relevant statutory requirements.

At all times, the Child Safe Standards of the Victoria Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) must be observed and acted upon. This Publication is referred to in this Policy.
Responsibilities

The **Board** of the School has ultimate responsibility for the detection and prevention of child abuse and is responsible for:

(a) ensuring that appropriate and effective internal control systems are in place; and

(b) ensuring that appropriate policies and procedures and a Child Protection Code of Conduct are in place.

The **Principal** of the School is responsible for:

(a) dealing with and investigating reports of child abuse

(b) ensuring that all staff, contractors, and volunteers are aware of relevant laws, organisational policies and procedures, and the organisation's Code of Conduct

(c) ensuring that all adults within the School community are aware of their obligation to report suspected sexual abuse of a child in accordance with these policies and procedures

(d) ensuring that all staff, contractors and volunteers are aware of their obligation to observe the Code of Conduct (particularly as it relates to child safety); and

(e) providing support for staff, contractors and volunteers in undertaking their child protection responsibilities.

All **Heads of School, Managers and Senior Staff** must ensure that they:

(a) promote child safety at all times

(b) assess the risk of child abuse within their area of control and eradicate / minimise any risk to the extent possible

(c) educate employees about the prevention and detection of child abuse; and

(d) facilitate the reporting of any inappropriate behaviour or suspected abusive activities.

Management should be familiar with the types of abuse that might occur within their area of responsibility and be alert for any indications of such conduct.

All **staff/volunteers/contractors** share in the responsibility for the prevention and detection of child abuse, and must:
(a) familiarise themselves with the relevant laws, the Code of Conduct, and the School’s policy and procedures in relation to child protection, and comply with all requirements

(b) report any reasonable belief that a child’s safety is at risk to the relevant authorities (such as the police and / or the Department of Human Services) and fulfil their obligations as mandatory reporters

(c) report any suspicion that a child’s safety may be at risk to their supervisor (or, if their supervisor is involved in the suspicion, to a Child Safety Officer at the School); and

(d) provide an environment that is supportive of all children’s emotional and physical safety.

**Code of conduct**

**Introduction**

Any form of abusive, derogatory, discriminatory, offensive or intimidating behaviour or language by adults towards children and young people, or children towards other children and young people, is not acceptable.

A person must not engage in any action that at is, or may be perceived by a reasonable observer as, grooming behaviour.

Comments or actions that are negatively and unreasonably critical of a person’s culture, ethnicity, language, gender identity, disability, sexuality or age, are unacceptable.

Management, employees, volunteers, contractors and Board members at the School are required to abide by this Code.

The following list of behaviours includes examples of what is acceptable and not acceptable behaviour.

**Acceptable behaviours**

All people involved in the care of children on behalf of, or in connection with, the School must:

(a) conduct themselves in a manner consistent with their position as an employee, partner, volunteer or contractor of the School and as a role model to children and young people

(b) treat all people with respect and be open to and accepting of diversity and difference in people’s backgrounds, work style and personal preferences

(c) promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children and young people (for example, by never questioning an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island child or young person’s self-identification)

(d) promote the safety, participation and empowerment of children and young people with culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds (for example, by having a zero tolerance of discrimination)

(e) promote the safety, participation and empowerment of children and young people with a disability

(f) listen and respond to the views and concerns of children, particularly if they are telling you that they are or another child has been abused or that they are worried about their safety/the safety of another child
(g) raise concerns, issues or problems about the suspected risk to a child with a Child Safety Officer

(h) record and act upon all allegations or suspicions of abuse, discrimination or harassment

(i) respect confidentiality when sharing information about children and young people in accordance with the Child Protection Policy and their reporting obligations

(j) establish and maintain a child-safe environment in the course of their work;

(k) be professional in their actions

(l) maintain strict impartiality; and

(m) contact the police if a child is at immediate risk of abuse (telephone 000).

**Unacceptable behaviours**

All people involved in the care of children on behalf of the School must not:

(a) spend time alone with a child or young person where there is risk, particularly overnight

(b) take a child or young person to their home or encourage meetings outside program activities

(c) engage in rough physical games, hold, massage, kiss, cuddle or touch children in an inappropriate and or culturally insensitive way

(d) practice favouritism when building relationships with children

(e) speak to a child or young person in a way that is or could be construed by any observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. Some examples are:

   (i) swearing in the presence of a child

   (ii) yelling at a child or young person, except in an emergency situation where the child’s safety may be in danger

   (iii) dealing with a child while the adult is angry with the child; and

   (iv) use of hurtful sarcasm.

(f) using, possessing, or being under the influence of illegal drugs while in the presence of a child

(g) using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol while supervising a child

(h) providing or allowing a child to consume alcohol or illegal drugs

(i) engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with a child unless the conversations are part of a legitimately arranged instructional activity dealing with human sexuality issues

(j) discussing sexual activities with a child unless it is a specific job requirement and the person is trained to discuss these matters

(k) being naked in the presence of a child

(l) possessing sexually oriented or morally inappropriate printed materials (magazines, cards, videos, films, clothing, etc.)
(m) sleeping in the same beds, sleeping bags or small tents with a child or young person; and/or

(n) engaging in sexual contact with a child.

For the purposes of this Policy, sexual contact is defined as vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse, oral intercourse or the touching of an erogenous zone of another (including but not limited to the thighs, genitals, buttocks, pubic region or chest) for the purpose of sexually arousing or gratifying either person.

**Physical Contact / Touching**

All teachers are required to follow the Victorian Institute of Teaching’s (VIT) Code of Conduct.

Employees, volunteers, contractors and Board members are prohibited from using physical discipline in any way for behaviour management of children and young people. This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviours by children and young people.

Physical contact may be required in an emergency situation to remove children and young people quickly from danger or threat of danger.

Appropriate contact between employees, volunteers, contractors, Board members and children is part of normal human relationships. Some considerations and guidelines include the following:

(a) consider the child or young person's age, developmental level, maturity and level of care required, for example, touching a child to gain their attention, guiding or comforting a distressed child or young person

(b) work in an open environment; for example, in confidential interviews or a one-to-one meeting, the door should be open with visual access (NB: exceptions apply for professions with strict confidentiality requirements)

(c) be alert to cues from children about how comfortable they are in your proximity and respect their need for personal space

(d) be sensitive when interacting with children who may misinterpret your actions, such as those who may have been traumatised by abuse or adolescents seeking attention from a member of the opposite sex

(e) be aware of cultural norms that may influence the interpretation of your behaviour

(f) be cautious about physical contact in games or practical instruction. If you need to make physical contact for demonstrations, explain the activity and what you will do, maintain a safe and appropriate distance

(g) physical contact should be made in a way that makes children people feel comfortable, for example, shaking hands, a congratulatory pat on the back or rub on the side of their arm for reassurance. Massaging a child or allowing a child to massage you is inappropriate physical contact

(h) the use of images of children as screen savers or backgrounds on personal electronic devices is not appropriate. The collection and storage of photographs or images of children must be for educational or professional purposes. Use of social media and posting of student images by students, employees, contractors, volunteers or members of the Board must be consistent with the School’s Social Media Policy and School Interaction on On-line Social Networks Procedures
be aware that the giving and receiving of gifts, giving extra attention, accepting a different standard of behaviour from a child or young person having 'special time' with a child or young person must be appropriate and justified as a strategy to meet teaching and learning outcomes

obtain permission from the School and parents when meeting with students for activities outside of school hours

the provision of your personal contact details should be justified in terms of educational or professional purpose

it is not appropriate for employees, volunteers and contractors to initiate out of hours contact with a child unless it is in the context of an emergency or where the child is unavailable during work hours

all forms of physical contact should therefore be avoided where possible. The School has invested in a Student Wellbeing team who bring appropriate qualifications in addressing the mental, physical, spiritual and emotional needs of students.

The School's Policy on Bullying and Violence also addresses physical contact.

Transportation and off-site events

Other than in an emergency or other abnormal situation where no other option could be reasonably foreseen, it is not acceptable to transport children or young people without written permission of their parent, carer or guardian.

It is prohibited to have unnecessary and/or inappropriate physical contact with children or young people while in vehicles.

Children and young people should be transported directly to their destination. No stops should be made other than those that are reasonably scheduled for meals or comfort stops.

It is prohibited to have children or young people spend the night at the residence of an employee, volunteer or contractor without parental/guardian prior approval.

Changing and showering facilities or arrangements for adults must be separate from facilities or arrangements for children and young people.

Confidentiality

*Disclosing Information to Employees, Volunteers, Contractors and Board Members*

When children or young people are having a written or verbal interaction with employees, volunteers, contractors and/or Board members of the School, that interaction is confidential to the organisation not to the individual. This means that an employee, volunteer, contractor or Board member is able to talk with other employees, volunteers, contractors or Board members in a way that identifies the child or young person. That said, where possible the privacy of the child or young person should be respected at all times. When considering breaching their privacy who and how many people are told should be based on what is believed to be in the best interests of the child or young person. In all cases, the advice of a Child Safety Officer should be sought before discussing with other personnel.

*Disclosing Information to People External to the Organisation*

Employees, volunteers, contractors and Board members should not discuss confidential matters about children or young people with people outside the organisation in a way that identifies that child or young person except when they have the express permission of the child or young person or it
complies with the Child Protection Procedure. In circumstances where employees, volunteers, contractors and/or Board members believe that there is not enough knowledge within the organisation to provide the best possible assistance to a child or young person, they are able to seek expertise external to the School. When communicating with people outside the School the child or young person's identity should be protected.

**Informing Children**

It is the responsibility of the School to communicate the limits of confidentiality in the School to children and young people who are likely to have an ongoing relationship with the School. These guidelines should be published in an accessible place for children and young people.

**Related legislation and contacts**

- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic);
- Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)
- Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)
- Victorian Institute of Teaching Act 2001 (Vic)
- Department of Health and Human Services Child Protection – North-eastern rural and regional office 1300 360 391 – After hours 131 278
- Child Protection Crisis Line – 24 Hours, seven days a week. Telephone: 13 12 78
This Reporting Procedure applies to all students, employees, volunteers, contractors, and Board members of the School, whether they work face-to-face, online or remotely with children. It should be read in accordance with the Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct.

**Step 1:**
When a “Mandatory Reporter” forms a belief, on reasonable grounds, that a child is in need of protection because they have suffered, or are likely to suffer, significant harm due to physical injury or sexual abuse, they must make a report to the Department of Health and Human Services (“DHHS”) as soon as practicable. The Head of Student Wellbeing should be informed.

The individual student, employee, volunteer, contractor or Board Member of the School should discuss these observations and concerns with a Child Safety Officer who can assist the person to make the report to DHHS as required. The Head of Student Wellbeing should be informed.

Any person that forms a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from child abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, psychological or neglect), may disclose that information to the Police or the DHHS. The School encourages all persons with concerns to raise this directly with the Child Safety Officer. The Head of Student Wellbeing should be informed.

It is the responsibility of the Head of Student Wellbeing to inform the Principal.

**Step 2:**
It may be that, following the previous step, a person decides to make a report to DHHS with the support of the Child Safety Officer and/or the Head of Student Wellbeing.

**Making a Report**
Ring DHHS at the North-eastern rural and regional office on 1300 360 391. Ask for Child Protection.

**Information for Making a Report:**
- Name, age and address of student
- The reason for suspecting that the behaviour or injury is a result of abuse
- An assessment of the immediate danger to the student
- A description of the injury or behaviour observed
- The current whereabouts of the student
- Any other information about the family
- Any specific cultural details, e.g. English speaking, disability, etc.
Ask that the School be informed of each step of the procedure.

Request that if an interview is to take place at the School the visiting police officer is in plain clothes and the time of the interview is specified so that appropriate arrangements for a meeting room can be organized.

When the person informs the Child Safety Officer that he/she is to make/has made a report, a Case Management Group that may consist of the Child Safety Officers, the Head of Student Wellbeing and/or the Principal or delegate will be set up to discuss the matter and to offer support to the student and reporter.

If the complainant alleges that a crime has been committed by a student employee, volunteer, contractor or Board Member that person will be stood aside immediately.

The Principal will conduct an independent investigation into the allegation to the extent that it will not interfere with investigations by DHHS or the police, and will co-operate with the authorities as required.

**Step 3:**

If the student is agreeable to be interviewed by DHHS or the police, the Child Safety Officer / Head of Student Wellbeing should offer to be present at the interview to give support to the student.

**Step 4:**

Following a report, DHHS may need to contact the Principal about the notification. It would be a matter of courtesy to inform the Principal that a report has been made, or is about to be made.

**Step 5:**

Following a report, it is important to protect confidentiality and the interests of the child and family at all times.

**Special comments:**

- DHHS will only interview the student if he/she is agreeable.
- The family will not be contacted until it is believed there is a case and the student is at risk.
- If the incident which caused the report to be made has occurred in the past - the student may be seen to be no longer at risk and no further action may be taken.
- The identity of the person making a notification will be kept confidential (except when that information is required in a court case) unless that person gives permission for the information to be divulged. Such confidentiality should also be requested by the Child Safety Officer / Head of Student Wellbeing and any other person who may become involved.

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Confidential to: [Name]
aware that a notification is to be, or has been, given

- Throughout the entire process of observation, discussion and reporting, the interests of the student and their family should be protected from unnecessary disclosure of information concerning abuse
- Following the making of a report to the DHHS, any investigation that takes place is the responsibility of DHHS in consultation with the Principal or delegate.

**Investigations**

If the DHHS or the police decide to conduct an investigation of this report, all students, employees, contractors, volunteers and Board members must co-operate fully with the investigation.

Whether or not the authorities decide to conduct an investigation, the Principal or delegate will consult with the authorities to determine whether an internal investigation is appropriate. If it is decided that such an investigation will not conflict with any proceeding of the authorities, the Principal or delegate may decide to conduct such an investigation. All students, employees, contractors, volunteers and Board members must co-operate fully with the investigation.

Any such investigation will be conducted according to the rules of natural justice.

The Principal or delegate will make every effort to keep any such investigation confidential; however, from time to time other members of staff may need to be consulted in conjunction with the investigation.

After an initial review and a determination that the suspected abuse warrants additional investigation, the Principal or delegate shall coordinate the investigation with the appropriate investigators and/or law enforcement officials. Internal or external legal representatives will be involved in the process, as deemed appropriate.