

NATHALIA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Child Safety Policy

PURPOSE

Rationale:

Nathalia Primary School is committed to child safety and to our children to being principled, caring, balanced members of our community. We are committed to our children's safety, participation and empowerment and have zero tolerance of child abuse. All allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently. We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously. The school is committed to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks and all staff undertake Mandatory Reporting training.

We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers and are committed to the cultural safety of children from diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability.

Aims:

Our children

This policy is intended to empower children who are vital and active participants in our school. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say. We promote diversity and tolerance in our school, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome. We promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and children with a disability.

Our staff and volunteers

This policy informs our staff and volunteers on how to behave with children in our school. All of our staff and volunteers must agree to abide by our code of conduct which is detailed in our Inclusion, Engagement and Wellbeing Policy. 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.

The governing body

The school governing authority must:

- develop strategies to embed a culture of child safety at the school
- allocate roles and responsibilities for achieving the strategies
- inform the school community about the strategies, and allocated roles and responsibilities
- put the strategies into practice, and inform the school community about these practices
- periodically review the effectiveness of the strategies put into practice and, if considered appropriate, revise those strategies

Implementation:

Training, supervision and induction

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

The school 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.

For all jobs that require child connected work there will be an induction process providing explicit information about the job's requirements, duties and responsibilities and the school's child safety practices, including the code of conduct (refer to the Student Inclusion, Engagement and Wellbeing Policy).

We also support our staff and volunteers through ongoing supervision to: develop their skills to protect all children from abuse; and promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds, and the safety of children with a disability.

Recruitment

We take all reasonable steps to employ appropriately skilled people to work with children. We identify selection criteria through Recruitment Online which clearly demonstrates our commitment to child safety. The school understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

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. Please see the Working with Children Check website. (www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au) for further information. We carry out reference checks to ensure that we are addressing the person's suitability for the job and working with children. VIT registration is compulsory and we require proof of personal identity and any professional or other qualifications.

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.

Roles and Responsibilities

Key people within the school will have the appropriate skills and capacity to undertake child safety roles and responsibilities. This includes teachers and school leaders and also extends to support staff, student counsellors, business managers of contracted service providers who work with or near school children.

The school will ensure that:

- school-based roles and responsibilities for child safety are known and understood across the school community
- students, school staff, and members of the school community know who to contact if they have a concern about child safety in the school and make sure this information is kept up to date, and is accessible to all

The school will build capability by:

- making training available in relation to key responsibilities
- including responsibilities in position descriptions or as part of staff development processes
- providing ongoing induction and training for all staff and volunteers in child safety including how to recognise and respond to child abuse.

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 and will disclose how this information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will have access to it.

Legislative responsibilities (Refer to the Child Protection Policy)

Our organisation takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- Any personnel who are mandatory reporters must comply with their duties.
- **Failure to disclose offence:** In addition to mandatory reporting and duty of care obligations, any adult who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under 16 must report that information to police. Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence except in limited circumstances, such as where the information has already been reported to Child Protection or the child is over 16 when the belief is formed.
- **Failure to protect:** Any staff member in a position of authority, who becomes aware that an adult associated with their organisation (such as an employee, contractor, volunteer or visitor) poses a risk of sexual abuse to a child under the care, authority or supervision of the organisation, must take all reasonable steps to remove or reduce that risk. This may include, for example, removing the adult from child-related work pending investigation. If a staff member in a position of authority fails to take reasonable steps in these circumstances, this may amount to a criminal offence. The offence applies only to adults in a position of authority within an organisation, including Principals, senior school staff, regional directors and other senior managers.

Risk management

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified (see information about failure to protect above). 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, swimming), and online environments.

Process for identifying and reducing or removing risks of child abuse

Managing risk typically involves the following steps and considerations:

- identify the school's child safety risks across the range of school environments (including excursions, camps, online).
- identify any existing risk mitigation measures or existing controls
- assess and rate the school's child safety risks given the existing controls in place, taking into account the likelihood of risk, and the likely consequence of the risk
- if the risk rating is more than the 'acceptable level', identify further risk management strategies through additional treatments or other prevention, detection or mitigation strategies and then re-assess the risk (once in place these treatments will then become controls).

The risk management process should be documented, recorded and reviewed periodically. Effective risk management strategies are dynamic and change over time as new risks arise and others may no longer be relevant.

Effective risk management strategies need to be transparent, well understood and diverse, to take account of the increased level of risk associated with the specific nature of some activities and the vulnerability of particular groups.

Allegations, concerns and complaints

The school takes all allegations seriously and works 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.

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

The school will provide support for the student who has made a disclosure or allegation for the duration of the process.

Evaluation:

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's three-year review cycle.

Communication:

Nathalia Primary School has a process in place where it communicates its policies to staff, students, guardians, parents and the school community by placing its policies on the school website and making them available to anyone who comes into the office and requests to see them.

Strategies to embed a culture of child safety at the school

Indicator of good practice:

All members of the school community feel empowered to discuss child safety and raise any concerns about child abuse.

Good practices:

- effective governance arrangements are in place to authorise and agree on strategies
- embed the goal of child safety in school documentation to convey the vision, mission and strategic direction of the school in relation to child safety
- recognise the diverse needs of children in the school. For example, it is important that schools are inclusive and culturally safe places for children and parents. Importantly, some children (e.g. young children, children with a disability) are at greater risk of abuse or exploitation and need greater levels of supervision and support
- include child safety as a standing item on Staff Meeting agendas.

Allocate roles and responsibilities for achieving the strategies

Indicator of good practice:

Key people have appropriate skills and capacity to undertake child safety roles and responsibilities. This includes teachers and school leaders and also extends to support staff, student counsellors, business managers of contracted service providers who work with or near school children.

Good practices:

- school-based roles and responsibilities for child safety are known and understood across the school community
- make sure students, school staff, and members of the school community know who to contact if they have a concern about child safety in the school. Make sure this information is kept up to date, and is accessible to all
- build capability by:
 - making training available in relation to key responsibilities
 - including responsibilities in position descriptions or as part of staff development processes
 - providing ongoing induction and training for all staff and volunteers in child safety including how to recognise and respond to child abuse.

Inform the school community about the strategies and allocated roles and responsibilities

Indicator of good practice

Child safety is a core part of the school's public and internal communication.

Good practices

- the school's communications about the child safety strategies:
 - identifies key people and covers the roles of all people in the school community
 - covers the range of school environments (e.g. camps, online)
 - uses a mix of communication tools (verbal, online, print)
- provide opportunities for staff, students, parents and the school community to engage with child safety (e.g. community forums).

Put the strategies into practice and inform the school community about these practices

Indicator of good practice:

Keep the school community updated about the school's progress in putting strategies into practice, changing strategies or developing new strategies.

Good practices:

- child safety champions - one or more roles in the school with responsibility to promote, monitor and/or report on the implementation of the school's child safety strategies (with appropriate leadership support)
- report progress to the school governing authority
- provide ongoing opportunities for staff, students, parents and the school community to engage with child safety issues (e.g. community forums).

Periodically review the effectiveness of the strategies put into practice and, if considered appropriate, revise those strategies

Indicator of good practice:

There is a system (including schedule, roles and reporting) for periodic review (e.g. every two years) and improvement of child safety related policies and practices.

Good practices:

- proactively planning the school's approach to review, including governance oversight
- consult with staff, and the wider school community to inform strategic decisions about child safety
- consider continuous improvement opportunities such as incorporating child safety questions in existing surveys to measure awareness and confidence in the school's approach.
- conduct a review after a potential risk or report occurs in the school
- outcomes of all reviews are communicated.