Child Safe Policy

Rationale:
To help protect children from all forms of abuse Victoria has introduced compulsory minimum standards that apply to organisations that provide services for children. The child safe standards form part of the Victorian Government’s response to the Betrayal of Trust Inquiry.

All Victorian schools are required to have a child safety policy or statement of commitment to child safety which details:

- the principles that guide the school in developing policies and procedures to create and maintain a child safe school environment; and the actions the school proposes to take to:
  - demonstrate its commitment to child safety and monitor the school’s adherence to its child safe policy
  - support, encourage and enable school staff, parents, and children to understand, identify, discuss and report child safety matters
  - support or assist children who disclose child abuse, or are otherwise linked to suspected child abuse
  - identify and mitigate the risk(s) of child abuse at Sunshine SDS by taking into account the nature of the school environment, the activities expected to be conducted in that environment (including the provision of services by contractors or outside organisations) and the characteristics and needs of all children expected to be present in that environment

Aim:
Child First is intended to promote child safety in the school environment (inclusive of physical and online environments) and to create and maintain a child safe organization; an entity to which the standards apply must have -

- Strategies that embed a culture of child safety into the organization, including effective leadership arrangements
- A child safe policy or statement of commitment to child safety
- A code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children
- Screening, supervision, training and other human resource practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel
- Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse
- Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse
- Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children

Our School
Sunshine Special Developmental School (SDS) is committed to child safety. We want children to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers.

We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently. We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our leadership team, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.
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 preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks.

We have robust human resources and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers.

The school is committed to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks.

We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability.

We promote diversity and tolerance in our school, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome. In particular we:

• promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children
• promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
• ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate equally

Our children

To promote child safety in the school environment we acknowledge the following:

All students have a right to: -

• Take part in learning programs that meet their individual needs.
• Feel secure and to be safe in a caring and supportive environment.
• Work and play without interference in an atmosphere of harmony and cooperation.
• Receive respect, kindness and courtesy and to be treated with fairness.
• Have learning continue without disruption in a supportive environment.
• Be valued for their individuality including race, gender, and cultural, physical or intellectual diversity.
• Expect the school rules to be fair, consistently implemented and respect the rights of all involved.

Our staff and volunteers

This policy guides 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 specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children.

Defining and Identifying Child Abuse

A child is defined as an unmarried person under the age of 18 years.

Child abuse generally falls into four categories. (Please refer to the Child Protection Policy)

1.1 Neglect

Neglect can be defined in terms of an omission, where the child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, medical care or attachment to and affection from adults.

The threshold of significant harm is reached when the child’s needs are neglected to the extent that their well-being and/or development are severely affected.
1.2 Emotional Abuse
Emotional abuse is normally found in the relationship between a care-giver (an adult person who has responsibility for a child in the short or long term) and a child rather than in a specific event or pattern of events. It occurs when a child’s needs for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met. It is rarely manifested in terms of physical symptoms. Children show signs of emotional abuse by their behaviour (for example excessive clinginess to or avoidance of the parent or carer), their emotional state (low self-esteem, unhappiness) or their development. The threshold of significant harm is reached when abusive interactions dominate and become typical of the relationship between the child and parent or carer.

1.3 Physical Abuse
Physical abuse is any form of non-accidental injury or any injury that results from wilful or neglectful failure to protect a child. Examples of physical injury include-
- shaking
- use of excessive force in handling
- deliberate poisoning
- Suffocation
- Munchausen’s Syndrome by proxy (where parents make up stories of illness about their child or cause physical signs of illness)
- allowing or creating a substantial risk of significant harm to a child

1.4 Sexual Abuse
Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for their gratification or sexual arousal, or for that of others. Examples of sexual abuse include-
- exposing sexual organs or intentionally performing any sexual act in the presence of a child
- Intentional touching or molesting the body of a child, by a person or object, for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification
- masturbating in the presence of a child or involving the child in the act of masturbation
- engaging in sexual intercourse with the child, whether oral, vaginal or anal
- sexually exploiting a child
- consensual sexual activity between an adult and a child under 17 years

In relation to child sexual abuse, it should be noted that, for the purposes of criminal law, the age of consent to sexual intercourse is 17 years.

1.5 Aggressive Behaviour
While bullying is not a category in itself, it is important to be aware of it in relation to child abuse. Bullying can be defined as repeated verbal, psychological or physical aggression that is conducted by an individual or group against others. Bullying behaviour may take place in any setting - in schools, in the home or in a Children First setting.

As first response it is the responsibility of the Mentor/Staff Member to deal with bullying that may take place within the organisation. The more extreme forms of bullying behaviour would be regarded as physical or emotional abuse, and are reportable to the statutory authorities.

Incidents should not be tolerated under any circumstances and should be dealt with immediately. For more information on bullying, “Let’s beat bullying” is a complete anti-bullying resource for those working with young people in youth work settings and is available as a download on www.youthhealth.ie.

Legislative responsibilities (Refer to Child Protection Policy)
Sunshine SDS takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including reporting procedures:
Any personnel who are mandatory reporters must comply with their duties.
Forming a belief on reasonable grounds

A person may form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection after becoming aware that a child or young person’s health, safety or wellbeing is at risk.

Reporting a belief

Mandated staff members (Teachers and Principals) must make a report to Child Protection as soon as practicable after forming a belief on reasonable grounds that a child or young person is in need of protection.

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 17 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 17 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.

Implementation:

Training and Supervision

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone in our learning community 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. We train our staff and volunteers to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

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. Staff training includes annual Child Safe information sessions and the completion of Department of Education and Training online modules.

We also support our staff and volunteers through ongoing supervision to: develop their skills to protect 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.

New employees and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand our learning community’s commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse, as well as checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate (please refer to our code of conduct to understand appropriate behaviour further). 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
We take all 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. 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.

If during the recruitment process a person’s records indicate a criminal history then the person will be given the opportunity to provide further information and context.

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. All records are securely stored.

If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to children and families on progress and any actions we as an organisation take.

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.

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.

Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse

- Risk management strategies have been developed within the following school policies:
  - Child Protection Policy
  - Student Engagement and Wellbeing Policy
  - Onsite Supervision Policy
  - Professional Code of Conduct Policy

Allegations, concerns and complaints
The 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 information about failure to disclose above).
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

**Code of Behaviour for Staff, Mentors, Volunteers and Participants Involved with children**

**Child safe principles and expectations for appropriate behaviour towards and in the company of children, as noted below.**

All personnel of Sunshine Special Developmental School (SDS) are responsible for supporting the safety, participation, wellbeing and empowerment of children by:

- adhering to the Sunshine SDS child safe policy at all times / upholding Sunshine SDS’s statement of commitment to child safety at all time
- taking all reasonable steps to protect children from abuse
- treating everyone with respect
- listening and responding to the views and concerns of children, particularly if they are telling you that they or another child has been abused and/or are worried about their safety or the safety of another
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children (for example, by never questioning an Aboriginal child’s self-identification)
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children with culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds (for example, by having a zero tolerance of discrimination)
- promoting the safety, participation and empowerment of children with a disability (for example, during personal care activities)
- ensuring as far as practicable that adults are not left alone with a child
- reporting any allegations of child abuse to Sunshine SDS’s Child Safety Officer or leadership representative, and ensure any allegation be reported to the police or child protection
- reporting any child safety concerns to Sunshine SDS’s Child Safety or leadership representative
- if an allegation of child abuse is made, ensure as quickly as possible that the child(ren) are safe
- encouraging children to ‘have a say’ and participate in all relevant organisational activities where possible, especially on issues that are important to them.

**Staff and volunteers must not:**

- develop any ‘special’ relationships with children that could be seen as favouritism (for example, the offering of gifts or special treatment for specific children)
- exhibit behaviours with children which may be construed as unnecessarily physical contact (for example inappropriate sitting on laps. Sitting on laps could be appropriate sometime, for example while reading a storybook to a small child in an open plan area)
- put children at risk of abuse (for example, by locking doors)
- do things of a personal nature that a child can do for themselves, such as toileting or changing clothes
- engage in open discussions of a mature or adult nature in the presence of children (for example, personal social activities)
- use inappropriate language in the presence of children
• express personal views on cultures, race or sexuality in the presence of children
• discriminate against any child, including because of culture, race, ethnicity or disability
• have contact with a child or their family outside of our organisation without our child safety officer’s knowledge and/or consent (for example, no babysitting). Accidental contact, such as seeing people in the street, is appropriate
• have any online contact with a child or their family (unless necessary, for example providing families with e-newsletters)
• ignore or disregard any suspected or disclosed child abuse.

By observing these standards staff acknowledge their responsibility to immediately report any breach of this code to Sunshine SDS’s Child Safety Officer or leadership representative.

Regular Review
This policy will be reviewed every two years and following significant incidents if they occur. We will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute. Where possible we do our best to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

References:

Department of Education and Training - Child Protection Reporting Obligations

Department of Health and Human Services
Overview of the Child Safe Standards


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