
Child Protection and Safety Policy

Adopted: August 2016

Last Amended: March 2022

Next Review: March 2023

1. Preamble

- 1.1. All children are precious in the sight of God. The Bible indicates that the nurture of children is a high priority in the community with specific responsibility being given to parents (Ephesians 6:4; Deuteronomy 4:9). It is the responsibility of all members of the Son Centre Christian College (SCCC) community to love, and therefore protect, the students in their care. This love, as described in 1 Corinthians 13, must guide the words and actions of staff members as they stand in the place of parents.
- 1.2. This policy is a companion to other SCCC documents and should be read in conjunction with them, including:
 - *Child Safety Statement of Commitment*
 - *Child Safety Strategy and Action Plan*
 - *Child Safety Code of Conduct*
- 1.3. SCCC is committed to the protection of all children from all forms of child abuse and demonstrates this commitment through the implementation of a comprehensive Child Protection Program designed to keep children safe. Child abuse includes sexual offences, grooming, physical violence, serious emotional or psychological harm, serious neglect and a child's exposure to family violence.
- 1.4. SCCC has a zero tolerance for child abuse and is committed to acting in the best interests of children and to keeping them safe from harm. The school regards its child protection responsibilities to be of the utmost importance and, as such, is committed to providing the necessary resources to ensure compliance with all relevant child protection laws and regulations, and to maintaining a child safe culture.
- 1.5. Upon enrolment, the school enters into an agreement with parents/guardians to assist them in their God-given responsibility for the nurture of their children. The school strives to fulfill their contract to support parents but not to the detriment of the welfare of the student. It is part of the school's duty of care to ensure that students receive the protection that is due to them.
- 1.6. Students cannot be expected to know their rights nor to assert them if they became subject to abusive behaviours from another person. Therefore, in every action taken in response to a case of suspected child abuse, assault and/or neglect, the best interest of the student is of paramount consideration.
- 1.7. Other policies and procedures that relate directly to the health, safety, protection and welfare of students include the *Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy*, *Student Discipline & Behaviour Policy*, *Anti-Bullying and Harassment (Students) Policy*, *Health and Wellbeing (Students) Policy*, *Volunteers Policy*, *Visitors Policy*, *Staff Conduct & Professional Practice Policy*, *Occupational Health and Safety Policy*, and recruitment and selection procedures.

2. Child Safe Values & Principles

- 2.1. SCCC's commitment to child safety is based on the following overarching values and principles that guide the development and regular review of our work systems, practices, policies and procedures to protect children from abuse:
 - All children have the right to be safe
 - The welfare and best interests of the child are paramount

- The views of the child and a child's privacy must be respected
- Clear expectations for appropriate behavior with children are established in our *Child Safety Code of Conduct* and *Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy*
- The safety of children is dependent upon the existence of a child safe culture
- Child safety awareness is promoted and openly discussed within our school community
- Procedures are in place to screen all staff members and volunteers, including third party contractors and external education providers who have direct contact with children
- Child safety and protection is everyone's responsibility
- Child protection training is mandatory for all Board members, staff members and volunteers
- Procedures for responding to alleged or suspected incidents of child abuse are simple and accessible for all members of the school community
- Younger students and children from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds have the right to special care and support, including those who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- Children who have any kind of disability have the right to special care and support

3. Objectives

3.1. This policy provides the framework for:

- development of work systems, practices, policies and procedures to promote child protection within the school;
- creation of a positive and robust child protection culture;
- promotion and open discussion of child protection issues within the school; and
- compliance with all laws, regulations and standards relevant to child protection in Victoria.

4. Child Protection Program

4.1. SCCC is committed to the effective implementation of the school's Child Protection Program and to ensuring that it is appropriately reviewed and updated. The school adopts a risk management approach by identifying key risk indicators and assessing child safety risks based on a range of factors, including the nature of our school's activities, physical and online environments, and the characteristics of the student body.

4.2. SCCC's Child Protection Program relates to all aspects of protecting children from abuse and establishes work systems, practices, policies and procedures to protect children from abuse. It includes:

- clear information as to what constitutes child abuse and associated key risk indicators;
- clear procedures for responding to and reporting allegations of child abuse;
- strategies to support, encourage and enable staff members, volunteers, parents and students to understand, identify, discuss and report child protection matters;
- procedures for recruiting and screening Board members, staff members and volunteers;
- pastoral care strategies designed to empower students and keep them safe;
- policies with respect to cultural diversity and students with disabilities;
- a child protection training program;
- information regarding steps to take after disclosure of abuse to protect, support and assist children;
- guidelines with respect to record keeping and confidentiality;
- policies to ensure compliance with all relevant laws, regulations and standards (including the *Victorian Child Safe Standards*); and
- a system for continuous review and improvement.

4.3. The Principal will annually ensure that appropriate guidance and training is provided to the

individual members of the school governing authority and the school staff members about individual and collective obligations and responsibilities for managing the risk of child abuse, child abuse risks in the school environment and the school's current child safety standards.

4.4. As part of SCCC's induction process, the Principal will ensure that appropriate guidance and training is provided to new school staff members about individual and collective obligations and responsibilities for managing the risk of child abuse, child abuse risks in the school environment and the school's current child safety standards.

4.5. Staff members and volunteers, third-party contractors and external education providers are supported by SCCC's Principal (as the nominated Child Protection Officer) to ensure that they are compliant with the school's approach to child protection.

4.6. Mandatory Reporting

All mandatory reporters must make a report to Victoria Police and/or DHHS Child Protection as soon as practicable if, during the course of carrying out their professional roles and responsibilities, they form a belief on reasonable grounds that:

- a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical abuse and/or sexual abuse; and
- the child's parents have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from harm of that type.

4.7. Failure to Disclose

The offense of failure to disclose applies to all adults (not just professionals who work with children) who form a reasonable belief that another adult may have committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 years of age and fail to report this information to the Victoria Police.

4.8. Failure to Protect

The offense of failure to protect applies to a person in a position of authority within an organisation who:

- knows of a substantial risk that a child under the age of 16, under the care, supervision or authority of the organisation, will become a victim of a sexual offence committed by an adult associated with the organisation (e.g. employee, contractors, volunteer, visitor); and
- negligently fails to remove or reduce the risk of harm.

4.9. Grooming

Grooming is when a person engages in predatory conduct to prepare a child for sexual activity at a later time. It can include communicating and/or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent/carer.

4.10. Duty of Care to Prevent Child Abuse

The school owes a duty to take care that, in all the circumstances of the case, is reasonable to prevent the abuse of a child by an individual associated with the school while the child is under the care, supervision or authority of the school. Abuse includes sexual and physical abuse.

4.11. Reportable Conduct Scheme

The school is required to notify the Commission for Children and Young People of any allegation of reportable conduct made against a worker or volunteer.

There are five types of reportable conduct:

- Sexual offences committed against, with or in the presence of a child

- Sexual misconduct committed against, with or in the presence of a child
- Physical violence against, with or in the presence of a child
- Any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child
- Significant neglect of a child

Any staff member, volunteer or contractor who needs clarification as to whether they have a 'reasonable belief' to report or not should speak with the Principal.

4.12. Historical Sexual Abuse Reports

If a former student is now an adult and makes a claim of historic abuse within the school context, the school must notify the Police. If the former student is still a child, a mandatory report to the Department of Health and Human Services and a reportable conduct allegation to the Commission for Children and Young People must be made. Reporting requirement under the Crimes Act may also apply.

4.13. Student Sexual Offending

Student sexual offending refers to sexual behaviour that is led by a student aged 10 years and over that may amount to a sexual offence. A sexual offence includes rape, sexual assault, indecent acts and other unwanted sexualised touching, all of which are offences under the Crimes Act 1958.

4.14. Students Under 10

If a staff member is unsure of any form of sexualised behaviour or has protective concerns for a child under the age of 10, they will speak with the Principal.

5. Responsibilities

5.1. Child protection is everyone's responsibility. At SCCC, all Board members and staff members, as well as volunteers, have a shared responsibility for contributing to the safety and protection of children. Specific responsibilities include:

- **Board members.** Each Board member is required to ensure that appropriate resources are made available to allow the school's *Child Protection and Safety Policy* and Child Protection Program to be effectively implemented within the school and are responsible for holding the Principal accountable for effective implementation.
- **Principal.** The Principal is responsible and accountable for taking all practical measures to ensure that our *Child Protection and Safety Policy* and our *Child Protection Program* are implemented effectively and that a strong and sustainable child protection culture is maintained within the school.
- **Child Protection Officers.** The Principal is nominated as the Child Protection Officer and receive additional specialised training with respect to child protection issues. They are the first point of contact for raising child protection concerns within the school. They are also responsible for championing child protection within the school and assisting in coordinating responses to child protection incidents.

It is the responsibility of the Principal to ensure that appropriate action is taken in response to any concerns raised.

- **Staff members.** All staff members are required to be familiar with the contents of our *Child Protection and Safety Policy* and our *Child Protection Program*, and with their legal obligations with respect to the reporting of child abuse. It is each individual's responsibility to be aware of key risk indicators of child abuse, to be observant, and to raise any concerns they may have relating to child abuse with the Principal.
- **Volunteers.** All volunteers are required to be familiar with the contents of the school's *Child*

Protection and Safety Policy and *Child Safety Code of Conduct*, and with their legal obligations with respect to the reporting of child abuse. It is each individual's responsibility to be aware of key risk indicators of child abuse, to be observant, and to raise any concerns they may have relating to child abuse with the Principal.

- **Service providers.** All third-party contractors (service providers) engaged by the school are responsible for contributing to the safety and protection of children in the school environment. All service providers engaged by the school are required to be familiar with our *Child Protection and Safety Policy* and our Child Protection Program. The school may include this requirement in the written agreement between the school and the service provider.

6. Reporting Child Protection Concerns

6.1. Depending on the type of conduct that occurs, the following authorities must be notified:

- Victoria Police under the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) (Crimes Act) if the conduct amounts to a sexual offence or abuse (failure to disclose offence)
- The DHHS under the CYFA if the conduct meets the mandatory reporting criteria
- The VIT under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic) (ETR Act) if the conduct involves a registered teacher (if the teacher misconduct involves a sexual offence, the VIT must be notified immediately)
- The Commission for Children and Young People (the Commission) under the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) (the CWS Act) if the allegation is against an employee, volunteer, contractor, office holder, minister of religion or officer of a religious body (an initial report is to be made within three days and a further report within 30 days)

Note: The online reporting procedure is outlined at this website:

<https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/reportable-conduct-scheme/reporting-and-investigating-allegations/>

The Commission has the power to share information it obtains under the Reportable Conduct Scheme to other organisations, including the Working with Children Check Unit and the Victoria Institute of Teaching.

- 6.2. In all circumstances, allegations of criminal conduct by a worker or volunteer must be reported to the Police as a first priority. Once the Police have been notified and a child is not at risk of harm, the school should then consider its reporting obligations under other legislation.
- 6.3. The school's Child Protection Program provides detailed guidance for Board members, staff members and volunteers regarding how to identify key risk indicators of child abuse and how to report child abuse concerns to Principal. It also contains detailed procedures with respect to the reporting of child abuse incidents to relevant authorities.
- 6.4. Third party contractors (service providers), external education providers, volunteers, students, parents/carers or other community members who have concerns that a child may be subject to abuse are asked to contact the Principal, whose responsibility it is to ensure that appropriate action is taken. Communications will be treated confidentially on a need-to-know basis. Whenever there are concerns that a child is in immediate danger, the police should be called on 000.
- 6.5. Reporting to the Principal does not displace or discharge any obligations that arise if a person reasonably believes that a child is at risk of child abuse. If a teacher, volunteer, contractor or other person engaged in child connected work at SCCC does make a report to an external authority, it is expected that they will also immediately notify the Principal that this has been done.
- 6.6. **Procedure for responding** to allegations of suspected child abuse:
- Any person making a disclosure will be told that this is a very serious matter that the school has no choice but to follow up by reporting to the Principal

- If a student makes a disclosure, it will be referred to the Principal
- The Principal will meet with the student to gather more information and take note of any further risk indicators
- The Principal will put in place immediate support for the student
- The Principal will discuss the case with the Board
- The Principal will make any report necessary
- When making a report, the Principal will take instruction from Police or DHHS as to whether or not the school should communicate with parents and what the content of any communication should be
- When making a report, the Principal, in consultation with DHHS or Victoria Police officers, will decide issues of safety and implement appropriate steps to ensure the safety of the student
- Follow up support will be provided to the student as in section 6.7 below
- The Principal will be present for interviews conducted by Police or DHHS with the student at school
- If the disclosure was public, the Principal will meet with other students who witnessed it to ensure appropriate support is in place for them and to brief them about appropriate ongoing behaviours
- If the disclosure was from an adult third-party, the Principal will gather details of the person making the disclosure, if they are willing to give them, and will follow up and report as appropriate and encourage the disclosing person to also report to the appropriate authorities
- If the disclosure was from a third-party student, the Principal will provide them support as below and meet with the student who is the subject of the disclosure as above
- The school does not provide feedback relating to ongoing action to third party informers

6.7. **Procedure for responding** to a student making or affected by an abuse allegation. The Principal making the report, will complete an Individual Safety Plan if appropriate. This will include follow up appointments with health professionals such as:

- external support through counsellor or psychologist;
- referral to CASA; and
- referral to the student's GP.

6.8. **Documentation** is the responsibility of the Principal when dealing with a particular report, to:

- complete a Child Safety Incident Report;
- include further supporting notes in the student's case notes file;
- file this form with the student's case notes file; and
- place a photocopy of this form in a sealed envelope marked "Only to be Opened by Principal", with the envelope to be filed in the confidential section of the Administration student file.

Files are securely retained in Principal's office.

7. Policy & Program Review

7.1. SCCC is committed to the continuous improvement of the Child Protection Program, which is regularly reviewed for overall effectiveness and to ensure compliance with all child protection related laws, regulations and standards.