

## Child Safety Policy

*“But, I’m overjoyed that I changed what I could. I kept struggling. I helped a resurrection happen, and wow! I never could have dreamed what God had in store for me.”*

*A Butterfly - Sr Angelita Fenker*

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### 1. Introduction

At St Mary’s College for the deaf, our aim is to foster compassionate, empowered, effective communicators nurtured through the spirit of our community and the values of the Dominican pillars. We hold the care, safety and wellbeing of the young people who are entrusted to our care as a sacred duty. As a Catholic Specialist School, St Mary’s recognises and values the worth of each student, developing an understanding of the Catholic faith which fosters faith development and Christian values in each student.

## 2. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to demonstrate the strong commitment of St Mary's College for the deaf to the care, safety and wellbeing of all students. It provides an outline of the policies, procedures and strategies developed to keep students safe from harm, including all forms of abuse in our school environment, on campus, online and in other locations provided by the College.

This policy takes into account relevant legislative requirements within the state of Victoria, including the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards as set out in Ministerial Order No. 870.

This policy applies to College staff, including College employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy.

## 3. Principles

Catholic schools have a moral, legal and mission driven responsibility to create nurturing school environments where children and young people are respected, their voices are heard and they are safe and feel safe ([CECV Commitment Statement to Child Safety](#)).

**The following principles underpin our commitment to child safety** at St Mary's College for the deaf. All students deserve, as a fundamental right, safety and protection from all forms of abuse and neglect.

- ❖ Our College works in partnership with families and the community to ensure that they are engaged in decision making processes, particularly those that have an impact on child safety and protection.
- ❖ All students have the right to a thorough and systematic education in all aspects of personal safety, in partnership with their parents/guardians/caregivers.
- ❖ All adults in our College, including teaching and non-teaching staff, clergy, volunteers, and contractors, have a responsibility to care for children and young people, to positively promote their wellbeing and to protect them from any kind of harm or abuse.
- ❖ The policies, guidelines and codes of conduct for the care, wellbeing and protection of students are based on honest, respectful and trusting relationships between adults and children and young people.
- ❖ Policies and practices demonstrate compliance with legislative requirements and cooperation with the Church, governments, the police and human services agencies.
- ❖ All persons involved in situations where harm is suspected or disclosed must be treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect.
- ❖ Staff, including the staff of our partner schools, clergy, volunteers, contractors, parents and students should feel free to raise concerns about child safety, knowing these will be taken seriously by school leadership.
- ❖ Appropriate confidentiality will be maintained, with information being provided to those who have a right or a need to be informed, either legally or pastorally.

#### 4. Definitions used in this Policy

**Child:** A child or a young person enrolled as a student at the College.

**Child abuse** includes:

- (a) any act committed against a child involving:
  - (i) a sexual offence
  - (ii) an offence under section 49B(2) of the **Crimes Act 1958** (grooming)
- (b) the infliction, on a child, of:
  - (i) physical violence
  - (ii) serious emotional or psychological harm
- (c) serious neglect of a child. ([Ministerial Order No. 870](#))

**Child safety** encompasses matters related to protecting all children from child abuse, managing the risk of child abuse, providing support to a child at risk of child abuse, and responding to incidents or allegations of child abuse. ([Ministerial Order No. 870](#))

**Child neglect:** The failure by a parent or caregiver to provide a child (where they are in a position to do so) with the conditions that are culturally accepted as being essential for their physical and emotional development and wellbeing. ([Safe Schools Hub](#))

**Child physical abuse:** Generally, child physical abuse refers to the non-accidental use of physical force against a child that results in harm to the child. Physically abusive behaviours include shoving, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, punching, kicking, biting, burning, strangling and poisoning. The fabrication or induction of an illness by a parent or carer (previously known as Munchausen syndrome by proxy) is also considered physically abusive behaviour. ([Safe Schools Hub](#))

**Child protection:** Statutory services designed to protect children who are at risk of serious harm. ([Safe Schools Hub](#))

**Child sexual abuse:** Any sexual activity between a child under the age of consent (16) and an adult or older person (i.e. a person five or more years older than the victim) is child sexual abuse.

Child sexual abuse can also be:

- any sexual behaviour between a child and an adult in a position of power or authority over them (e.g. a teacher); the age of consent laws do not apply in such instances due to the strong imbalance of power that exists between young people and authority figures, as well as the breaching of both personal and public trust that occurs when professional boundaries are violated
- any sexual behaviour between a child and an adult family member, regardless of issues of consent, equality or coercion
- sexual activity between peers that is non-consensual or involves the use of power or coercion
- non-consensual sexual activity between minors (e.g. a 14-year-old and an 11-year-old), or any sexual behaviour between a child and another child or adolescent who, due to their age or stage of development, is in a position of power, trust or

responsibility over the victim. Sexual activity between adolescents at a similar developmental level is not considered abuse. ([Safe Schools Hub](#))

**Mandatory Reporting:** The legal requirement to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect is known as mandatory reporting. Mandated persons include teachers, nurses, police, psychologists, psychiatrists and medical practitioners. ([Safe Schools Hub](#))

**Reasonable Belief:** When staff are concerned about the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person, they must assess that concern to determine if a report should be made to the relevant agency. This process of considering all relevant information and observations is known as forming a 'reasonable belief'. A 'reasonable belief' or a 'belief on reasonable grounds' is not the same as having proof but is more than mere rumour or speculation. A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds.

**School environment** means any physical or virtual place made available or authorised by the school governing authority for use by a child during or outside school hours, including:

- (a) a campus of the school
- (b) online school environments (including email and intranet systems)
- (c) other locations provided by the school for a child's use (including, without limitation, locations used for school camps, sporting events, excursions, competitions, and other events). ([Ministerial Order No. 870](#))

**School staff** means an individual working in a school environment who is:

- (a) directly engaged or employed by a school governing authority
- (b) a volunteer or a contracted service provider (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary)
- (c) a minister of religion. (Ministerial Order No. 870)

## 5. Policy Commitments

All students enrolled at St Mary's College for the deaf have the right to feel safe and be safe. The wellbeing of children in our care will always be our first priority and we do not and will not tolerate child abuse. We aim to create a child-safe and child-friendly environment where children are free to enjoy life to the full without any concern for their safety. There is particular attention paid to the most vulnerable children, including children who are deaf or have an additional disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds.

### Our commitment to our students

- (a) We commit to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people enrolled in our College.
- (b) We commit to providing children and young people with positive and nurturing experiences.
- (c) We commit to listening to children and young people and empowering them by taking their views seriously, and addressing any concerns that they raise with us.
- (d) We commit to taking action to ensure that children and young people are protected from abuse or harm, considering their additional needs.

- (e) We commit to teaching children and young people the necessary skills and empowering them with the knowledge to understand and maintain their personal safety and wellbeing.
- (f) We commit to seeking input and feedback from students regarding the creation of a safe school environment.

#### **Our commitment to parents and carers**

- (a) We commit to communicating honestly and openly with parents and carers about the wellbeing and safety of their children, with particular consideration of the impact of their additional needs.
- (b) We commit to engaging with, and listening to, the views of parents and carers about our child-safety practice, policies and procedures.
- (c) We commit to transparency in our decision-making with parents and carers where it will not compromise the safety of children or young people.
- (d) We commit to acknowledging the cultural diversity of students and families, and being sensitive to how this may impact on student safety issues.
- (e) We commit to continuously reviewing and improving our systems to protect children from abuse.

#### **Our commitment to our school staff (school employees, allied health providers, volunteers, contractors and clergy)**

- (a) We commit to providing all St Mary's College for the deaf staff with the necessary support to enable them to fulfil their roles. This will include regular and appropriate learning opportunities.
- (b) We commit to providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm policy and procedures in relation to child safety and young people's protection and wellbeing. This will include annual training in the principles and intent of the Child Safety Policy and Child Safety Code of Conduct, and staff responsibilities to report concerns.
- (c) We commit to listening to all concerns voiced by St Mary's College for the deaf staff, clergy, volunteers, and contractors about keeping children and young people safe from harm.
- (d) We commit to providing opportunities for St Mary's College for the deaf employees, allied health providers, volunteers, contractors and clergy to receive formal debriefing and counselling arising from incidents of the abuse of a child or young person.



## 6. Responsibilities and Organisational Arrangements

Everyone employed or volunteering at St Mary's College for the deaf has a responsibility to understand the important and specific role he/she plays individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all students is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make. ([CECV Commitment Statement to Child Safety](#))

The College has allocated roles and responsibilities for child safety as follows.

### 6.1 Guide to Responsibilities of College Leadership

The Principal, the Canonical Administrators, the College Board and College leaders at St Mary's College for the deaf recognise their particular responsibility to ensure the development of preventative and proactive strategies that promote a culture of openness, awareness of and shared responsibility for child safety. Responsibilities include:

- creating an environment for children and young people to be safe and to feel safe
- upholding high principles and standards for all staff, clergy, volunteers, and contractors
- promoting models of behaviour between adults and children and young people based on mutual respect and consideration
- ensuring thorough and rigorous practices are applied in the recruitment, screening and ongoing professional learning of staff
- ensuring that College personnel have regular and appropriate learning to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address child safety matters
- providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm legislative obligations, policy and procedures in relation to child and young people's protection and wellbeing
- ensuring the College meets the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards as set out in Ministerial Order No. 870.

### 6.2 Guide to Responsibilities of College Staff

Responsibilities of College staff (College employees, allied health providers, volunteers, contractors and clergy) include:

- treating children and young people with dignity and respect, acting with propriety, providing a duty of care, and protecting children and young people in their care
- following the legislative and internal College processes in the course of their work, if they form a reasonable belief that a child or young person has been or is being abused or neglected
- providing a physically and psychologically safe environment where the wellbeing of children and young people is nurtured
- undertaking regular training and education in order to understand their individual responsibilities in relation to child safety and the wellbeing of children and young people with additional needs
- assisting children and young people to develop positive, responsible and caring attitudes and behaviours which recognise the rights of all people to be safe and free from abuse
- following the College's Child Safety Code of Conduct.



### **6.3 Organisational Arrangements**

The responsibility for all organisational arrangements in relation to child safety at St Mary's College for the deaf rests with the Principal. To assist with this responsibility, the Team Leaders of each Campus are appointed to the Child Safety Committee.

### **7. Expectation of our College Staff – Child Safety Code of Conduct**

Within the St Mary's College for the Deaf community, we expect College employees, allied health providers, volunteers, contractors and clergy to proactively ensure the safety of students at all times and to take appropriate action if there are concerns about the safety of any child at the College. All College staff must remain familiar with the relevant laws, the code of conduct, and policies and procedures in relation to child protection and to comply with all requirements. We have developed a Child Safety Code of Conduct, which recognises the critical role that school staff play in protecting the students in our care and establishes clear expectations of College employees, allied health providers, volunteers, contractors and clergy for appropriate behaviour with children in order to safeguard them against abuse and or neglect.

Our Code also protects College staff through clarification of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

### **8. Student Safety and Participation**

At St Mary's College for the Deaf, we actively encourage all students to openly express their views and feel comfortable about giving voice to the things that are important to them.

We teach students about what they can do if they feel unsafe and enable them to understand, identify, discuss and report on child safety. We listen to and act on any concerns students, or their parents or carers raise with us.

Furthermore, the following school practices and processes highlight the level of student participation and empowerment in matters related to child safety at the College:

- Student Campus Leaders that meet regularly with the Principal
- Student Safety curriculum
- Student participation in Program Support Group Meetings

## 9. Reporting and Responding

Our College records any child safety complaints, disclosures or breaches of the Child Safety Code of Conduct, and stores the records in accordance with security and privacy requirements. Our College complies with legal obligations that relate to managing the risk of child abuse under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic.), the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic.) and the recommendations of the [Betrayal of Trust](#) report.

Child protection reporting obligations fall under separate pieces of legislation with differing reporting requirements.

Our College's **Child Protection – Reporting Policy**, updated in July 2016, sets out the actions required under the relevant legislation when there is a reasonable belief that a child at our College is in need of protection or a criminal offence has been committed, and provides guidance and procedures on how to make a report.

Our policy assists staff, allied health providers, volunteers and families to:

- identify the indicators of a child or young person with additional needs who may be in need of protection
- understand how a 'reasonable belief' is formed
- make a report of a child or young person with additional needs who may be in need of protection
- comply with mandatory reporting obligations under child protection law and their legal obligations relating to criminal child abuse and grooming under criminal law.

The College has also established internal processes to ensure that appropriate action is taken to respond to concerns about the wellbeing and/or safety of a student. This includes, but is not limited to:

- contacting the Principal who chairs the Child Safety Committee and has overall responsibility for Child Safety at the College
- contacting the Team Leader at the respective campus who are representatives on the Child Safety Committee

Our complaints and disclosure processes are outlined and detailed in the following policies and procedures:

- Complaint Resolution Procedure
- Student Wellbeing Policy
- Privacy Policy

## 10. Screening and Recruitment of College Staff

St Mary's College for the deaf will apply thorough and rigorous screening processes in the recruitment of employees and volunteers involved in child connected work. Our commitment to child safety and our screening requirements are included in all advertisements for such employee, contractor and volunteer positions, and all applicants are provided with copies of the College's Child Safety Code of Conduct and the Child Safety Policy.

When recruiting and selecting employees, contractors and volunteers involved in child-connected work, we make all reasonable efforts to:



- confirm the applicant's Working with Children Check and National Police Check status and/or professional registration (as relevant)
- obtain proof of personal identity and any professional or other qualifications
- verify the applicant's history of work involving children
- obtain references that address the applicant's suitability for the job and working with children

We have processes for monitoring and assessing the continuing suitability of College staff to work with children, including regular reviews of the status of Working with Children Checks and staff professional registration requirements such as Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registration.

## **11. Child Safety – Education and Training for College Staff**

St Mary's College for the deaf provides employees, volunteers and clergy with regular and appropriate opportunities to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address child safety matters. This includes induction, ongoing training and professional learning to ensure that everyone understands their professional and legal obligations and responsibilities, and the procedures for reporting suspicion of child abuse and neglect.

New staff to the College will be inducted into the College's Child Protection strategies, including policies and processes. The appropriate documentation is linked to the Campus Operational Guidelines which are available prior to the commencement of employment. Ongoing training and professional learning for all staff is included in the professional learning program.

## **12. Risk Management**

At St Mary's College for the deaf we are committed to proactively and systematically identifying and assessing risks to student safety across our whole school environment, and reducing or eliminating (where possible) all potential sources of harm. We document, implement, monitor and periodically review our risk management strategies for child safety and ensure that the strategies change as needed and as new risks arise.

The Principal is the College's Child Safety Committee Chair and is supported by the Campus Team Leaders. This group, will monitor and evaluate appropriate risk management strategies.

## **13. Relevant Legislation**

- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic.)
- Working with Children Act 2005 (Vic.)
- Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic.)
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic.)
- Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)
- Crimes Act 1958 (Vic.) – Three new criminal offences have been introduced under this Act:

- a) **Failure to disclose offence**: Any adult who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under 16 has an obligation to report that information to police. Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence.
- b) **Failure to protect offence**: The offence will apply where there is a substantial risk that a child under the age of 16 under the care, supervision or authority of a relevant organisation will become a victim of a sexual offence committed by an adult associated with that organisation. A person in a position of authority in the organisation will commit the offence if they know of the risk of abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.
- i) **Grooming offence**: This offence targets predatory conduct designed to facilitate later sexual activity with a child. Grooming can be conducted in person or online, for example via interaction through social media, web forums and emails.

## **14. Related Policies**

### **14.1 Catholic Education Melbourne Policies**

- [Policy 2.2: Guidelines Relating to the Employment of Staff \(currently under review\)](#)
- [Policy 2.19: Child Protection – Reporting Obligations](#)
- [Policy 2.19a: School Guidelines –Police and DHHS Interview Protocols](#)
- Policy 2.20: Misconduct Policy (withdrawn and currently under review)
- [Policy 2.26: Pastoral Care of Students in Catholic Schools\(currently under review\)](#)

### **14.2 School Policies**

- Child Protection - Reporting Obligations
- Student Wellbeing
- ICT Policy
- Social Media Policy
- Supervision of Students Policy
- Excursion and Camps Policy
- External Providers and Volunteers Policy
- Bus Policy
- Screening and Recruitment Policy
- Managing Complaints and Grievances Policy

## **15. Breach of Policy**

Where an employee is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this Policy, St Mary's College for the deaf may start the process under clause 13 of the Victorian Catholic Education Multi Enterprise Agreement 2013 (VCEMEA) for managing employment concerns. This may result in disciplinary consequences.

Where the Principal is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this policy, the concerned party is advised to contact the Canonical Administrators or the employer.

Relevant notification should also be made to Catholic Education Melbourne (Office of Professional Conduct, Ethics and Investigation).

Where any other member of the College community is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this policy, the College is to take appropriate action, including in accordance with the Reporting Obligations Policy, the Managing Complaints and Grievances Policy, and/or contact Catholic Education Melbourne (Office of Professional Conduct, Ethics and Investigation).

## 16. Review of this Child Safety Policy

At St Mary's College for the deaf we are committed to continuous improvement of our child safety systems and practices. We intend this policy to be a dynamic document that will be annually reviewed to ensure it is working in practice and updated to accommodate changes in legislation or circumstance.

We will maintain a history of updates to the policy.

## 17. References

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) 2016, [Commitment Statement to Child Safety](#): A safe and nurturing culture for all children and young people in Catholic schools.

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) 2013, [Victorian Catholic Education Multi Enterprise Agreement 2013](#), CECV.

Congregation for Catholic Education 1997, [The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium](#), Vatican.

Safe Schools Hub 2014, [National Safe Schools Framework Glossary](#), Australian Government Department of Education and Training.

State of Victoria 2016, [Child Safe Standards](#) – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools: Ministerial Order No. 870, Education & Training Reform Act 2006, Victorian Government Gazette No. S2.

Victorian Government Department of Justice 2016, [Betrayal of Trust Implementation](#).

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