



## 1. STATEMENT OF CONTEXT AND PURPOSE

Child abuse involves any act committed against a child involving physical violence, sexual offences (including grooming), serious emotional or psychological abuse, and serious neglect.

The School has a zero tolerance policy for child abuse and is committed to promoting child safety, children's wellbeing and protecting children from abuse. Ministerial Order 870 requires the School to implement child safety standards and to accommodate and take the needs of all children (including but not limited to, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with disabilities, and children who are vulnerable) into account when creating a child safe environment.

Accordingly, this policy and procedure sets out key elements of the School's approach to child safety and has been developed to create and maintain a child safe school environment in accordance with Ministerial Order 870 and the Child Safe Standards set out therein. It also:

- outlines the overarching principles and values that guide the School in its approach to child safety;
- refers to the processes and procedures for reporting and responding to allegations of child abuse; and
- refers to the Code of Conduct – Child Safe, which in turn provides the standards of expected and appropriate behaviour with children.

## 2. APPLICATION

This policy applies to all School staff (as defined below), as well as parents, students and other people who are associated with or come in contact with the School.

## 3. DEFINITIONS

**Child** means a person who is enrolled as a student at the School.

**Child abuse** encompasses a broad range of matters set out in Part 5 of this policy.

**Child-connected work** means work authorised by the School and performed by an adult in the school environment while children are present or reasonably expected to be present.

**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.

**Child Safety Officer** is the relevant Head of School and School Counsellor as follows:

Head of Early Learning Centre	Cara Mearns	<a href="mailto:cmearns@fintona.vic.edu.au">cmearns@fintona.vic.edu.au</a>
Head of Junior School	Eleni Goulas	<a href="mailto:egoulas@fintona.vic.edu.au">egoulas@fintona.vic.edu.au</a>
Head of Middle School	Jacqui Pugh	<a href="mailto:jpugh@fintona.vic.edu.au">jpugh@fintona.vic.edu.au</a>
Deputy Principal/Head of Senior School	Sarah Carter	<a href="mailto:scarter@fintona.vic.edu.au">scarter@fintona.vic.edu.au</a>
School Counsellor	Fiona Stekhoven	<a href="mailto:fstekhoven@fintona.vic.edu.au">fstekhoven@fintona.vic.edu.au</a>

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

- a School campus;
- online school environments (including email and intranet systems);
- 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).

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**School staff** means an individual working in a School environment who is directly engaged or employed by the School and/or a volunteer or a contracted service provider (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary) and/or a minister of religion.

## 4. OVERARCHING VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

The School's approach to child safety is guided by a number of overarching principles and values (which are set out below).

All persons to whom this policy applies are responsible for complying with the School's child safety policies and related policies and procedures (including the Code of Conduct and Mandatory Reporting Policy), upholding the overarching principles and values set out herein, conducting themselves in accordance with the commitments set out below and taking all reasonable steps to promote the safety of children.

### 4.1 COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY AND BEST INTERESTS

The School is committed to child safety and wants children to be safe, happy and empowered. The School supports and respects all students and children, as well as school staff and parents.

The School is committed to:

- embedding and promoting a culture of child safety;
- preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks;
- protecting the rights of all children to be safe, without fear of abuse or exploitation as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989);
- acting in children's best interests and keeping children safe by all reasonable means;
- ensuring cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and for children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds;
- providing a safe environment for children with a disability;
- actively working to empower children; and
- regularly training and educating school staff on child abuse risks.

### 4.2 ZERO TOLERANCE FOR CHILD ABUSE

The School has zero tolerance for child abuse and will not tolerate any form of child abuse, including by anyone who is working within the school environment or in child-connected work.

The School has legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when child safety concerns are raised and will comply with these obligations.

All instances of suspected child abuse, allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns must be reported to a Child Safety Officer and will be treated very seriously and consistently with the School's reporting procedures (including as set out in this policy and the Mandatory Reporting Policy).

If school staff believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse phone 000.

## 5. WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE

### 5.1 DEFINITION OF CHILD ABUSE AS SET OUT IN THE *EDUCATION TRAINING REPORT ACT 2006 (VIC)*

**Child abuse** includes:

- any act committed against a child involving:
  - a **sexual offence**; or

- an offence under section 49B(2) of the *Crimes Act 1958*, that is, the offence of "grooming" which prohibits communicating (including electronically) by words or conduct with a child with the intention of facilitating the child's engagement or involvement in a sexual offence with you or another adult;
- the infliction on a child of:
  - **physical violence**; or
  - **serious emotional or psychological harm**; and
- **serious neglect** of a child.

## 5.2 PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

Physical violence occurs when a child suffers or is likely to suffer significant harm from a non-accidental injury or injuries inflicted by another person. Physical violence can be inflicted in many ways, including beating, shaking, burning or use of weapons.

Possible physical indicators:	Possible behavioural indicators:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unexplained bruises</li> <li>• burns and/or fractured bones</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• showing wariness or distrust of adults</li> <li>• wearing long sleeved clothes on hot days (to hide bruising or other injury)</li> <li>• fear of specific people</li> <li>• unexplained absences</li> <li>• academic problems</li> </ul>

## 5.3 SEXUAL OFFENCES AND ABUSE

Sexual offences occur when a person involves a child in sexual activity, or deliberately puts the child in the presence of sexual behaviours that are exploitative or inappropriate to his/her age and development. Child sexual abuse can involve a range of sexual activity including fondling, masturbation, penetration, voyeurism and exhibitionism. It can also include exposure to or exploitation through pornography or prostitution, as well as grooming behaviour.

Possible physical indicators:	Possible behavioural indicators:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• presence of sexually transmitted diseases</li> <li>• pregnancy</li> <li>• bleeding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• displaying sexual behaviour or knowledge that is unusual for the child's age</li> <li>• difficulty sleeping</li> <li>• being withdrawn</li> <li>• complaining of headaches or stomach pains</li> <li>• fear of specific people</li> <li>• showing wariness or distrust of adults</li> <li>• displaying aggressive behaviour</li> </ul>

## 5.4 SERIOUS EMOTIONAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

Serious emotional or psychological abuse occurs when harm is inflicted on a child through repeated rejection, isolation, or by threats or violence. It can include derogatory name-calling and put downs, or persistent and deliberate coldness from a person, to the extent where the behaviour of the child is disturbed or their emotional development is at serious risk of being impaired. Serious emotional or psychological abuse could also result from conduct that exploits a child without necessarily being criminal, such as encouraging a child to engage in inappropriate or risky behaviours.

Possible physical indicators:	Possible behavioural indicators:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• delays in emotional, mental or even physical development</li> <li>• physical signs of self-harming.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• exhibiting low self-esteem or anxiety</li> <li>• displaying aggressive or demanding behaviour</li> <li>• being withdrawn, passive and/or tearful</li> </ul>

## 5.5 SERIOUS NEGLECT

Serious neglect is the continued failure to provide a child with the basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, shelter, hygiene, medical attention or adequate supervision, to the extent that the child's health, safety and/or development is, or is likely to be, jeopardized. Serious neglect can also occur if an adult fails to adequately ensure the safety of a child where the child is exposed to extremely dangerous or life threatening situations.

Possible physical indicators:	Possible behavioural indicators:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• frequent hunger</li> <li>• malnutrition</li> <li>• poor hygiene</li> <li>• inappropriate clothing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stealing food</li> <li>• staying at school outside of school hours</li> <li>• aggressive behaviour</li> <li>• using alcohol or drugs</li> <li>• academic issues</li> </ul>

## 6. CHILD SAFETY ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE SCHOOL

The School has taken, and/or proposes to take, the actions set out below in order to:

- demonstrate its commitment to child safety and monitor the school's adherence to its child safety policy;
- support, encourage and enable school staff, parents, and children to understand, identify, discuss and report child safety matters; and
- support or assist children who disclose child abuse, or are otherwise linked to suspected child abuse.

### 6.1 DEVELOPMENT, MAINTENANCE, IMPLEMENTATION AND PUBLICATION OF CHILD SAFETY POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND CODES OF CONDUCT

This policy and procedure (along with the Code of Conduct, Mandatory Reporting Procedure, and other School Policies and Procedures) guides school staff on how to behave with children at the School.

All school staff must abide by the School's Code of Conduct which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. The School welcomes input from employees and authorised personnel, as well as children and their families, regarding the development and content of the Code of Conduct.

We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place. The School:

- takes all allegations seriously and has a procedure in place to enable allegations to be investigated thoroughly and quickly.
- trains staff and volunteers to deal appropriately with allegations of child abuse.
- 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/or if they notice inappropriate behaviour.

## 6.2 RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

The School takes all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children and develops selection criteria and advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities.

Please refer to the School's Recruitment and Selection Policy for further information.

## 6.3 TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone at the School (including the Principal, the Board, school staff, students and parents) understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility.

The School's culture aims for all school staff (in addition to parents/carers and children) to feel comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. Accordingly, the School trains its employees and authorised staff to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

The School also supports its school staff through ongoing supervision and training 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 school staff will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand the School'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 the School's 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.

## 6.4 APPOINTMENT OF CHILD SAFETY OFFICERS

The School has appointed Child Safety Officers as a first point of contact to provide advice and support to children, parents, employees and volunteers regarding the safety and well-being of children at the School (see also Part 7.6 below).

The Child Safety Officers will receive appropriate training and support in relation to child safety, prevention of child abuse and responding to allegations of child abuse.

School staff, students and parents can contact a Child Safety Officer for further information regarding child safety and for any questions or concerns or reports of suspected or alleged child abuse.

## 6.5 PROVISION OF COUNSELLING

The School has set up and provides counselling services to children who disclose child abuse or are otherwise linked to suspected child abuse.

## 6.6 RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

The School proactively manages risks of abuse to children.

The School has developed and implemented risk management strategies regarding child safety in school environments which will identify and mitigate the risk(s) of child abuse in school environments by taking into account:

- the nature of the school environment, for example:
- risks posed by physical environments such as doors that can lock; and
- risks posted by online environments, such as preventing staff or volunteers from having contact with a child on social media;
- 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.

Where risks are identified of child abuse occurring in one or more school environment, the Principal and/or Board will:

- make a record of those risks;
- specify the action(s) the School will take to reduce or remove the risks (risk controls), which will take into account the nature of the risk and the diversity characteristics of the children affected by the risk.

The Principal and/or Board will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of its risk controls.

The Principal and/or Board will ensure (at least annually) that appropriate guidance and training is provided to themselves and school staff 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.

The Principal and/or the Board:

- has developed strategies to deliver appropriate education about standards of behaviour for students attending the school, healthy and respectful relationships (including sexuality), resilience and child abuse awareness and prevention.
- promotes child safety standards set out in Ministerial Order 870 in ways that are readily accessible, easy to understand, and user-friendly to children.

## 6. PROCEDURE FOR RESPONDING TO AND REPORTING ALLEGATIONS OF SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

The School takes all allegations or disclosures of suspected child abuse seriously and will respond to and report (including to authorities and the police) allegations or disclosures of child abuse in accordance with this policy and procedure, the Mandatory Reporting Policy and any other legal obligations.

### 7.1 APPLICATION OF THE PROCEDURE

This procedure:

- covers all forms of child abuse; and
- applies to allegations or disclosures of child abuse made by or in relation to a child, school staff, visitors, or other persons while connected to a school environment;
- is to be read in conjunction with:
  - the Code of Conduct (which sets out types of conduct that should be reported); and
  - the Mandatory Reporting Policy (which sets out mandatory reporting obligations, the Failure to Disclose and Failure to Protect Offences);
- *does not*:
  - prohibit or discourage staff from reporting an allegation of child abuse to a person external to the School;
  - state or imply that it is the victim's responsibility to inform the police or authorities of the allegation;
  - require staff to make a judgment about the truth of the allegation of child abuse;
  - prohibit staff from making records in relation to an allegation or disclosure of child abuse.

## 7.2 OBLIGATION TO REPORT INCIDENTS INVOLVING ALLEGED OR SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

All school staff must report any instances of child abuse (included instances of suspected or alleged child abuse) to a Child Safety Officer (or Principal if appropriate) as soon as practicable in accordance with this policy and procedure.

Fulfilling the roles and responsibilities contained in this procedure does not displace or discharge any other obligations that arise if a person reasonably believes that a child is at risk of child abuse, including the obligations set out in the Mandatory Reporting Policy.

If an adult has a **reasonable belief** that an incident involving child abuse 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 (such as those set out above) is observed;
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it; or
- observing suspicious behaviour.

The School takes its legal responsibilities seriously, including as set out in the Mandatory Reporting Policy in relation to Mandatory Reporting obligations and:

- the **Failure to Disclose Offence**: Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to the police;
- the **Failure to Protect Offence**: People of authority in the School will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.

## 7.3 WHERE A CHILD DISCLOSES OR ALLEGES AN INCIDENT OF CHILD ABUSE

The following procedure is to be followed by any person to whom a child discloses or alleges an incident of child abuse:

- Separate the child from the other children discreetly and listen to them carefully.
- Let the child use their own words to explain what has occurred.
- Reassure the child that you take what they are saying seriously, and it is not their fault and that they are doing the right thing.
- Explain to them that this information may need to be shared with others, such as with their parent/carer, specific people in the School, or the police.
- Do not make promises to the child such as promising not to tell anyone about the incident, except that you will do your best to keep them safe.
- Do not leave the child in a distressed state. If they seem at ease in your company, stay with them.
- Provide them with an Incident Report Form to complete, or complete it together, if you think the child is able to do this.
- As soon as possible after the disclosure, record the information using the child's words and report the disclosure to a Child Safety Officer, the police or child protection.
- Ensure the disclosure is recorded accurately, and provided to one of the Child Safety Officers to be stored securely.

#### **7.4 WHERE A PARENT/CARER ALLEGES OR DISCLOSES THAT THEIR CHILD HAS BEEN ABUSED IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT**

The following procedure is to be followed by any person to whom a parent/carer discloses or alleges an incident of child abuse:

- Explain that the School has processes to ensure all abuse allegations are taken very seriously.
- Ask about the wellbeing of the child.
- Allow the parent/carer to talk through the incident in their own words.
- Advise the parent/carer that you will take notes during the discussion to capture all details.
- Explain to them the information may need to be repeated to authorities or others, such as one of the School's Child Safety Officers, the police or child protection.
- Do not make promises at this early stage, except that you will do your best to keep the child safe.
- Provide them with an incident report form to complete, or complete it together.
- Ask them what action they would like to take and advise them of what the immediate next steps will be.
- Ensure the report is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely.
- As soon as possible after the disclosure, report the disclosure to a Child Safety Officer.

#### **7.5 PROTECTION OF CHILD CONNECTED TO ALLEGED ABUSE**

Where an allegation of suspected child abuse is made, all reasonable and appropriate action will be taken to protect any child connected to the alleged child abuse until the allegation is resolved.

What is reasonable and appropriate will depend on the circumstances of each case, but will in all cases involve preventing (as far as reasonably practicable) any contact between the child connected to the alleged abuse and the alleged offender. This may be achieved by:

- moving the alleged offender to a non-child related position;
- supervising the alleged offender;
- removing or suspending the alleged offender from their duties while the matter is being investigated.

The Child Safety Officer will consult with the family of the child connected to the alleged abuse regarding further actions to be implemented to ensure the safety of the child pending resolution of the matter.

#### **7.6 CHILD SAFETY OFFICERS**

The School has appointed Child Safety Officers, who are responsible for:

- promptly managing the School's response to an allegation or disclosure of child abuse, and ensuring that the allegation or disclosure is taken seriously;
- responding appropriately to a child who makes or is affected by an allegation of child abuse; and
- monitoring overall compliance by the School with this procedure.

Where a Child Safety Officer cannot perform their role for any reason, the Principal is responsible for managing an alternative procedure for responding to an allegation or disclosure of abuse.

In response to any allegation or disclosure of child abuse, the School and/or Child Safety Officer will:

- inform appropriate authorities about the allegation (including but not limited to mandatory reporting);



- protect any child connected to the alleged child abuse until the allegation is resolved (including in accordance with clause 7.5 above); and
- retain records of the allegation of child abuse and the School's response to it.

## 7.7 AWARENESS OF POTENTIAL BARRIERS IN REPORTING ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

All persons need to be aware that some people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds may face barriers in reporting allegations of abuse. For example, people from some cultures may experience anxiety when talking with police, and communicating in English may be a barrier for some. All staff need to be sensitive to these issues and meet people's needs where possible, such as having an interpreter present (who could be a friend or family member).

If an allegation of abuse involves an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child, all staff will need to ensure a culturally appropriate response (including for example, engaging with parents of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children, local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities). Please contact the Child Safety Officer for further guidance regarding how to accommodate potential cultural and linguistic barriers.

Some children with a disability may experience barriers disclosing an incident. For example, children with hearing or cognitive impairments may need support to help them explain the incident, including through sign language interpreters. Please contact the Child Safety Officer for advice on communicating with people with a disability.

## 8. CONSEQUENCES FOR BREACH OF THIS POLICY

The School emphasises the need to fully comply with the requirements of this policy and procedure. Any school staff found to be in breach of the requirements of this policy may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment (or engagement, where appropriate). Employees should refer to the Performance Management, Misconduct and Disciplinary Action Policy. Breaches may also result in appropriate authorities and/or the Police.

## 9. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

### 9.1 AT BOARD / PRINCIPAL LEVEL

To properly implement this policy, the School, the Board and/or the Principal must ensure:

- that this policy is endorsed on an annual basis and following significant incidents if they occur;
- (where possible) that families and children have the opportunity to contribute, and work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability;
- that copies of this policy and procedure are made available to all school staff, for example on the School intranet, in physical form in the school staff room and on school staff bulletin notice boards;
- that this policy is incorporated into the Board's / Principal's record of current policies;
- that this policy is incorporated into the School's induction program, to ensure that all school staff (particularly those who are engaged in child-connected work) are aware of the policy, have read and understood the policy, and acknowledge their commitment to comply with the policy;
- that periodic training and refresher sessions are administered to all school staff in relation to this policy and procedure;
- that all school staff are directed towards the Code of Conduct – Child Safe; and
- that this policy and procedure is accessible to the public (including children and families).

## 9.2 AT OTHER LEVELS

To properly implement this Policy, all the School's staff must ensure:

- that they will abide by this policy and procedure, the Mandatory Reporting Policy and the Code of Conduct and assist the School in the implementation of this policy and procedure; and
- that they have read and understood the definitions of child abuse outlined in this policy.

## 10. REFERENCE POINTS / BACKGROUND PAPERS

- *Child Safety and Wellbeing Act 2005* (Vic);
- *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic);
- *Crimes Amendment (Protection of Children) Act 2014* (Vic);
- *Crimes Amendment (Grooming) Act 2014* (Vic);
- *Education Training Report Act 2006* (Vic);
- *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989);
- *Working with Children Act 2005* (Vic);
- Ministerial Order 870;
- Child Safe Standards and Code of Conduct – Child Safe;
- Child Safety Officer Role Description;
- Code of Conduct - Staff;
- Mandatory Reporting Policy;
- Recruitment and Selection Policy; and
- Reportable Conduct Policy.