



# Northern School for Autism

*"Learning for Life"*

## **STANDARD 2** **Child Safe Policy**

### **PURPOSE**

Northern School for Autism School's Child Safe Policy sets out the school's commitment and approach to creating and maintaining a child safe organisation where children and young people are safe and feel safe, and provides the policy framework for the school's approach to the Child Safe Standards.

### **SCOPE**

This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, and contractors in the school environment, whether or not they work in direct contact with children or young people. This policy also applies to School Council members where indicated.

The policy will apply to the school environment (see Definitions section). The policy covers both school hours and outside of school hours.

### **DEFINITIONS**

#### *Child abuse*

Child abuse includes:

- any act committed against a child involving:
  - a sexual offence; or
  - grooming; and
- the infliction, on a child, of:
  - physical violence; or
  - serious emotional or psychological harm; and
- serious neglect of a child.

#### *Child-connected work*

Child-connected work is the term used in Ministerial Order 870 — Child Safe Standards. It is defined as work:

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- authorised by the Principal, School Council or Department
- performed by an adult in a school environment, including online, school camps and excursions, and
- when children are present or reasonably expected to be present

For child-connected work, it is up to each school to determine whether they will require WWC Checks for visitors and volunteers based on the nature of the person's interaction with children.

Each school is unique and what checks are required should reflect the risks of each individual school setting, the school community and what duties the person will be performing.

Schools are encouraged to develop their own specific policies and practices, keeping in mind the broad intent of the [Child Safe Standards](#) to embed a child safe culture that has zero tolerance for child abuse.

### *Child safety*

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.

### *School environment*

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 campus of the school;
- online school environments (including email and intranet systems); and
- other locations provided by the school for a child's use (including, without limitation, locations used for school camps, sporting events, excursions, competitions, homestays, and other school activities or events)

### *School staff*

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

- employed by the Department of Education and Training;
- directly engaged or employed by the School Council; or
- a volunteer or a contracted service provider (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary).

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## STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY AND CHILD SAFETY PRINCIPLES

This school is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people. This will be the primary focus of our care and decision-making.

The school's approach to creating and maintaining a child safe school environment is guided by our acceptance of the universal values –

*Every member of the school community has a right to fully participate in an educational environment that is safe, supportive and inclusive.*

*Everyone deserves to be treated with respect and dignity.*

We have **zero tolerance of child abuse**, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures.

The school expects that when the School Strategic Plan is updated, it will contain statements about the school's commitment to developing a child safe culture.

Our Child Safe Code of Conduct lists acceptable and not acceptable behaviours.

We have child safe policies to identify and remove or reduce suspected child abuse and to respond to suspected child abuse.

Where applicable, our VRQA and other policies have, as one of their purposes, the objective of having in place strategies to enhance child safety standards.

Our school policies consistently affirm that the safety and wellbeing of children is a high priority for Northern School for Autism Primary School.

Where possible, we choose to use the term "child" rather than "student".

We are committed to providing a child safe environment where children and young people are safe and feel safe, and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives. Our child safe policies, procedures, strategies and practices will be inclusive of the needs of all children, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with disabilities, and children who are vulnerable.

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Every person involved in the school has a responsibility to understand the important and specific role they play individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children and young people is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make.

### Child safety principles

In its planning, decision-making and operations, the school will:

1. Take a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to child safety.
2. Value and empower children to participate in decisions which affect their lives.
3. Foster a culture of openness that supports all persons to safely disclose risks of harm to children.
4. Respect diversity in cultures and child rearing practices while keeping child safety paramount.
5. Provide written guidance on appropriate conduct and behaviour towards children.
6. Engage only the most suitable people to work with children and have high quality staff and volunteer supervision and professional development.
7. Ensure children know who to talk with if they are worried or are feeling unsafe, and that they are comfortable and encouraged to raise such concerns.
8. Report suspected abuse, neglect or mistreatment promptly to the appropriate authorities.
9. Share information appropriately and lawfully with other organisations where the safety and wellbeing of children is at risk.
10. Value the input of and communicate regularly with families and carers.

## POLICY

### Strategies to embed a child safe culture

The school culture encourages staff, students, parents/carers and the school community to raise, discuss and scrutinise child safety concerns. This makes it more difficult for abuse to occur and remain hidden.

All child safety documents, including this policy, the Child Safe Code of Conduct, the school’s Protecting Children – Reporting and Other Legal Obligations Policy, [Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#) and the [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#) are readily available online.

Child safety is everyone’s responsibility. All school staff are required to:

- Act in accordance with the school’s Child Safe Code of Conduct, which clearly sets out the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.
- Act in accordance with the Protecting Children – Reporting and Other Legal Obligations Policy at all times, including following the [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#) where necessary.
- Undertake annual guidance and training on child safety.

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- Act in accordance with their legal obligations, including:
  - Failure to disclose offence (applies to all adults)
  - Duty of care (applies to all school staff)
  - Mandatory reporting obligations (applies to all mandatory reporters, including teachers, principals, registered psychologists, and registered doctors and nurses)
  - Failure to protect offence (applies to a person in a position of authority within the school)
  - Reportable conduct obligations (applies to all school staff in reporting conduct to the Principal, and applies to the Principal in reporting to Employee Conduct Branch)
  - Organisational duty of care (applies to the school as an organisation)
  - For more information on these obligations, see [Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#).

As part of the school’s child safe culture, **school leadership** (including the Principal and Assistant Principal) will:

- Consider the diversity of all children, including (but not limited to) the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with disabilities, and children who are vulnerable, when implementing the Child Safe Standards.
- Ensure that child safety is a regular agenda item at school leadership meetings and staff meetings.
- Encourage and enable staff professional learning and training to build deeper understandings of child safety and prevention of abuse.
- Ensure that no one is prohibited or discouraged from reporting an allegation of child abuse to a person external to the school or from making records of any allegation.

As part of the school’s child safe culture, **school mandatory reporting staff** are required to:

- Complete the [Protecting Children – Mandatory reporting and other obligations](#) online module every year.
- Read the school’s Protecting Children – Reporting and Other Legal Policy, and maintain familiarity with that document.
- Read the school’s Child Safe Policy (this document) on induction, and maintain familiarity with the document.

As part of the school’s child safe culture, in performing the functions and powers given to them under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*, the **School Council and School Council members** will:

- Ensure that child safety is a regular agenda item at School Council meetings. [Please note that there is no requirement to discuss child safety at every School Council meeting, but it is best practice to have child safety on the agenda at some meetings to show that the school is embedding a culture of child safety and School Council members are informed and understand the issues.]
- Consider the diversity of all children, including (but not limited to) the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with disabilities, and children who are vulnerable, when making decisions regarding the Child Safe Standards

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- Undertake annual guidance and training on child safety, such as the [Child Safe Standards School Council Training PowerPoint](#).
- Approve the Child Safe Code of Conduct to the extent that it applies to School Council employees and members, and if updated, note the new document in its school council meeting minutes
- When hiring employees, ensure that selection, supervision and management practices are child safe (will be delegated to the Principal).

School leadership will maintain records of the above processes.

### Roles and responsibilities

School leaders will ensure that each person understands their role, responsibilities and behaviour expected in protecting children and young people from abuse and neglect. Staff will comply with the school’s Child Safe Code of Conduct, which sets out clearly the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.

Specific child safety responsibilities:

- School Leadership, in consultation with staff, parents/carers, students and School Council, is responsible for reviewing and updating the Child Safe Policy every two years (as part of VRQA requirements).
- School Leadership is responsible for monitoring the school’s compliance with the Child Safe Policy. The school community should approach the Principal/Assistant Principal if they have any concerns about the school’s compliance with the Child Safe Policy.
- The Principal/Assistant is responsible for informing the school community about this policy, and making it publicly available on the school’s website.
- Other specific roles and responsibilities are named in the school’s other child safe policies and procedures, including the Child Safe Code of Conduct, Child Safe Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures, and risk assessment register.

### Recruitment

The school follows the Department’s Recruitment in Schools Guide last updated 24 October 2019, to ensure child safe recruitment practices, available on the [Department’s website](#).

All prospective volunteers are required to comply with our school’s Volunteers in Schools Policy, including in relation to assessing the suitability of prospective volunteers and obtaining checks required under this policy. A valid Working with Children Check will be required in compliance with this policy.

### Training and supervision

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Training and education are important to ensure that everyone in the school understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility.

Our school culture aims for all staff and volunteers (in addition to parents/carers and children) to feel confident and comfortable in coming forward with any allegations or suspicions 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. In compliance with MO 870, this training occurs annually or more often as required.

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

New employees and volunteers will be inducted into the school, including by being referred to the Child Safe Policy (this document), the Child Safe Code of Conduct, and the Child Protection - Responding and Other Legal Obligations Policy.

They will also be supervised regularly to ensure they understand our school's commitment to child safety, and that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate. All employees of our school will be monitored and assessed via regular performance review to ensure their continuing suitability for child-connected work. Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported by school staff to the Principal or Assistant Principal and will be managed in accordance with this school's Protecting Children – Reporting & Other Legal Obligations Policy.

### Reporting a child safety concern or complaint

The school has clear expectations for all staff and volunteers in making a report about a child or young person who may be in need of protection. All staff (including School Council employees) must follow the school's Protecting Children – Reporting & Other Legal Obligations Policy including following the [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#) if there is an incident, disclosure or suspicion of child abuse. Immediate actions should include reporting their concerns to DHHS Child Protection, Victoria Police and/or another appropriate agency and notifying the Principal or a member of the School Leadership Team of their concerns and the reasons for those concerns.

We never will prohibit or discourage school staff from reporting an allegation of child abuse. The school will always take action to respond to a complaint in accordance with the school's Protecting Children – Reporting and Other Legal Obligations Policy in accordance with Action 4 of the Four Critical Actions for Schools and will provide ongoing support for students affected by child abuse.

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### Risk reduction and management

The school believes the wellbeing of children and young people is paramount, and is vigilant in ensuring proper risk management processes, found in the school's risk assessment register. The school recognises there are potential risks to children and young people and will take a risk management approach by undertaking preventative measures.

We will identify and mitigate the risks of child abuse in school environments by taking into account the nature of each school environment, the activities expected to be conducted in that environment and the characteristics and needs of all children expected to be present in that environment.

The school monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of the actions it takes to reduce or remove risks to child safety. More information can be found in the school's Risk Assessment Register.

### Listening to, communicating with and empowering children

The school has developed a safe, inclusive and supportive environment that involves and communicates with children, young people and their parents/carers. We encourage child and parent/carer involvement and engagement that informs safe school operations and builds the capability of children and parents/carers to understand their rights and their responsibilities. Our school is committed to supporting and encouraging students to use their voice to raise and share their concerns with a trusted adult at any time of need.

When the school is gathering information in relation to a complaint about alleged misconduct with or abuse of a child, we will listen to the complainant's account and take them seriously, check understanding and keep the child (and/or their parents/carers, as appropriate) informed about progress. Please refer to the school's *Complaints, Parents Policy*.

The school will promote the Child Safe Standards in ways that are readily accessible, easy to understand, and user-friendly to children, including:

- If deemed appropriate, PROTECT Child Safety posters will be displayed across the school.
- School newsletters will inform students and the school community about the school's commitment to child safety, and strategies or initiatives that the school is taking to ensure student safety.
- As part of our Strategies to Promote the Participation and Empowerment of Children Policy, age-appropriate discussion of child safety issues with students and student leaders is a feature of our child safe approach.
- As part of our *Student Sexual Offending & Problem Sexual Behaviour Policy*, mandatory reporters and other school staff are briefed on the Four Critical Actions.

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- The whole school is encouraged to contribute to risk assessment and mitigation. The *Risk Management – Schools Policy* describes actions.

The school will use its health and wellbeing programs to deliver appropriate education to its students about:

- standards of behaviour for students attending the school;
- healthy and respectful relationships (including sexuality);
- resilience (one of the school’s prime values);
- child abuse awareness and prevention.

### Communications

This school is committed to communicating our child safety strategies to the school community through:

- Ensuring that the Child Safe Policy (this document) and the Protecting Children – Reporting and Other Legal Obligations Policy are available on the school website.
- Once per term reminders in the school newsletter of our school’s commitment to child safety.
- Ensuring that child safety is a regular agenda item at school leadership meetings, staff meetings and School Council meetings for discussion.

### Confidentiality and privacy

This school collects, uses and discloses information about particular children and their families in accordance with Victorian privacy law. The principles regulating the collection, use and storage of information is included in the Department of Education and Training’s [Privacy and Information Sharing Policy](#) and the school’s policy of the same name.

## FURTHER INFORMATION & RESOURCES

Related policies and documents include:

- Child Safe Code of Conduct
- Risk Assessment Register
- [Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#)
- [Recording your actions: Responding to suspected child abuse – A template for Victorian schools](#)
- [Identifying and Responding to Student Sexual Offending](#)
- [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Student Sexual Offending](#)
- [School Policy and Advisory Library – Duty of Care](#)
- [School Policy and Advisory Library – Child Protection Reporting Obligations.](#)

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- Please refer also to the school’s existing policies all of which are designed to create a safe environment for children:

<i>Contractor OHS Management</i>	<i>Bullying Prevention &amp; Response</i>
<i>Duty of Care</i>	<i>Behaviour, Student (DET Overview)</i>
<i>Employment</i>	<i>Reporting &amp; Managing School Incidents (Including Emergencies) Policy</i>
<i>Incursions (Safety of Children Working with External Providers)</i>	<i>Privacy &amp; Information Sharing</i>
<i>Digital Learning in Schools</i>	<i>Protecting Children – Reporting and Other Legal Obligations Policy</i>
<i>Mobile Phones, Student Use</i>	<i>Photographing, Filming &amp; Recording Children</i>
<i>Police &amp; DHHS Interviews</i>	<i>Risk Management - Schools</i>
<i>Staff Code of Conduct</i>	<i>Student Wellbeing &amp; Engagement</i>
<i>Visitors to the School</i>	<i>Volunteers in Schools</i>
<i>Working with Children &amp; Other Suitability Checks –</i>	<i>Supervision of Students</i>
<i>Volunteers &amp; Visitors</i>	<i>Student Sexual Offending &amp; Problem Sexual Behaviours</i>

## References:

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/school/pal/child-safe-standards>  
<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/protect/Pages/default.aspx?Redirect=1>

## REVIEW CYCLE

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This policy, first developed in this format in March 2020 and updated in September 2020, will be reviewed two-yearly or if guidelines change (latest Protect update April 2020).

The review will include input from staff, students, parents/carers and the school community.

A mandatory policy

School Council Approval Not Required for this policy, but the Principal may choose to table this policy with Council for noting

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