

POLICY STATEMENT

CHILD SAFETY

Purpose:

At Tecoma Primary the safety of every one of our children is a main priority. We want children to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and school volunteers. We have a commitment to **zero tolerance of child abuse**. Staff at our school have a responsibility to respond to the safety, care and welfare of students, in all school environments and outside of school hours. This is a commitment which is led by our School Council, School Leadership team, all staff and is shared openly and transparently with all members of our school community.

We are committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all children. We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our policies and procedures. We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, and will follow this rigorously, at all times.

We are committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks.

At Tecoma Primary School staff take part in regularly training and education about child abuse risks. We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability.

We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our leadership team, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.

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

Our children

This policy is intended to empower children who are vital and active participants in our school. We involve them when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them.

We listen to their views and respect what they have to say.

We promote diversity and tolerance at Tecoma Primary School, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome here.

In particular we:

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

In Ministerial Order No. 870 Child abuse is listed as:

- a) any act committed against a child involving –
 - (i) a sexual offence; or
 - (ii) an offence under section 49B(2) of the Crimes Act 1958 (grooming)
- b) the infliction, on a child of –
 - (i) Physical violence; or
 - (ii) Serious emotional or psychological harm
- c) Serious neglect of a child.

Guidelines for Implementation:

Our staff and volunteers

This policy guides our staff and volunteers on how to behave with children at our school. All of our staff, School Councillors and volunteers must agree to abide by our code of conduct, which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. All staff and volunteers, as well as children and their families, are given the opportunity to contribute to the development of the school's code of conduct. A signed copy of the agreement will be kept on file at school, in accordance with privacy legislation.

Training and supervision

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone at Tecoma Primary School understands that child safety is the responsibility of everyone.

Our school culture aims for all staff and volunteers (in addition to parents and children) to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns.

We train our staff to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

We also support our staff and volunteers through ongoing supervision to:

- develop their skills to protect children from abuse;
- and promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds,
- and the safety of children with a disability.

New employees take part in induction activities and are assigned a mentor, to ensure they understand our 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 Tecoma Primary School's Code of Conduct to understand appropriate behaviours further).

Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services (DHS) and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

Recruitment

We take all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children. We develop selection criteria and advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities. Our organisation understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

We carry out reference checks and ensure all teaching staff are registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) to ensure that we are recruiting the right people. All other personnel working in our school (maintenance, cleaner, gardener, plumber, etc) must hold a valid Working with Children's Check.

All people engaged in child-related work, including office staff, integration aides and volunteers, are required to hold a valid Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this Check. When working in the classroom, all volunteers should be within the line of sight of DET employees.

Fair procedures for personnel

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and just to personnel. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form (Appendix A) including investigation updates. All records are securely stored.

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

Privacy

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be staff, volunteers, parents or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety.

We have safeguards and practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected. Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will have access to it. The storage of all personal information will adhere to all aspects of privacy legislation and requirements from DET.

Legislative responsibilities

Our organisation takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- **Failure to disclose:** 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.¹
- **Failure to protect:** People of authority in our organisation 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.²

All staff at Tecoma Primary School must complete annual Mandatory Reporting training. These are completed at the beginning of every school year through the **Protecting Children – Mandatory Reporting and other Obligations eLearning Module**. This ensures all staff are aware of their responsibilities, as all staff who are mandatory reporters must comply with their duties.³

Risk management

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified (see information about failure to protect above). In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our children.

We have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks, which include risks posed by physical environments (for example, any doors that can lock), and online environments (for example, no staff or volunteer is to have contact with a child in organisations on social media).

Allegations, concerns and complaints

¹ A person will not commit this offence if they have a reasonable excuse for not disclosing the information, including a fear for their safety or where the information has already been disclosed.

Further information about the failure to disclose offence is available on the [Department of Justice and Regulation website](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence) www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence

² Further information about the failure to protect offence is available on the [Department of Justice and Regulation website](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence) www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence

³ Mandatory reporters (doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers (including early childhood teachers), principals and police) must report to child protection if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse.

See the Department of Health and Human Services website for information about [how to make a report to child protection](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/guide-to-making-a-report-to-child-protection-or-child-first) www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/guide-to-making-a-report-to-child-protection-or-child-first

At Tecoma Primary School we take all allegations seriously and have practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our staff are trained to deal appropriately with allegations. We work to ensure all children, families, staff and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour. We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place (see information about failure to disclose above).

If an adult has a **reasonable belief** that an incident has occurred then they must report the incident.

Factors contributing to reasonable belief may be:

- a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves)
- behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed⁴
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- observing suspicious behaviour.

Evaluation:

Evaluation of this policy will be carried out by the Education Sub-committee as part of the cyclic review process, in three years time, or beforehand, if a significant issue arises. We will ensure that families and students have the opportunity to contribute to the reviewing of this policy.

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Approval Date: 26th July, 2016

Review Date: May, 2019

Signed:

Principal

School Council President



⁴ For example behaviour, please see **An Overview of the Victorian child safe standards:**
www.dhs.vic.gov.au/...data/assets/word_doc/0005/955598/Child-safe-standards_overview.doc

Incident Reporting Form

(Appendix A)

The child safe standards require all schools to have processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse. This form can be provided to a child or their parents if they disclose an allegation of abuse or safety concern.

Staff can also use this resource to record disclosures.

Incident details

Date of incident:	
Time of incident:	
Location of incident:	
Name(s) of child/children involved:	
Name(s) of staff/volunteer involved:	

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

Does the child identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?

(Mark with an 'X' as applicable)

No Yes, Aboriginal Yes, Torres Strait Islander

Please categorise the incident

Physical violence

Sexual offence

Serious emotional or psychological abuse

Serious neglect

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

Please describe the incident

When did it take place?	
Who was involved?	
What did you see?	
Other information	

Parent/carer/child use

Date of incident:	
Time of incident:	
Location of incident:	
Name(s) of child/children involved:	
Name(s) of staff/volunteer involved:	

Office use:

Date incident report received:	
Staff member managing incident:	
Follow-up date:	
Incident ref. number:	

Has the incident been reported?

Child protection	
Police	
Another third party (please specify):	

Incident reporter wishes to remain anonymous?

(Mark with an 'X' as applicable)

Yes No

What to do when an allegation of child abuse is made?

The child safe standards require organisations that provide services for children⁵ to have processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse.⁶

At Tecoma Primary School we have a Child Safety Policy and a Child Safety Code of Conduct in place to ensure all staff know their obligation and the legal requirements of keeping children safe at our school.

This resource is designed to provide guidance on what to do if a child discloses an incident of abuse, or if a parent/carer raises a concern or allegation of abuse which may have taken.

If a child discloses an incident of abuse to you:

- Try and separate them 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 others, such as with their parent/carer, specific people in your school (such as Principal/Assistant Principal), 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 your Principal/Assistant Principal, police or child protection (DHS).
- Principal/Assistant Principal to provide support to the staff member involved in the disclosure
- Ensure the disclosure is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely.
All records need to be stored in the confidential file in the Assistant Principal's office.

If a parent/carer says their child has been abused in your school or raises a concern:

- 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. These notes will be attached to the report if necessary, and therefore destroyed if not needed.
- Explain to them the information may need to be repeated to authorities or others, such as the school's Principal/Assistant Principal, the police or child protection (DHS).
- 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.

⁵ For a [list of the organisations in scope](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies,-guidelines-and-legislation/in-scope-organisations-for-child-safe-standards) for the child safe standards, please see the Department of Health and Human Services website: <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies,-guidelines-and-legislation/in-scope-organisations-for-child-safe-standards>

⁶ The child safe standards aim to protect children from abuse in organisations, including physical violence, sexual offences, serious emotional or psychological abuse and serious neglect. For further explanation of the different types of child abuse, please see [An Overview of the Victorian child safe standards](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/word_doc/0005/955598/Child-safe-standards_overview.doc): <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/word_doc/0005/955598/Child-safe-standards_overview.doc>.

You 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. You 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 child, you will need to ensure a culturally appropriate response. A way to help ensure this could include engaging with parents of Aboriginal children, local Aboriginal communities or an Aboriginal community controlled organisations to review policies and procedures.

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. Advice on [communicating with people with a disability](#) can be found on the Department of Health and Human Services website <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-business-and-community/community-involvement/people-with-a-disability-in-the-community/communicate-and-consult-with-people-with-a-disability/communication-with-people-with-disabilities>.

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

Legal responsibilities

While the child safe standards focus on organisations, every adult who reasonably believes that a child has been abused, whether in their organisation or not, has an obligation to report that belief to authorities.

The **failure to disclose** criminal offence requires all adults (aged 18 and over) who hold a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria by an adult against a child under 16 to disclose that information to police (unless they have a reasonable excuse not to, for example because they fear for their safety or the safety of another).

More information about [failure to disclose](#) is available on the Department of Justice and Regulation website <www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence>

While failure to disclose only covers child sexual abuse, all adults should report other forms of child abuse to authorities. Failure to disclose does not change mandatory reporting responsibilities.

More information about [mandatory reporting](#) is available in the *Child protection manual* <www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/intake/mandatory-reporting>.

Mandatory reporters (doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers (including early childhood teachers), principals and police) must report to child protection if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse.

See the Department of Health and Human Services website for information about [how to make a report to child protection](#) <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/guide-to-making-a-report-to-child-protection-or-child-first>.

The **failure to protect** criminal offence (commenced on 1 July 2015) applies 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 failed to do so.

Further information about [failure to protect](#) can be found on the Department of Justice and Regulation website www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence, and the Department of Health and Human Services website