



POLICY: CHILD SAFE

OUR COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY:

Brentwood Park 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.

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.

We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously.

DEFINITIONS:

Child abuse

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 (grooming)
- the infliction, on a child, of:
 - physical violence
 - serious emotional or psychological harm
 - serious neglect of a child

Child-connected work

Child-connected work means work authorised by the school, school council, or Secretary of the Department of Education and Training and performed by an adult in a school environment while children are present or reasonably expected to be present.

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 a school council; or
- a volunteer or a contracted service provider (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary)

Brentwood Park is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks.

Brentwood Park is committed to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks.

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. Particular attention will be paid to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children and children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as the safety of children with a disability. We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.

CHILD SAFETY PRINCIPLES:

In its planning, decision-making and operations, Brentwood Park will:

- take a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to child safety
- value and empower children to participate in decisions which affect their lives
- foster a culture of openness that supports all persons to safely disclose risks of harm to children
- respect diversity in cultures and child rearing practices while keeping children safe under the Child Safe Standards
- provide written guidance on appropriate conduct and behaviour towards children
- engage only the most suitable people to work with children and have high quality staff and volunteer supervision and professional development
- 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 issues
- report suspected abuse, neglect or mistreatment promptly to the appropriate authorities
- share information appropriately and lawfully with other organisations where the safety and wellbeing of children is at risk
- value the input of, and communicate regularly, with families and carers

STRATEGIES TO EMBED A CHILD SAFE CULTURE:

The school's culture encourages staff, students, parents 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 *Statement of Commitment to Child Safety*, *Child Safety Code of Conduct*, *Child Protection Mandatory Reporting Policy* and reporting procedure (*Mandatory Reporting Flowchart*), *Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools* and the *Four Critical Actions for Schools* are readily available on the school's website.

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

- Act in accordance with the school's *Child Safety Code of Conduct*, which clearly sets out the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour
- Act in accordance with the *Child Protection Mandatory Reporting Policy* and procedures at all times, including following the *Four Critical Actions for Schools* where necessary
- Undertake annual guidance and training on child safety
- 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, social workers 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*

STUDENTS:

This policy is intended to empower children who are vital and active participants at Brentwood Park. 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 in our organisation, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome. 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.

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, the school 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.

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

- All of our child safety policies and procedures will be available for the students and parents on the school website
- 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
- 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; and
 - child abuse awareness and prevention.
- Specific school programs are:
 - Be You
 - You Can Do It!
 - Respectful Relationships
 - Health and Human Relations Year 6
 - Changes in Our Bodies Year 5
 - e-smart education programs

COMMUNICATIONS:

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

- Ensuring that the Child Safety Policy (this document), the *Statement of Commitment to Child Safety*, *Child Safety Code of Conduct*, *Child Protection Mandatory Reporting Policy and reporting procedure (Mandatory Reporting Flowchart)*, 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 professional learning teams for discussion

SCHOOL LEADERS:

The Principal Class Leaders will ensure that staff members and volunteers understand 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*. The school leadership (including the principal and assistant principals) 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.

STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS:

This policy guides our staff and volunteers on how to behave with children in our organisation.

All of our staff and volunteers must agree to abide by our *Child Safe Code of Conduct* which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. All volunteers are required to comply with the school's *Volunteers Policy*. Volunteers are required to have a valid *Working with Children Check*.

SPECIFIC CHILD SAFETY RESPONSIBILITIES:

- The Curriculum and Policy Leader is responsible for reviewing and updating the *Child Safety Policy* every two years
- The Child Safety Officer is responsible for monitoring the school's compliance with the *Child Safety Policy*. The school community should approach the Child Safety Officer if they have any concerns about the school's compliance with the *Child Safety Policy*
- The Curriculum and Policy Leader is responsible for informing the school community about this policy, and making it publicly available

Staff are required to:

- Complete the *Protecting Children – Mandatory reporting and other obligations* online module every year.
- Read the school's *Child Safety Code of Conduct* on induction, and maintain familiarity with that document.
- Read the school's *Child Protection Mandatory Reporting Policy* and procedures on induction, and maintain familiarity with the documents.
- Read the school's *Statement of Commitment to Child Safety* and *Child Safety Policy* (this document) on induction, and maintain familiarity with the documents.

School councils and school council members will:

- Ensure that child safety is a regular agenda item at school council meetings

- 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
- Undertake annual guidance and training on child safety, such as the *Child Safe Standards School Council Training PowerPoint*
- Approve the *Child Safety Code of Conduct* and related policies 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 (unless delegated to the principal)
- School leadership will maintain records of the above processes
- Ensure the appointment of a school child safety officer

TRAINING AND SUPERVISION:

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone in our organisation understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility. Staff will undertake the online training *Mandatory Reporting and other Obligations*.

Our organisational culture aims for all staff and volunteers to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations 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.

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

New employees and volunteers will be inducted into the school, including by being provided with copies the *Child Safety Policy*, the *Child Safety Code of Conduct* and *Statement of Commitment*, and the *Child Protection Mandatory Reporting Policy*.

New employees and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand Brentwood Park'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. 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.

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. Brentwood Park understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

We are non-discriminatory in our recruitment. All people engaged in child-related work, including volunteers, are required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this check. A register of WWCC will be maintained by the Office Manager and be tabled at school council meetings.

We carry out reference checks and liaise with the appropriate authorities to ensure that we are recruiting the right people. Police record checks are part of the recruitment process undertaken through the Victorian Institute of Teaching Registration.

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, including investigation updates. All records are securely stored.

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.

LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES:

The school has clear expectations for all staff and volunteers (including homestay providers) 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 *Child Protection Mandatory Reporting Policy* and procedures (*Mandatory Reporting Flowchart*), 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.

The school will never 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 *Child Protection Mandatory Reporting Policy* and procedures (*Mandatory Reporting Flowchart*),. In accordance with Action 4 of the *Four Critical Actions for Schools*, the school will provide ongoing support for students affected by child abuse.

Brentwood Park takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- **Listening:** When gathering information in relation to a complaint about alleged misconduct with, or abuse of a child, the school will listen to the complainant's account of things, take them seriously and check understanding
- **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,
- **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.
- Any personnel who are mandatory reporters must comply with their duties.

ALLEGATIONS, CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS:

Brentwood Park takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our staff and volunteers 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. Immediate action should include reporting the concern to the Child Safety Officer, Jenny Reid, or if unavailable, a member of the Principal Class Team who will report concerns to DHS Child Protection.

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 observed
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- observing suspicious behaviour

RISK MANAGEMENT:

Brentwood Park believes the wellbeing of children and young people is paramount, and is vigilant in ensuring proper risk management processes, found in the school's Child Safety 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.

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified. 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 online social contact with a child).

The school's risk management includes:

- The Child safety Code of Conduct-outlines acceptable and unacceptable behaviour with respect to child safety and child abuse
- Appointing a Child Safety Officer.
- Screening as part of the staff recruitment process
- Working With Children Checks, Police Records, reference checks
- Supervision of students during recess and lunch breaks, as well as 15 minutes before and after school
- ICT Acceptable Use Agreement for students
- Teacher supervision of student internet usage
- Students move around the school in pairs during class time, not individually, for example, a toilet break
- Out of bounds areas in the school to ensure that students are not placed at risk
- Staff and Volunteer training
- Adequate monitoring of visitors, staff, volunteers and contractors
- eLearning mandatory reporting training for staff

REVIEW:

This policy will be reviewed in 2024

APPROVED BY SCHOOL COUNCIL: 30/3/2021