CHILD SAFETY AND WELLBEING POLICY

Purpose

The RedGum Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy demonstrates our school's commitment to creating and maintaining a child safe and child-friendly organisation, where children and young people are safe and feel safe.

This policy provides an overview of RedGum – The Waldorf School of Central Victoria's approach to implementing Ministerial Order 1359 which sets out how the Victorian Child Safe Standards apply in school environments.

It informs our school community of everyone's obligations to act safely and appropriately towards children and guides our processes and practices for the safety and wellbeing of students across all areas of our work.

Scope

This policy:

- applies to all school staff, volunteers and contractors whether or not they work in direct contact with students. It also applies to school council members where indicated;
- applies in all physical and online school environments used by students during or outside of school hours, including other locations provided by for a student's use (for example, a school camp) and those provided through third-party providers;
- should be read together with our other child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, and codes – refer to the related school policies section below.

Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

- RedGum is a child safe organisation which welcomes children, young people and their families.
- We are committed to providing environments where our students are safe and feel safe, where their participation is valued, their views respected, and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives. Our child safe policies, strategies and practices are inclusive of the needs of all children and students.

- We have no tolerance for child abuse and take proactive steps to identify and manage any risks of harm to students in our school environments.
- We promote positive relationships between students and adults and between students and their peers. These relationships are based on trust, respect and a deep understanding of the stages of child development as indicated by Rudolf Steiner.
- We take proactive steps to identify and manage any risk of harm to students in our school environment. When child safety concerns are raised or identified, we treat these seriously and respond promptly and thoroughly.
- Particular attention is given to the child safety needs of Aboriginal students, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, international students, students with disabilities, those unable to live at home, children and young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) and other students experiencing risk or vulnerability. Inappropriate or harmful behaviour targeting students based on these or other characteristics, such as racism or homophobia, are not tolerated at our school, and any instances identified will be addressed with appropriate consequences.
- Child safety is a shared responsibility. Every person involved in our school has an important role in promoting child safety and wellbeing and promptly raising any issues or concerns about a child's safety.
- We are committed to regularly reviewing our child safe practices, and seeking input from our students, families, staff, and volunteers to inform our ongoing strategies.

Definitions

Definitions of terms used in relation to the Victorian Child Safe Standards and Ministerial Order 1359 can be found on the Victorian Government website at https://www.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards-definitions

Summary of key terms

Child - Child means a child or young person who is under the age of 18 years.

Child Abuse - Child abuse includes:

1. any act committed against a child involving:
    a) a sexual offence
    b) grooming offences under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958
2. the infliction, on a child, of:
    a) physical violence
    b) serious emotional or psychological harm

3. the serious neglect of a child.

Child Safety - Child safety includes 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 suspicions, incidents, disclosures or allegations of child abuse.

Duty of Care - Duty of care refers to the obligation of all staff working with students to take reasonable steps to protect them from reasonably foreseeable harm.

Grooming - Grooming is when a person engages in predatory conduct to prepare a child or young person for sexual activity at a later time. Grooming can include communicating or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent or carer.

Mandatory Reporting - Mandatory reporting is the legal requirement for certain professional groups to report a reasonable belief of child physical or sexual abuse to child protection authorities.

In Victoria, under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, mandatory reporters must make a report to child protection, if:

- in the course of practising their profession or carrying out duties of their office, position or employment they form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse.

Reportable Conduct - Reportable Conduct is defined as:

- a sexual offence, sexual misconduct or physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of a child
- behaviour causing significant emotional or psychological harm to a child
- significant neglect of a child, or misconduct involving any of the above.

School Environment - School environment means any of the following physical, online or virtual places, used during or outside school hours:

a) A campus of the school

b) Online or virtual school environments made available or authorised by the school governing authority for use by a child or student (including email, intranet systems, software applications, collaboration tools, and online services)

c) Other locations provided by the school or through a third-party provider for a child or student to use including, but not limited to, locations used for:

   1. camps,
   2. approved homestay accommodation,

3. delivery of education and training such as registered training organisations, TAFEs, non-school senior secondary providers or another school; or (iv) sporting events, excursions, competitions or other events.

School Governing Body – in relation to a non-government school, Governing body means the person or body responsible for the governance, conduct or management of the school

School Staff - in a non-Government school, an individual working in a school environment who is

1. directly engaged or employed by a school governing authority
2. a contracted service provider (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary) engaged by the school governing authority to perform child-related work
3. a minister of religion, a religious leader or an employee or officer of a religious body associated with the school.

Student - Student means a person who is enrolled at or attends the school

Volunteer - Volunteer means a person who performs work without remuneration or reward for the school in the school environment.

Key legislation:

Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)
Children, Youth & Families Act (CYFA) 2005 (Vic)
Recommendations of the Betrayal of Trust Report
Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic.)
Victorian Institute of Teaching Act 2001 (Vic.)
Ministerial Order 1359

Roles and responsibilities

School leadership team

The Principal is responsible for ensuring that a strong child safe culture is created and maintained, and that policies and practices are effectively developed and implemented in accordance with Ministerial Order 1359.

Under the direction of the Principal ensures that the leadership team:

- ensures effective child safety and wellbeing governance, policies, procedures, codes and practices are in place and followed
- models a child safe culture that facilitates the active participation of students, families and staff in promoting and improving child safety, cultural safety and wellbeing
- enables inclusive practices where the diverse needs of all students are considered

- reinforces high standards of respectful behaviour between students and adults, and between students
- promotes regular open discussion on child safety issues within the school community including at leadership team meetings, staff meetings and school council meetings
- facilitates regular professional learning for staff and volunteers (where appropriate) to build deeper understandings of child safety, cultural safety, student wellbeing and prevention of responding to abuse
- creates an environment where child safety complaints and concerns are readily raised, and no one is discouraged from reporting an allegation of child abuse to relevant authorities.

School staff and volunteers

All staff and volunteers will:

- participate in child safety and wellbeing induction and training provided by the school or an outside agency, and always follow the school's child safety and wellbeing policies and procedures
- act in accordance with our Child Safety Code of Conduct (which can be found in the policy folder on the school drive).
- identify and raise concerns about child safety issues in accordance with our Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures, including following the Four Critical Actions for Schools (note, information about the Four Critical Actions can be found at the end of this policy).
- ensure students' views are taken seriously and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives
- implement inclusive practices that respond to the diverse needs of students.

School Board

In performing the functions and powers given to them under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*, school board members will:

- champion and promote a child safe culture with the broader school community
- ensure that child safety is a regular agenda item at school board meetings [**Note** It is not necessary to discuss child safety at every school council meeting, but child safety should be discussed at some meetings to ensure that a culture of child safety is being embedded and school council members are informed and understand the issues]
- undertake annual training on child safety
- approve updates to, and act in accordance with the Child Safety Code of Conduct to the extent that it applies to school board employees and members
- when hiring school board employees, ensure that selection, supervision, and management practices are child safe. At our school, school council employment duties are delegated to the principal who is bound by this policy.

Specific staff child safety responsibilities

The Principal is the designated Child Safety Officer and is supported by the Student Care and Wellbeing Team (comprised of the Student Care Leader and a number of other dedicated student and wellbeing officers) to implement our child safety policies and practices, including staff and volunteer training.) Note that in the absence of the Principal, the Student Care Leader assumes the Principal's responsibilities in this regard.

The responsibilities of the Principal (child safety champion) are outlined at Guidance for child safety champions.

Our principal is the first point of contact for child safety concerns or queries and for coordinating responses to child safety incidents.

- The principal is responsible for monitoring the school's compliance with the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy. Anyone in our school community should approach [job title] if they have any concerns about the school's compliance with the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.
- The principal is responsible for informing the school community about this policy, and making it publicly available
- Other specific roles and responsibilities are named in other child safety policies and procedures, including the Child Safety Code of Conduct, Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedures, and Child Safety Risk Register.

The Student Care and Wellbeing Team and the Student Leadership Group . The Child Safety and Wellbeing Team meet regularly to identify and respond to any ongoing matters related to child safety and wellbeing. The Student Leadership Group provides an opportunity for students to provide input into school strategies.

Our Leadership Team monitors the Child Safety Risk Register.

Child Safety Code of Conduct

Our Child Safety Code of Conduct sets the boundaries and expectations for appropriate behaviours between adults and students. It also clarifies behaviours that are not acceptable in our physical and online environments.

We ensure that students also know what is acceptable and what is not acceptable so that they can be clear and confident about what to expect from adults in the school.

The Child Safety Code of Conduct also includes processes to report inappropriate behaviour.

Managing risks to child safety and wellbeing

At our school we identify, assess and manage risks to child safety and wellbeing in our physical and online school environments. These risks are managed through our child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures and practices, and in our activity specific risk registers, such as those we develop for off-site overnight camps, adventure activities and facilities and services we contract through third party providers for student use.

Our Child Safety Risk Register is used to record any identified risks related to child abuse alongside actions in place to manage those risks. Our school leadership team will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the actions in the Child Safety Risk Register at least annually.

Establishing a culturally safe environment

At RedGum, we are committed to establishing an inclusive and culturally safe school where the strengths of First Nations culture, values and practices are respected.

We think about how every student can have a positive experience in a safe environment. For First Nations students, we recognise the link between First Nations culture, identity and safety and actively create opportunities for First Nations students and the First Nations community to have a voice and presence in our school planning, policies, and activities.

We have developed the following strategies to promote cultural safety in our school community:

- Signage displayed with acknowledgement of country
- Indigenous knowledge and understanding woven through curriculum across all age levels
- The school has active engagement with local elders, including in outdoor education camps
- Welcome to Country ceremony conducted at the beginning of each year and at appropriate important events
- School is currently engaged in Reconciliation Action Plan process

Student empowerment

To support child safety and wellbeing at RedGum, we work to create an inclusive and supportive environment that encourages students and families to contribute to our child safety approach and understand their rights and their responsibilities.

Respectful relationships between students are reinforced and we encourage strong friendships and peer support in the school to ensure a sense of belonging through developing social and emotional learning competencies across the curriculum (drawing on the CASEL framework). This includes a range of ongoing teaching practices and specific lessons of instruction to develop self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making. This work is supported by our student Code of Conduct and our school values.

We inform students of their rights through explicit teaching, modelling and reinforcing our positive behaviour values of be safe, be helpful, be kind and be ready to learn. We give them the skills and confidence to recognise unsafe situations with adults or other students and to speak up and act on concerns relating to themselves or their peers. We ensure our students know who to talk to if they are worried or feeling unsafe and we encourage them to share concerns with a trusted adult at any time. Students and families can also access information on how to report concerns through school reception or contacting a member of the leadership team.

When the school is gathering information in relation to a complaint about alleged misconduct or abuse of a child, we will listen to the complainant's account and take them seriously, check our understanding of the complaint, support the student and keep them (and their parents and carers, as appropriate) informed about progress.

To support student empowerment, our curriculum includes an age-appropriate exploration of values at every year level.

Family engagement

Our families and the school community have an important role in monitoring and promoting children's safety and wellbeing and helping children to raise any concerns.

To support family engagement, at RedGum we are committed to providing families and community with accessible information about our school's child safe policies and practices and involving them in our approach to child safety and wellbeing.

We will create opportunities for families to have input into the development and review of our child safety policies and practices and encourage them to raise any concerns and ideas for improvement.

We do this by:

- seeking input from families and the community through emails, surveys, newsletters, other communications, school board, student, staff, and parent meetings etc. and liaison with the RedGum Community Group
- All of our child safety policies and procedures will be available for students and parents through school reception, on the website or via email by request.
- Newsletters and emails will inform families and the school community about any significant updates to our child safety policies or processes, and strategies or initiatives that we are taking to ensure student safety.
- PROTECT Child Safety posters will be displayed in appropriate locations in the school.
- Parents may be engaged in discussions about the school's child safety approach at regular class parent meetings.

Diversity and equity

As a child safe organisation, we celebrate the rich diversity of our students, families and community and promote respectful environments that are free from discrimination. Our focus is on wellbeing and growth for all.

We recognise that every child has unique skills, strengths and experiences to draw on.

We pay particular attention to individuals and groups of children and young people in our community with additional and specific needs. This includes tailoring our child safety strategies and supports to the needs of:

- First Nations children and young people
- children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- children and young people with disabilities
- children unable to live at home or impacted by family violence
- international students
- children and young people who identify as LGBTIQ+.

Our Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy provides more information about the measures we have in place to support diversity and equity.

Suitable staff and volunteers

At RedGum we apply robust child safe recruitment, induction, training, and supervision practices to ensure that all staff, contractors, and volunteers are suitable to work with children.

Staff recruitment

When recruiting staff, we follow the RedGum Recruitment Policy.

When engaging staff to perform child-related work, we:

- sight, verify and record the person's Working with Children clearance or equivalent background check such as a Victorian teaching registration
- collect and record:
    - proof of the person's identity and any professional or other qualifications
    - the person's history of working with children
    - references that address suitability for the job and working with children.

Staff induction

All newly appointed staff will be expected to participate in our child safety and wellbeing induction program. The program will include a focus on:

- the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy (this document)
- the Child Safety Code of Conduct
- the Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedures and
- any other child safety and wellbeing information that school leadership considers appropriate to the nature of the role.

Ongoing supervision and management of staff

All staff engaged in child-connected work will be supervised appropriately to ensure that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate.

Staff will be monitored and assessed to ensure their continuing suitability for child-connected work. This will be done by maintenance and monitoring of child safety and incidents register (kept by the Principal), regular monitoring interaction with staff (by Principal and Student Care Leader), part of performance review process and regular agenda item in staff discussions.

Inappropriate behaviour towards children and young people will be managed swiftly and in accordance with our school policies and our legal obligations. Child safety and wellbeing will be paramount. Note that the School Principal is responsible for managing this (and the Chair of the Board for any matters involving the principal)

Suitability of volunteers

All volunteers are required to comply with our Volunteers Terms of Agreement, which describes how we assess the suitability of prospective volunteers and outlines expectations in relation to child safety and wellbeing induction and training, and supervision and management.

Child safety knowledge, skills and awareness

Ongoing training and education are essential to ensuring that staff understand their roles and responsibilities and develop their capacity to effectively address child safety and wellbeing matters.

In addition to the child safety and wellbeing induction, our staff will participate in a range of training and professional learning to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to maintain a child safe environment.

Staff child safety and wellbeing training will be delivered at least annually and will include guidance on:

- our school's child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, codes, and practices

- completing the Protecting Children – Mandatory Reporting and Other Legal Obligations online module annually
- recognising indicators of child harm including harm caused by other children and students
- responding effectively to issues of child safety and wellbeing and supporting colleagues who disclose harm
- how to build culturally safe environments for children and students
- information sharing and recordkeeping obligations
- how to identify and mitigate child safety and wellbeing risks in the school environment.

Other professional learning and training on child safety and wellbeing, for example, training for our volunteers, will be tailored to specific roles and responsibilities and any identified or emerging needs or issues.

School board training and education

To ensure our school board is equipped with the knowledge required to make decisions in the best interests of student safety and wellbeing, and to identify and mitigate child safety and wellbeing risks in our school environment, the council is trained at least annually. Training takes place following each AGM and includes guidance on:

- individual and collective obligations and responsibilities for implementing the Child Safe Standards and managing the risk of child abuse
- child safety and wellbeing risks in our school environment
- RedGum child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, codes and practices

Complaints and reporting processes

RedGum fosters a culture that encourages staff, volunteers, students, parents, and the school community to raise concerns and complaints. This makes it more difficult for breaches of the code of conduct, misconduct or abuse to occur and remain hidden.

We have clear pathways for raising complaints and concerns and responding and this is documented in our school's Complaint Policy. The Complaints Policy can be found on the school website or requested through reception.

If there is an incident, disclosure, allegation or suspicion of child abuse, all staff and volunteers (including school board members) must follow our Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures. Our policy and procedures address complaints and concerns of child abuse made by or in relation to a child or student, school staff, volunteers, contractors, service providers, visitors or any other person while connected to the school.

As soon as any immediate health and safety concerns are addressed, and relevant school staff have been informed, we will ensure our school follows:

- the Four Critical Actions for complaints and concerns relating to adult behaviour towards a child
- the Four Critical Actions: Student Sexual Offending for complaints and concerns relating to student sexual offending

Our Student Wellbeing, Engagement and Inclusion Policy and Prevention of Bullying (including cyber bullying) and Harassment Policy cover complaints and concerns relating to student physical violence or other harmful behaviours.

Communications

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

- ensuring that key child safety and wellbeing policies are available on our website including the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy (this document), Child Safety Code of Conduct, and the Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedure
- displaying PROTECT posters and other relevant child safety information around the school
- updates in our school newsletter and at parent meetings.
- ensuring that child safety is a regular agenda item at school leadership meetings, staff meetings and school board meetings.

RedGum collects, uses, and discloses information about children and their families in accordance with Victorian privacy laws, and other relevant laws. For information on how our school collects, uses and discloses information refer to: Schools' Privacy Policy.

Records management

We acknowledge that good records management practices are a critical element of child safety and wellbeing and manage our records in accordance with the Department of Education and Training's policy: Records Management – School Records

Review of child safety practices

At RedGum we have processes for the review and ongoing improvement of our child safe policies, procedures, and practices.

We will:

- review and improve our policy every 2 years or after any significant child safety incident
- analyse any complaints, concerns, and safety incidents to improve policy and practice
- act with transparency and share pertinent learnings and review outcomes with school staff and our school community.

Related policies and procedures

This Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy is to be read in conjunction with other related school policies, procedures, and codes. These include our:

- Prevention of Bullying (including cyberbullying) and Harassment Policy
- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Complaints and Grievances Policy
- Student Wellbeing, Engagement and Inclusion Policy
- Visitors Policy
- Volunteers Terms of Agreement
- Duty of Care and Supervision Policy
- Child Safe Responding and Mandatory Reporting Policy

Other related documents

- Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools
- Four Critical Actions for Schools
- Identifying and Responding to Student Sexual Offending
- Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Student Sexual Offending
- Recording your actions: Responding to suspected child abuse – A template for Victorian schools

Policy status and review

The principal is responsible for reviewing and updating the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy at least every two years. The review will include input from students, parents/carers and the RedGum school community.

THE FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS

ACTION 1: IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO AN INCIDENT

If there is no risk of immediate harm go to ACTION 2.

If a child is at immediate risk of harm you must ensure their safety by:

- separating alleged victims and others involved
- administering first aid
- **calling 000 for urgent medical and/or police assistance** to respond to immediate health or safety concerns
- identifying a contact person at the school (the Principal) for future liaison with Police.

Where necessary you may also need to maintain the integrity of the potential crime scene and preserve evidence.

ACTION 2: REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed you must report incidents, suspicions and disclosures of student sexual offending as soon as possible.

VICTORIA POLICE

All instances on **000**

DFFH CHILD PROTECTION

If you believe that:

- the victim's parent/carers are unable or unwilling to protect the child
- The student who is alleged to have engaged in the student sexual offending is:
    - Aged over 10 and under 15 years and may be in need of therapeutic treatment to address these behaviours
    - May be displaying physical and behavioural indicators of being the victim of child abuse.

INTERNALLY

Also report internally to:

- **School Principal and/or leadership team** (all instances)

The Principal (or the Student Care Leader in the Principal's absence) will be the contact person at the school for future liaison with Victoria Police and/or Child Protection. Seek advice about contacting parents/carers (see **Action 3**)

*See the Four Critical Actions for Schools: **Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse** for further guidance in these circumstances.

ACTION 3: CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

Your Principal **must** consult with **Victoria Police** or **DFFH Child Protection** to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers. They may advise:

- **not to contact** the parents/carers (e.g. in circumstances where contacting the parents/carers is likely to adversely affect a Victoria Police investigation or where the student is a mature minor and has requested that their parent/carer not be notified.
- **to contact** the parents/carers and provide agreed information (this must be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion).

ACTION 4: PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

- Your school **must** provide support for students who are victim to a student sexual offence AND students who have engaged in a sexual offence. This is an essential part of your duty of care requirements.
- This support should include the development of a Student Support Plan in consultation with wellbeing professionals outlining support strategies.
- Strategies may include the development of a safety plan, direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals.

Document Control

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2.1	July 2022	Update to meet the requirements of Ministerial Order 1359 (effective 1 July, 2022)	N. Johnson
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