

Child Safety & Wellbeing Policy

Purpose

GMS College's (GMS's) Child Safety Policy sets out the school's commitment and approach 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 our school's approach to implementing [Ministerial Order 1359 \(PDF, 363KB\)](#) 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 staff, volunteers, Board members and contractors in the school environment, whether or not they work in direct contact with children or young people as part of their role.

The policy 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.

This policy should be read together with our other child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, and codes – refer to the related school policies section.

Child safety relates to protecting all children from child abuse, managing and reducing the risk of child abuse, providing support to a child at risk of child abuse, and responding to incidents or allegations of child abuse.

Definitions

The following terms in this policy have [specific definitions](#):

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

child safety

child abuse

child-connected work

child-related work

school environment

school staff

school governing authority

student

volunteer

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

Gisborne Montessori School (GMS) is a child safe organisation which welcomes all 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 inside and outside our school environments.

We promote positive relationships between students and adults and between students and their peers. These relationships are based on trust and respect.

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. We have a zero tolerance towards child abuse.

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 with the Executive Director, Peter Hutton or our Child Safety Champion, Maha Asif, where they will receive support in taking action to keep all children safe in accordance with the GMS Child Safe Policy.

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.

Child Safety Principles

In its planning, decision-making and operations, GMS 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; and
10. Value the input of and communicate regularly with families and carers; and
11. Ensure our community ecosystem provides each student with a team of staff they are connected to and can seek assistance from.

Roles and responsibilities

School leadership team

Our school leadership team (comprising the Executive Director, Peter Hutton and the Deputy Principal, Sabuhi Chishti) are 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.

The School Leadership Team will:

- ensure effective child safety and wellbeing governance, policies, procedures, codes and practices are in place and followed
- model a child safe culture that facilitates the active participation of students, families and staff in promoting and improving child safety, cultural safety and wellbeing
- enable inclusive practices where the diverse needs of all students are considered
- reinforce high standards of respectful behaviour between students and adults, and between students
- promote regular open discussion on child safety issues within the school community including at leadership team meetings, staff meetings and school council meetings
- facilitate regular professional learning for staff and volunteers (where appropriate) to build deeper understandings of child safety, cultural safety, student wellbeing and prevention of and responding to abuse
- create 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 and always follow the school's child safety and wellbeing policies and procedures
- act in accordance with our [Child Safety Code of Conduct](#)
- identify and raise concerns about child safety issues in accordance with our https://huttonconsulting-my.sharepoint.com/:w/g/personal/peter_hutton_futureschools_education/EUNVRvmJAK

[pDuW8bWb4_2-MBi-P9YvP5E7hQJQMz0GdWJg?e=9eiWqJ](#) and [Mandatory Reporting Policy and Procedure](#), including following the [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#)

- 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*, and the GMS Constitution school council members will:

- champion and promote a child safe culture with the broader school community
- ensure that child safety is a regular agenda item at Board meetings
- undertake annual training on child safety, [PROTECT TRAINING SLIDES- BOARD](#)
- approve updates to, and act in accordance with the Child Safety Code of Conduct to the extent that it applies to school council employees and members
- ensure that when the school leadership team is hiring school council employees, ensure that selection, supervision, and management practices are child safe

Specific staff child safety responsibilities

GMS has nominated a Child Safety Champion, Maha Asif to support the School Leadership Team to implement our child safety policies and practices, including staff and volunteer training.

The responsibilities of the child safety champion are outlined at [Guidance for child safety champions](#). In addition to these roles, our child safety champion is also responsible for:

Our Executive Director and child safety champion are the first point of contact for child safety concerns or queries and for coordinating responses to child safety incidents.

- The Child Safety Champion is responsible for monitoring the school's compliance with the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy. Anyone in our school community should approach the Child Safety Champion if they have any concerns about the school's compliance with the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.
- The Child Safety Champion 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 Policy and Procedures, and Child Safety Risk Register.

Our school has established a Wellbeing Team and will establish a Student Reference Group both of which includes Child Safety as key responsibilities. The Child Safety and Wellbeing Team meet regularly to identify and respond to any ongoing matters related to child safety and wellbeing. The Student Reference Group provides an opportunity for students to provide input into school strategies.

Our Risk Management Committee and Wellbeing Team monitor the Child Safety Risk Register.

Child Safety Code of Conduct

Our Child Safety Code of Conduct sets the boundaries and expectations for appropriate behaviour between adults and students. It also clarifies behaviour 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 and Wellbeing Policy and Procedures](#) outline the processes to report inappropriate behaviour.

Managing risks to child safety and wellbeing

At GMS 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 Child Safe Risk Register, including plans 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 each two years.

We will refer to [PROTECT Child Safe Standard 9](#) guidance at least each two years for updated suggestions as to how we can improve.

Establishing a culturally safe environment

At GMS, we are committed to establishing an inclusive and culturally safe school where the strengths of Aboriginal culture, values and practices are respected and celebrated.

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

To encourage and actively support a child or student's ability to express their culture and enjoy their cultural rights in the following ways:

- equip staff, students, volunteers and the school community to acknowledge and appreciate the strengths of Aboriginal culture and understand its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children and students
- adopt measures to ensure racism is identified, confronted and not tolerated
- address any instances of racism within the school environment with appropriate consequences
- actively support participation and inclusion in the school by Aboriginal children, students and their families
- ensure school policies, procedures, systems and processes together create a culturally safe and inclusive environment and meet the needs of Aboriginal children, students and their families
- scheduled the development of a Reconciliation Action Plan RAP for 2023.

We will refer to [PROTECT Child Safe Standard 1](#) guidance at least each two years for updated suggestions as to how we can improve.

Student Empowerment

To support child safety and wellbeing at GMS, 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 trust and belonging. Where these relationships break down, we sit down and work through the issues with all involved and monitor the ongoing effectiveness of any agreements reached.

We inform students of their rights through the Code of Conduct and our whole school approach to Respectful Relationships (to be introduced in Semester 1, 2023) and 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 directly to the Executive Director, Child Safe Champion, or access the links on the school website.

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.

We will refer to the [PROTECT Child Safe Standard 3](#) guidance at least each two years for updated suggestions as to how we can improve.

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 GMS 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:

- All of our child safety policies and procedures will be available for students and parents on the [school website](#), newsletters and Compass Posts
- During Parent Briefings, including new parents/ carers briefings
- PROTECT Child Safety posters will be displayed around the school.

We will refer to the [PROTECT Child Safe Standard 4](#) for guidance at least each two years for updated suggestions as to how we can improve.

Child Safe Offences

All adults in the GMS community have an obligation to report abuse if that adult has formed a reasonable belief that abuse has taken place.

Failure to Disclose

Failure to disclose is a criminal offence which 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).

While failure to disclose only covers child sexual abuse, all adults should report other forms of child abuse to authorities. Failure to disclose is in addition to mandatory reporting responsibilities.

Failure to make a Mandatory Report

Professionals classed as mandatory reporters (police officers, registered medical practitioners, nurses, midwives, registered teachers, kindergarten teachers, school counsellors, school principals, out of home care workers, early childhood workers, registered psychologists and youth justice workers) must report to child protection if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child needs protection from physical injury or sexual abuse.

Failure to Protect

The failure to protect is a criminal offence which commenced on 1 July 2015. This reporting obligation applies to school staff in a position of authority. This can include principals, assistant principals and campus principals. Any staff member in a position of authority who becomes aware that an adult associated with their school such as an employee, contractor, volunteer, or visitor who poses a risk of sexual abuse to a child under the age of 16 under their care, authority, or supervision, must take all reasonable steps to remove or reduce that risk. This may include removing the adult (persons aged 18 years and over) from working with children pending an investigation and reporting their concerns to Victoria Police. If a school staff member in a position of authority fails to take reasonable steps in these circumstances, this may amount to a criminal offence. For more information about this reporting obligation, see the Department's *School Policy and Advisory Guide*: [Failure to protect offence](#).

Grooming

Grooming is a criminal offence under the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic). This offence targets predatory conduct undertaken by an adult to prepare a child, under the age of 16, to engage in sexual activity at a later time. Grooming can include communicating and/or attempting to befriend or establish an inappropriate relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent/carer. For more information about this offence and reporting obligations see: [Child Exploitation and Grooming](#).

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:

- Aboriginal 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
- children and young people who identify as LGBTIQ+.

We will refer to the [PROTECT Child Safe Standard 5](#) for guidance at least each two years for updated suggestions as to how we can improve.

Suitable staff and volunteers

At GMS, 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 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
 - use an external agency to verify professional qualifications (2023)
 - 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 Policy and Procedures and

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. Given the size of the staff is relatively small, this will be done by regular observations by the Executive Director with any issues and concerns raised and documented as appropriate.

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.

We will refer to the [PROTECT Child Safe Standard 6](#) for guidance at least each two years for updated suggestions as to how we can improve.

Suitability of volunteers

All volunteers are required to comply with our Child Safety Code of Conduct, 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
- 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.

We will refer to the [PROTECT Child Safe Standard 8](#) for guidance at least each two years for updated suggestions as to how we can improve.

Board training and education

To ensure our school council 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 and awareness building will take place through the [PROTECT TRAINING SLIDES- BOARD](#), includes guidance on:

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

Complaints and reporting processes

GMS 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 by requesting a copy from the Office or Executive Director.

If there is an incident, disclosure, allegation or suspicion of child abuse, all staff, Board Members and volunteers must follow our [Child Safety Reporting Procedure](#). 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 [Anti Bullying and Harassment Policy](#) cover complaints and concerns relating to student physical violence or other harmful behaviours.

Communications

GMS 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 around the school
- updates in our school newsletter and through Compass posts
- ensuring that child safety is a regular agenda item at school leadership meetings, staff meetings, school council meetings and during overnight activities.

Privacy and information sharing

We acknowledge that good records management practices are a critical element of child safety and wellbeing. GMS 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](#).

Review of child safety practices

At GMS, we have established 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.

We will refer to the [PROTECT Child Safe Standard 10](#) for guidance at least each two years for updated suggestions as to how we can improve.

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:

- [Anti Bullying and Harassment Policy](#)
- [Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures](#)
- [Child Safety Code of Conduct](#)
- Complaints Policy
- Digital Learning Policy
- Inclusion and Diversity Policy
- Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy
- Visitors 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 Executive Director 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 staff and the broader community.

Approval

Created date	20AUG22
Consultation	ISV, Staff, Board
Endorsed by	Board Gisborne Montessori School Ltd
Endorsed on	27OCT22
Next review date	1OCT24