



MCM Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Purpose

Melbourne City Mission (MCM) is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children, students and young people. MCM will ensure it does all that it can to protect children, students and young people from harm.

The Child Safe Policy is in place to ensure that all employees, volunteers, student placements, consultants and contractors of MCM are aware of our commitment to maintaining a child safe organisation and of their responsibilities and obligations around the safety of children, students and young people, including how we respond to allegations of child abuse and child-related misconduct and our obligations under the Reportable Conduct Scheme.

Scope

This policy is applicable to all employees, volunteers, student placements, consultants and contractors of MCM across all of our service and work areas. Wherever MCM is stated it is inclusive of Hester Hornbrook Academy and MCM Housing.

MCM works together to support the delivery of programs and services in predictable, transparent and healing oriented ways. Our guidelines uphold the dignity, wellbeing, connectedness and self-determination of people and communities.

MCM is a Child Safe organisation and child safety is at the forefront of our program delivery. Our guidelines ensure that Child Safety is a primary part of everyday thinking and practice. All employees and volunteers have an obligation to ensure we keep children safe from harm and abuse.



Policy

MCM is committed to the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children, students, and young people. This includes:

- upholding the rights of children, students and young people who come into contact with our organisation so that they feel heard on matters relevant to their safety and so that they feel safe and protected
- enforcing zero tolerance of child abuse and taking all allegations of child abuse, reportable conduct, and safety concerns very seriously, ensuring such conduct is dealt with in accordance with organisational policies, procedures, and the law
- a commitment to preventing child abuse and the early identification, reduction, or removal of all risks to children
- rigorously upholding our legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when there are concerns about a child, student, or young person's safety
- having robust human resources and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers
- creating a child safe organisation by providing ongoing training and education to staff and volunteers on the Child Safe Standards, Mandatory Reporting, Reportable Conduct and Information Sharing Schemes
- actively working to listen to and empower children, students and young people we are working with or who come into contact with our organisation to understand their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and to be taken seriously
- providing a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, students and young people by considering their needs in providing that environment
- providing a culturally safe environment for children and young people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, by considering their needs in providing that environment
- providing a safe environment for children and young people with disability, by considering their needs in providing that environment
- providing a safe environment for children and young people who have suffered trauma, by considering their needs in providing that environment
- providing a safe environment for, and considering the needs of, LGBTIQ+ children, students and young people, and recognising gender diversity in providing a safe environment
- providing a safe environment for children and young people who are unable to live at home (for example, children and young people in out of home care, kinship care, who are experiencing homelessness or in a custodial settings)
- ensuring physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for children to be harmed
- ensuring the involvement of families and communities in MCM's efforts to keep children and young people safe and in the development and delivery of our services
- having robust governance systems and processes to keep children and young people safe
- ensuring a commitment to child safety is embedded in all levels of the organisation.

MCM will do this through:

Building a Child Safe Culture

MCM's key strategy in preventing risk to children is to cultivate a culture of action, awareness, transparency and communication.

- All MCM staff have a responsibility to support the organisation's commitment and obligation to creating a child safe environment.
- All staff must ensure that at all times they display appropriate standards of behaviour towards children, students and young people, ensuring their rights are respected, they feel safe and protected and their concerns are taken seriously.
- All staff must be aware of their reporting, information sharing and record keeping obligations in line with legislation and MCM procedures.

The MCM's Code of Conduct outlines appropriate standards of behaviour by adults towards children and young people. It strives to protect children and young people and eliminate opportunities for abuse, harm or further damage to occur. It also helps staff by providing them with guidance on how to

best support children and young people and how to avoid or better manage difficult situations. It also contains strict provisions in relation to privacy and confidentiality of client data.

Empowering Children and Young People

MCM's child safety practices enable and promote children and young people to be vital and active participants in our organisation. 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 will enable and facilitate independence where possible; engage with children, young people and families about what makes them feel safe; ensure that complaints handling policies and processes are child focused and include children and young people in consultation and investigations as appropriate.

Where relevant, MCM also works to increase children, students and young people's knowledge of child sexual abuse and self-protection strategies. We recognise the importance of friendships and encourage support from peers, to help children, students and young people feel safe and be connected.

Where relevant, MCM will support and empower children and young people through any process involving Child Protection, Police, other legal matters and referrals to specialist supports.

Empowering Children and Young People's Families

MCM acknowledges the value of input from families and communities in decisions impacting children and young people and involve families and communities in the development and review of child safe policies and practices. We also communicate effectively with families and communities about how to raise child safety concerns within MCM and in the community.

Risk management

MCM has risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise the risk of abuse, which include risks posed by physical environments (for example, any lockable doors), and online environments (for example, contact with children via social media). MCM endorses a learning culture, recognising that reducing risks to children, students and young people is an ongoing process from which we learn. By monitoring what works well and what doesn't work and incorporating this learning into our risk management practices we can further mitigate risk.

Training, Education and Supervision

Training, education and supervision are important to ensure that everyone at MCM understands that safety of children, students and young people is everyone's responsibility. Through these processes we aim to provide a clear understanding of child safety and prevent harm. For specific roles, this training will include how to identify, assess, report and minimise risks of child abuse. Relevant training also equips staff and volunteers to communicate with children, students and young people in a way that is appropriate to their age, maturity and capability

By establishing a positive working environment and providing clear duty statements MCM supports all staff and volunteers to perform to the best of their ability. These measures ensure that staff, contractors and volunteers are accountable, feel comfortable and confident to discuss child safety concerns or any allegations of abuse.

We also support our staff and volunteers through ongoing supervision to develop their skills to protect children and young people from abuse. New employees and volunteers will be inducted carefully and supervised regularly to ensure they understand our organisation'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 Families, Fairness and Housing, The Department of Education, The Commission for Children and Young People and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

Compliance with these systems is monitored by employee's line Manager via MCM's Quality management systems. Staff are required to complete Child Safe training every two years.

Recruitment Practices

MCM takes all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children and develop selection criteria and advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to the safety of children, students and young people 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.

Safety Screening is completed for all MCM staff prior to commencement to ensure that we are recruiting the right people. This includes carrying out identity, qualification, reference check and police record checks. For positions that involve contact with children and young people, recruitment is based on selection criteria which clearly demonstrate a commitment to child safety. All people engaged in child-related work, including volunteers, contractors and student placements are required to hold a current Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) Registration or Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this Check.

Reporting a child safety concern or complaint

MCM will work to ensure all children, students and young people, families, carers, staff and volunteers understand their obligations and know who to tell if they observe abuse, are a victim of abuse, or if they notice inappropriate behaviour. MCM takes all allegations of misconduct, child abuse, harm and reportable conduct seriously. It will ensure that such allegations are addressed in accordance with the Mandatory Reporting Scheme and Reportable Conduct Scheme and has clearly documented organisational processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse.

Name of Legislative Obligation	Age it applies to
Child Safe Standards Victoria	<18
Reportable Conduct	<18
Mandatory Reporting	<17
Failure to Disclose	<16
Failure to Protect	<16

There are five (5) types of Reportable Conduct:

- sexual offences committed against, with or in the presence of a child
- sexual misconduct committed against, with or in the presence of a child
- physical violence against, with or in the presence of a child
- any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child
- significant neglect of a child.

Reportable Conduct applies to alleged abuse perpetrated by employees including staff, volunteers, student placements or contractors employed or engaged by the organisation.

Mandatory Reporters must make a report to Victoria Police and/or the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) 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 has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical abuse and/or sexual abuse, and
- the child's parents or carers have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from harm of that type.

MCM 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 or young person under the age of 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.

When advising families/guardians about notifications made to Victoria Police or the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Child Protection (depending on who the report has been made to), considerations of whether it's appropriate to inform the parents need to be discussed with line management.

You will be advised not to contact the parents in circumstances where:

- the parents are alleged to have engaged in the abuse
- a disclosure to the parent/carer may subject the child to further abuse
- the notification is likely to adversely affect the investigation of the incident by the relevant authorities.

When informing parents, you should make sensitive and professional contact as soon as possible on the day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion.

In many cases where it is suspected that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused, it is extremely important that parents/carers are notified as soon as practicable. This enables parents/carers to take steps to:

- prevent or limit their child's exposure to further abuse.
- ensure that their child receives the support that they require.
- It's also a requirement under the National Quality Framework that parents be contacted within 24 hours, if the suspected abuse occurs whilst a child is at an education or care service.

Fair Procedures for Staff

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also committed to providing fair and just processes to staff. 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 system or HR system, including investigation updates. All records are securely stored.

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

Privacy

While safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern, MCM is committed to protecting an individual's right to privacy. Personal information which is collected and/or disclosed about an individual will be managed in accordance with the *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)*, the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*. The *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* and MCM's Privacy Policy.

Accountability

Melbourne City Mission Board

Provides appropriate strategic governance, direction and guidance for the safety of children and young people at MCM.

CEO and Executive

CEO is accountable for compliance with the Reportable Conduct Scheme by the organisation. Provides appropriate strategic governance and allocation of resources at MCM, for the safety of children and young people including implementation, monitoring and review of all MCM wide policies and procedures.

Provides leadership and governance within their division for the safety of children, students and young people. Ensures the development of appropriate local procedures and guidelines (if required) within the division that clearly articulate how this policy is enacted by staff.

Managers and Leaders

To ensure that staff, volunteers, students and contractors are aware of this policy and how it applies to their role.

To develop program procedures and practice guidelines to ensure staff, volunteers, students and contractors are able to comply with this policy.

Staff, volunteers and contractors

To comply with all aspects of this policy and associated procedures and guidelines and required professional standards and practices. All staff are required to be compliant with the requirements of the Reportable Conduct Scheme.

Legislative context

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005

Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment Act 2015

Children Legislation Amendment (Reportable Conduct) Act 2017

Ministerial Order No.870 - Child Safe Standards - Managing the risk of child abuse in schools

Working with Children Act 2005

Children Youth and families Act 2005

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006

Crimes Act 1958

Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014

Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)

Health Records Act 2001

Convention of the Rights of the Child

The Victorian Child Safe Standards are:

Standard 1: Organisations establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued.

Standard 2: Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.

Standard 3: Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.

Standard 4: Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.

Standard 5: Equity is upheld, and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.

Standard 6: People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.

Standard 7: Processes for complaints and concerns are child focused

Standard 8: Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.

Standard 9: Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.

Standard 10: Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved.

Standard 11: Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people.

The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations are:

National Principle 1: Child Safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance, and culture

National Principle 2 Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously

National Principle 3 Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing

National Principle 4 Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice

National Principle 5 People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice

National Principle 6 Processes for complaints and concerns are child focussed

National Principle 7 Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training

National Principle 8 Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed

National Principle 9 Implementation of the national child safe principles is regularly reviewed and improved

National Principle 10 Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people

Definitions

The following definitions apply to this document:

Child

A child or young person is a person under the age of eighteen years old. (Children Youth and Families (CYF) Act 2005)

Dependent on the legislation, offences apply to children under specified ages e.g. Grooming offence applies to a child under 16 years old.

Young person and Students

Child safe legislation applies to a child or young person under the age of eighteen years old. (Children Youth and families Act 2005). MCM also recognises the rights of young people, defined by VicHealth, between the ages of 16 to 25 years.

A child or young person may be in need of protection if they have experienced or are at risk of significant harm, and their parents or carers have not protected, or are unlikely to protect them from that harm. Significant harm may relate to:

- physical injury
- sexual abuse
- emotional or intellectual development
- physical development or health
- abandonment or parental incapacity