

BHCS Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

- Belgrave Heights Christian School is committed to child safety. Our School wants children to be safe, feel happy and empowered.
- We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and our volunteers
- We are committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all children
- BHCS has a zero tolerance for child abuse this includes abuse within an online environment. All allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently in line with our child safety policies and procedures.
- BHCS has legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously
- We are committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks
- BHCS has in place screening procedures and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers
- BHCS is committed to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks
- We support and respect all children as well as our staff and volunteers. We are committed to the cultural safety of children from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse background including those of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. We also seek to ensure that children with a disability and children who are vulnerable are safe and can participate equally
- We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our leadership team, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments

PURPOSE

This policy is intended to empower children who are vital and active participants in our organisation. This policy equally guides our staff and volunteers on how to behave with children at our School while also creating an awareness in our greater school community.

FOR THE CHILDREN

We involve them when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say.

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

In particular we:

- Promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds including those of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds
- Ensure that children with a disability and children who are vulnerable are safe and can participate equally

FOR OUR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

All of our staff and volunteers must agree to abide by our Codes of Conduct which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children.

TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

Training and education is important in ensuring that everyone at our School understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility.

Our School culture aims for all staff and volunteers (in addition to parents/carers and children) 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; and promote 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 supervised regularly to ensure they understand our School's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse, as well as checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate (please refer to our School's code of conduct to understand appropriate behaviour further). 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. BHCS understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

All non-teaching staff at our School, not just those involved in child-related work, including volunteers, are required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this.

Please see the Working with Children Check website www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au for further information.

All teaching staff at our School, including Casual Relief Staff must hold a current registration with the Victorian Institute of Teaching, which includes a National Police History Check. Registrations are checked for validity against the VIT website. Further information regarding the NPHC can be found at <http://www.vit.vic.edu.au/registered-teacher/national-police-history-check>

Staff who are involved with students in relation to counselling such as Chaplains are required to not just hold a Working with Children Check, but also have undergone a National Police Check and the appropriate training in line with their role.

We carry out reference checks and police record checks where applicable to ensure that we are recruiting the right people. Police record checks are used only for the purposes of recruitment. We do retain our own records if an applicant's criminal history has affected our decision making process. If during the recruitment process a person's records indicate a criminal history then the person will be given the opportunity to provide further information and context to this history.

FAIR PROCEDURES FOR STAFF

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and just 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 form, including investigation updates. All records are securely stored. If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to children and families on progress and any actions we take as a School.

PRIVACY

All staff information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they are 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

BHCS takes its legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- **Failure to disclose:** Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to the police. (A person will not commit this offence if they have a reasonable excuse for not disclosing the information, including a fear for their safety or where the information has already been disclosed). For further information see: <https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/failure-to-disclose-offence>
- **Failure to protect:** People of authority at our School 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. For further information see: <https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/failure-to-protect-a-new-criminal-offence-to>
- Being aware of the offence of **grooming** and ensuring measures are in place to reduce risks associated with this including via online means. Our Staff Code of Conduct seeks to ensure that conversations are not engaged in via written or electronic means including phone, email, social media, text message or chat programs outside of a school context. For further information regarding grooming see: <https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/grooming-offence>
- Any personnel who are **mandatory reporters** must comply with their duties. Mandatory reporters (doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers (including early childhood teachers), principals and police) must report to child protection if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse.

RISK MANAGEMENT

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

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

REDRESS SCHEME

In order to demonstrate the School's commitment to child safety, the School is part of the [National Redress Scheme](#). The National Redress Scheme came into existence in response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

THE NATIONAL PRINCIPLES

As of February 2019, the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations have been endorsed by members of the Council of Australian Governments, including the Prime Minister and state and territory First Ministers. The principles aim to provide a nationally consistent approach to creating organisational cultures that foster child safety and wellbeing.

The National Principles reflect ten child safe standards recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and are the vehicle for giving effect to recommendations relating to the standards. [The National Principles](#) reflect the ten child safe standards recommended by the Royal Commission, with a broader scope that goes beyond child sexual abuse to cover other forms of harm to children and young people.

VICTORIAN CHILD SAFE STANDARDS

As of 1 July, 2022 Victoria adopted 11 child safe standards. These standards line up with the National Principles. This includes ensuring that we as a school:

1. Establish a culturally safe environment in our school in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued.
2. Embed child safety and wellbeing in our school's leadership, governance and culture.
3. Empower children and young people in relation to their rights, allowing them to participate in decisions affecting them while taking them seriously.
4. Inform and involve our families and communities in promoting child safety and wellbeing.
5. Uphold equity while respecting the diverse needs in policy and practice.
6. Ensure those working in our school with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice
7. Have processes in place for complaints and concerns that are child focused
8. Ensure staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.
9. Promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed in both physical and online environments.
10. Implement Child Safe Standards that are regularly reviewed and improved.
11. Have policies and procedures in place that outline how we keep children and young people safe.

ALLEGATIONS, CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

BHCS 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 (see information about failure to disclose above). Staff should refer to the Mandatory Reporting Policy.

If an adult has a **reasonable belief** that an incident has occurred, then they must report the incident. Factors contributing to reasonable belief may be:

- a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves)
- behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed. Information regarding understanding and responding to child sexual abuse can be found at <https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/child-sexual-abuse-understanding-and-responding-booklet-word>
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- observing suspicious behaviour

REPORTING CONCERNS - FOR STUDENTS

Should students have concerns about their safety, the safety of another child, or wish to discuss an incident of child abuse, they are encouraged to approach the staff member that they are most comfortable discussing the matter with. This could be their Homegroup teacher, a Team Leader, Head of School, Deputy Principal or someone in the welfare team such as a Chaplain or Welfare Coordinator. These people will seek to assist students in ensuring their complaint is heard and dealt with in line with this policy.

REPORTING CONCERNS – FOR PARENTS

Parents should contact the school and request to speak to one of the allocated Child Safety Officers. The Child Safety Officers are members of the School's Leadership Team who are appointed in order to assist parents/carers, staff and students with respect to reporting child abuse.

REPORTABLE CONDUCT

As of 1 July, 2017 the Reportable Conduct Scheme was introduced. The scheme is covered under the [Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005](#). The Commission for Children and Young People is responsible for administering the scheme under the [Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment \(Oversight and Enforcement of Child Safe Standards\) Act 2016](#). Under the scheme

all 'reportable conduct' must be reported by the Principal to the Commission for Children and Young People as follows:

- Within 3 business days of becoming aware of a reportable allegation made against a staff member or volunteer

The Principal is then further responsible for ensuring that:

- The allegation is investigated. If the allegation is criminal in nature, clearance from the Victorian Police MUST first be obtained.
- The Commission is advised of who is undertaking the investigation
- The risks to children is being managed
- The Commission is further kept updated within 30 calendar days of the report by providing them with detailed information on the reportable allegation and the action taken
- The Commission must be notified of the final outcome of the investigation and any disciplinary action taken or given reasons as to why no action was taken

The following conduct is deemed as being reportable:

- 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

For an expanded list of the above conduct and the details on what is required when reporting, as well as the key steps in an investigation please refer to the ['Reportable Conduct' fact sheets](#).

REPORTING TO VICTORIA POLICE

All suspected criminal behaviour should be reported to Victoria Police.

If the reportable allegation involves suspected criminal behaviour, both Victoria Police and the Commission for Children and Young People must be notified.

If you are unsure of how to proceed, contact the Commission or Victoria Police for guidance.

If the School becomes aware that Victoria Police will investigate a reportable allegation, they must not begin or continue their own investigation. The School should wait until police advice that its investigation has concluded or that the School's investigation may be conducted simultaneously.

MANDATORY REPORTING

The School also has in place a Mandatory Reporting Policy and all staff are asked to familiarise themselves with this policy on an annual basis.

DEFINITION OF CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse includes:-

- Any act committed against a child involving –
 - A sexual offence or
 - An offence under section 49M (1) of the *Crimes Act 1958* (grooming)
 - An offence under Criminal Code Act 1995 criminalising acts done using a carriage service to prepare or plan to cause harm to, procure, or engage in sexual activity with, a person under the age of 16 (Carly's Law)
- The infliction, on a child of –
 - Physical violence or
 - Serious emotional or psychological harm
 - Serious neglect of a child

LIABILITIES – THE WRONGS AMENDMENT

As of March, 2017 the Victorian Government introduced the *Wrongs Amendment (Organisational Child Abuse) Act 2017*. This Act reverses the onus of proof, so that organisations will need to prove that they took “reasonable precautions” to prevent abuse.

FURTHER REFERENCES

Child safety is much broader than just this policy and is captured as part of the School's other policies, procedures and processes. The most important of these include: -

- Staff Code of Conduct
- [Community \(Parent\) Code of Conduct](#)
- [Student Code of Conduct](#)
- Child Abuse – What to do when an allegation is made
- Child Safety Strategy & Risk Management Policy
- Mandatory Reporting Policy
- HR Screening Policy
- [Complaints Resolution Policy](#)

RELATED INFORMATION

- Commission for Children and Young People <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au>
- [Reportable Conduct Scheme](#) and associated [fact sheets](#)
- [Wrongs Amendment \(Organisational Child Abuse\) Act 2017](#)
- BHCS Child Abuse Incident Reporting Form
- [Human Rights Commission – The National Principles](#)
- [Ministerial Order 1359](#) (effective as of 1 July, 2022)

REGULAR REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed annually and/or immediately following the occurrence of any significant incident to ensure all risks in relation to child safety are taken into account.