



ACC Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Introduction

At The Associated Catholic Colleges Inc. ("ACC" or "The Association"), we hold the care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people as a central and fundamental responsibility of our school. Our commitment is drawn from and inherent to the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ, with love, justice and the sanctity of each human person at the heart of the gospel (CECV Commitment Statement to Child Safety).

The person of each individual human being, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ's teaching: this is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school (The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, n. 9).

Our Vision:

To be recognised as the most outstanding association for school sport, student leadership and school cultural events in Victoria.

Our Mission:

To enhance the educational experience of the students in our member schools through a dynamic, highly structured and exceptionally well organised program across a broad spectrum of co-curricular activities and events.

Our Aims:

The Associated Catholic Colleges aims to provide an opportunity for students to:

- compete in a range of high-quality sporting competitions as part of the Weekly Sport Program, the
- Championship Sport Program and the Events and Tournament Program;
- participate in a diverse range of cultural, musical, artistic and leadership events, working collaboratively to provide a wide range of educational experiences outside of the classroom;
- foster an understanding of the importance of individual talent, team spirit and commitment;
- develop an understanding of the importance of ethical behaviour, fair play and sportsmanship;
- uphold values of tolerance, respect, acceptance, service, equality and commitment.

Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to demonstrate the strong commitment of ACC to the care, safety and wellbeing of all students within the Association. It provides an outline of the policies, procedures, actions and strategies that will be implemented to ensure that a child safe culture is championed and modelled

within our organisation, to keep students safe from harm, including all forms of abuse in our school environments, on campus, online and in other locations provided by the Association.

This Policy takes into account relevant legislative requirements within the state of Victoria, including the specific requirements of the Child Safe Standards as set out in Ministerial Order No. 1359.

This Policy applies to ACC employees, volunteers and contractors. It should be read in conjunction with the following related school policies and procedures:

1. PROTECT: Identifying and Responding to Abuse – Reporting obligations
2. Child Safety Code of Conduct
3. Reportable Conduct Policy.

Principles

Catholic schools and organisations they associate with (ie. ACC) have a moral, legal and mission-driven responsibility to create nurturing school environments where children and young people are respected, their voices are heard, and they are safe and feel safe (CECV Commitment Statement to Child Safety).

The following principles underpin our commitment to child safety and wellbeing at ACC:

- All students deserve, as a fundamental right, safety and protection from all forms of abuse and neglect.
- Our Association works in partnership with member school families and the community to ensure that they are engaged in decision-making processes, particularly those that have an impact on child safety and wellbeing and protection.
- All students have the right to a thorough and systematic education in all aspects of personal safety, in partnership with their parents/guardians/carers.
- All adults involved with our Association, including employees, teaching and non-teaching staff, clergy, volunteers and contractors, have a responsibility to care for children and young people, to positively promote their wellbeing, to identify and mitigate risks related to child safety and wellbeing in the school environment and to protect them from any kind of harm or abuse.
- The policies, guidelines and codes of conduct for the care, wellbeing and protection of students are based on honest, respectful and trusting relationships between adults and children and young people.
- Policies and practices demonstrate compliance with legislative requirements and cooperation with the Church, governments, the police and human services agencies.
- All persons involved in situations where harm is suspected or disclosed must be treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect.
- All members of the ACC community (including students and their families) are kept informed of child safety and wellbeing matters (where appropriate) and are involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.
- Staff, volunteers, contractors, parents and students should feel free to raise concerns about child safety and wellbeing, knowing these will be taken seriously by Association leadership.
- Appropriate confidentiality will be maintained, with information being provided to those who have a right or a need to be informed, either legally (including under legislated information sharing schemes being Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) or Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS)) or pastorally.

Definitions

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

Child abuse includes:

- (a) any act committed against a child involving:
 - (i) a sexual offence
 - (ii) an offence under section 49B(2) of the *Crimes Act 1958* (grooming)
- (b) the infliction, on a child, of:
 - (i) physical violence
 - (ii) serious emotional or psychological harm
- (c) serious neglect of a child.

Child safety encompasses matters related to protecting all children from child abuse, managing the risk of child abuse, providing support to a child at risk of child abuse, and responding to suspicions, incidents, disclosures or allegations of child abuse (Ministerial Order No. 1359).

Child neglect includes a failure to provide the child with an adequate standard of nutrition, medical care, clothing, shelter or supervision to the extent that the health and physical development of the child is significantly impaired or placed at serious risk (PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools).

Child physical abuse generally consists of any non-accidental infliction of physical violence on a child by any person (PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools).

Child sexual abuse is when a person uses power or authority over a child to involve them in sexual activity. It can include a wide range of sexual activity and does not always involve physical contact or force (PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools).

Emotional child abuse occurs when a child is repeatedly rejected, isolated or frightened by threats, or by witnessing family violence (PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools).

Grooming is when a person engages in predatory conduct to prepare a child for sexual activity at a later date. It can include communication and/or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent/carer (PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools).

Mandatory reporting: The legal requirement under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic.) to protect children from harm relating to physical and sexual abuse. The Principal, registered teachers and early childhood teachers, school counsellors, religious clergy, medical practitioners and nurses at a school are mandatory reporters under this Act (PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools).

Reasonable belief – mandatory reporting: When staff are concerned about the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person, they must assess that concern to determine if a report should be made to the relevant agency. This process of considering all relevant information and observations is known as forming a reasonable belief. A 'reasonable belief' or a 'belief on reasonable grounds' is not the same as having proof, but is more than mere rumour or speculation. A reasonable belief is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds (PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools).

Reasonable belief – reportable conduct scheme: When a person has a reasonable belief that a worker/volunteer has committed reportable conduct or misconduct that may involve reportable conduct.

A reasonable belief is more than suspicion and there must be some objective basis for the belief. It does not necessitate proof or require certainty.

NOTE: the difference between the reasonable belief definitions under mandatory reporting and the reportable conduct scheme is the category of persons who are required to, or can, form the reasonable belief which forms the basis for a report.

Reportable conduct: Five types of reportable conduct are listed in the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic.) (as amended by the *Children Legislation Amendment (Reportable Conduct) Act 2017*). These include:

1. sexual offences (against, with or in the presence of a child)
2. sexual misconduct (against, with or in the presence of a child)
3. physical violence (against, with or in the presence of a child)
4. behaviour that is likely to cause significant emotional or psychological harm
5. significant neglect.

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

- a campus of the school
- online or virtual school environments made available or authorized by ACC for use by a child or student (including email, intranet systems, software, applications, collaboration tools and online services)
- other locations provided by the school or through a third-part provider for a child or student to use including, but not limited to, locations used for school camps, approved homestay accommodation, delivery of education and training, sporting events, excursions, competitions and other events) (Ministerial Order No. 1359).

School staff means an individual working in a school environment (on or off campus including at events run by ACC) who is:

- directly engaged or employed by a school governing authority
- a contracted service provider engaged by ACC (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary) engaged to perform child-related work for ACC
- a minister of religion, a religious leader or an employee or officer of a religious body associated with MACS (Ministerial Order No. 1359).

Volunteer means a person who performs work without remuneration or reward for ACC in the school environment or at events run by the Association.

Policy commitments

All students participating at ACC events have the right to feel safe and be safe. The safety and wellbeing of children in our care will always be our first priority and we do not and will not tolerate child abuse. We aim to create a child-safe and child-friendly environment where children are free to enjoy life to the full without any concern for their safety. There is particular attention paid to the most vulnerable children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with a disability, children who are unable to live at home, international students, and LGBTIQ+ students.

Our commitment to our member school students

- We commit to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people enrolled in our member schools.
- We commit to providing children and young people with positive and nurturing experiences.
- We commit to listening to children and young people, and empowering them by ensuring that they understand their rights (including to safety, information and participation), and by taking their views seriously and addressing any concerns that they raise with us.
- We commit to taking action to ensure that children and young people are protected from abuse or harm.
- We commit to ensuring that the needs of all children and young people enrolled in our school are met, including those who are most vulnerable.
- We commit to recognising the importance of friendships and to encouraging support from peers, to help children and students feel safe and less isolated.
- We commit to developing a culture that facilitates and provides opportunities for children and student participation, and that strengthens the confidence and engagement of children and students by being responsive to their input.
- We commit to teaching children and young people the necessary skills and knowledge to understand and maintain their personal safety and wellbeing.
- We commit to seeking input and feedback from students regarding the creation of a safe school environment.

Our commitment to parents, guardians and carers

- We commit to communicating honestly and openly with parents, guardians and carers about the wellbeing and safety of their children.
- We commit to engaging with, and listening to, the views of parents, guardians and carers about our child safety and wellbeing practice, policies and procedures.
- We commit to transparency in our decision-making with parents, guardians and carers where it will not compromise the safety of children or young people.
- We commit to open engagement and communication with parents, guardians and carers about our child safe approach and our operations and governance related to child safety and wellbeing.
- We commit to ensuring that relevant information relating to child safety and wellbeing is accessible to parents, guardians and carers.
- We commit to acknowledging the cultural diversity of students and families, and being sensitive to how this may impact on student safety issues.
- We commit to continuously reviewing and improving our systems to protect children from abuse.

Our commitment to our staff (ACC employees, member school employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy)

- We commit to providing all staff with the necessary support to enable them to fulfil their roles, and to ensure that staff are attuned to signs of harm and are able to facilitate child-friendly ways for children and students to express their views, participate in decision-making and raise their concerns. This will include regular and appropriate learning opportunities.

- We commit to providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm policy and procedures in relation to child safety and wellbeing, and young people's protection and wellbeing. This will include annual training in the principles and intent of the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Child Safety Code of Conduct, and staff responsibilities to report concerns.
- We commit to listening to all concerns voiced by staff, clergy, volunteers and contractors about keeping children and young people safe from harm.
- We commit to providing opportunities for ACC employees, member school employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy to receive formal debriefing and counselling arising from incidents of the abuse of a child or young person.

Responsibilities and organisational arrangements

Everyone employed or volunteering at ACC events has a responsibility to understand the important and specific role they play individually and collectively to ensure a child safe culture in which the wellbeing and safety of all students is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make (CECV Commitment Statement to Child Safety).

The Association has allocated roles and responsibilities for child safety and wellbeing as follows:

Executive Officer

Paddy McKenna

Responsible for establishing and maintaining Child Safety and Wellbeing policies and practices within the Association, as well as compliance with staff, contractors and volunteers.

Operations Officer

Domenic Scarpino

Responsible for the update and maintenance of the ACC Student Safety Registrar, including the Working With Children Check status of all employees, contractors and volunteers involved with the Association and its events.

Guide to responsibilities of ACC leadership

The Principals' Committee and Executive Officer of the ACC recognise their particular responsibility to ensure the development of preventative and proactive strategies that promote a culture of openness, awareness of and shared responsibility for child safety and wellbeing. Responsibilities include:

- creating an environment for children and young people to be safe and to feel safe
- upholding high principles and standards for all staff, clergy, volunteers and contractors
- promoting models of behaviour between adults and children and young people based on mutual respect and consideration
- ensuring thorough and rigorous practices are applied in the recruitment, screening and ongoing professional learning of staff and volunteers
- ensuring that Association personnel have regular and appropriate learning to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to prevent, identify and address child safety and wellbeing matters
- ensuring that the Association has in place appropriate risk management strategies and practices that focus on preventing, identifying and mitigating risks related to child safety and wellbeing in the school environment
- providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm legislative obligations, policy and procedures in relation to children and young people's protection and wellbeing

- ensuring the Association meets the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards as set out in Ministerial Order No. 1359
- ensuring the Association takes specific action to protect children from abuse in line with the three new criminal offences introduced under the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.) and in line with PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools
- ensuring the Association understands and reports all matters that may constitute reportable conduct under the Reportable Conduct Scheme and in accordance with the Association's reportable conduct policy
- ensuring that the Association monitors and reviews the risks related to child safety and wellbeing, including evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation of its risk controls, on an annual basis.

Guide to responsibilities of ACC staff

Responsibilities of ACC staff (ACC employees, school employees, contractors and clergy) and volunteers include:

- treating children and young people with dignity and respect, acting with propriety, providing a duty of care, and protecting children and young people in their care
- following the legislative and internal school policies, procedures and processes in the course of their work, if they form a reasonable belief that a child or young person has been or is being abused or neglected
- providing a physically and psychologically safe environment where the wellbeing of children and young people is nurtured
- undertaking regular training and education in order to understand their individual responsibilities in relation to child safety, and the wellbeing of children and young people, including ways to prevent, identify and mitigate risks relating to child safety and wellbeing
- assisting children and young people to develop positive, responsible and caring attitudes and behaviours which recognise the rights of all people to be safe and free from abuse
- following the Association's Child Safety Code of Conduct
- where risks of child abuse are identified, ensuring that action is taken to mitigate against those risks and that risks and actions are appropriately recorded.

Organisational arrangements

The Executive Officer has the overall leadership role in monitoring and responding to the policy, procedures and practices for child safety and wellbeing in ACC in accordance with this Policy.

The ACC's website and newsletter will provide information to keep parents and carers informed of child safety and wellbeing commitments, procedures and arrangements.

Expectation of our school staff and volunteers – Child Safety Code of Conduct

At ACC, we expect employees, volunteers and contractors to proactively ensure the safety and wellbeing of students at all times, to identify concerns about child safety and wellbeing and to take appropriate action if there are concerns about the safety and wellbeing of any child from any of our member schools.

All staff must remain familiar with the relevant laws, the code of conduct, and policies and procedures in relation to child protection, and comply with all requirements. We have developed a Child Safety Code of Conduct [[Child Safety Code of Conduct](#)], which recognises the critical role that school staff play in protecting the students in our care and establishes clear expectations of employees, volunteers and contractors for appropriate behaviour with children in order to safeguard them against abuse and/or neglect.

Our Code also protects ACC staff and volunteers through clarification of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

Student safety and participation

At ACC, we actively encourage all member school students to openly express their views and feel comfortable about giving voice to the things that are important to them.

Our member schools teach students about what they can do if they feel unsafe and enable them to understand, identify, discuss and report their concerns. We listen to and act on any concerns students, or their parents or carers, raise with us.

Reporting and responding

Our Association creates records relevant to any child safety complaints, disclosures or breaches of the Child Safety Code of Conduct, and maintains and disposes of those records in accordance with security and privacy requirements and [Public Record Office Victoria Recordkeeping Standards](#) (including minimum retention periods). Our school complies with legal obligations that relate to managing the risk of child abuse under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic.), the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.), the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic.) and the recommendations of the [Betrayal of Trust](#) report.

Child protection reporting obligations fall under separate pieces of legislation with differing reporting requirements.

Our Association's [PROTECT: Identifying and Responding to Abuse – Reporting obligations](#), updated on May 25th, 2022, sets out the actions required under the relevant legislation when there is a reasonable belief that a child within our Association is in need of protection or a criminal offence has been committed, and provides guidance and procedures on how to make a report.

Our policy assists staff, volunteers and families to:

- identify the indicators of a child or young person who may be in need of protection
- understand how a reasonable belief is formed under the reportable conduct scheme as well as mandatory reporting
- make a report of a child or young person who may be in need of protection
- comply with mandatory reporting obligations under child protection law, and their legal obligations relating to child abuse and grooming under criminal law
- understand and comply with information sharing and recordkeeping obligations
- comply with reporting obligations under the reportable conduct scheme including obligations to report and investigate allegations of reportable conduct.

Our Association has also established additional internal procedures and processes to help ensure that appropriate action is taken to prevent, identify and respond to concerns about the wellbeing and/or safety of a student.

At ACC events or activities, if any member of a school community has concerns for a child's safety they need to discuss, they can notify the relevant school Principal, the Deputy Principal or the ACC Child Safety and Wellbeing Lead/Officer, Paddy McKenna.

If the Principal or Child Safety and Wellbeing Officer is not available, then it should be discussed with a member of the relevant school leadership team. Alternatively, any member of the school community may report directly to the responsible authority.

The staff member, supported by the Principal or designated Child Safety and Wellbeing Officer will follow the step-by-step guide to making a report as outlined in the Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse.

Screening and recruitment of ACC staff

The ACC will apply thorough and rigorous screening processes in the recruitment of employees and volunteers involved in child-connected work. Our commitment to child safety and wellbeing and our screening requirements are included in all advertisements for such employee, contractor and volunteer positions, and all applicants are provided with copies of the Association's Child Safety Code of Conduct and the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

Each job description for staff involved in child-connected work has a clear statement that sets out the requirements, duties and responsibilities regarding child safety and wellbeing for those in that role and the occupant's essential qualifications, experience and attributes in relation to child safety and wellbeing.

When recruiting and selecting employees, contractors and volunteers involved in child-connected work, we ensure that we gather, verify and record the following information about any person we propose to engage:

- confirm the applicant's Working with Children Check and National Police Check status and/or professional registration (as relevant)
- obtain proof of personal identity and any essential or relevant professional or other qualifications
- verify the applicant's history of work involving children
- obtain references that address the applicant's suitability for the job and working with children.

We will also ensure that appropriate supervision or support arrangements are in place in relation to the induction of new staff into the Association's policies, codes, practices and procedures governing child safety and wellbeing and child-connected work.

We have procedures and processes for monitoring and assessing the continuing suitability of Association staff and volunteers to work with children, including regular reviews of the status of Working with Children Checks and staff professional registration.

Child safety and wellbeing – education and training for ACC staff

The ACC provides employees with regular and appropriate opportunities to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address child safety and wellbeing matters. This includes induction, ongoing training and professional learning to ensure that everyone understands their professional and legal obligations and responsibilities, and the procedures for reporting suspicion of child abuse and neglect.

Diversity and equity – strategies and actions

At ACC, we are committed to ensuring that equity is upheld, and that diverse needs are respected in policy and practice. We aim to ensure that:

- all staff and volunteers understand the diverse circumstances of children and students
- our Association provides support and responds to vulnerable children and students
- children, students, staff, volunteers and the school community have access to information, support and complaints processes in ways that are culturally safe, accessible and easy to understand
- the Association pays particular attention to the needs of students with disability, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, students who are unable to live at home, international students, and LGBTIQ+ students
- the Association pays particular attention to the needs of Aboriginal students and provides and promotes a culturally safe environment for them.

MACS Resources:

- *Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne – Welcoming Each Other: Guidelines for Interfaith Education in the Schools of the Archdiocese of Melbourne*
- *Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan*
- *CECV – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives*
- *CECV – Assessing and Intervening with Impact*
- *CECV – Guidelines for Supporting New Arrivals and Refugees*
- *CECV – Intervention Framework*
- *CECV – Parent Guide to Program Support Groups*
- *CECV – Personal Care Support in Schools*
- *CECV – Positive Behaviour Guidelines*
- *Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) – Horizons of Hope – Vision, Context, Strategy, Practice*
- *CEM – Identity and Growth: A perspective for Catholic schools*
- *Catholic Education South Australia – Children: Close to the Mystery of God*
- *Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) – Live Life to the Full: EREA Safe & Inclusive Learning Communities Statement*
- *MACS – Allways: A guide to supporting all learners in all ways always*
- *MACS – Religious Education Curriculum*
- *National Catholic Education Commission – Framework for Student Faith Formation in Catholic Schools*
- *Victorian Curriculum F–10*
- *Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment*
- *Victorian DET – Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships, incorporating a Catholic context*

Family engagement – strategies and actions

The ACC ensures that families, carers and others involved in our member school communities are informed about relevant child safety and wellbeing matters and are involved in the promotion of child safety and wellbeing at their respective schools.

Risk management

At ACC, we are committed to proactively and systematically identifying and assessing risks to student safety across our various events, and reducing or eliminating (where possible) all potential sources of

harm. We document, implement, monitor and annually review our risks and risk management strategies for child safety and wellbeing, evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of our risk controls and ensure that the strategies change as needed and as new risks arise.

Relevant legislation

- *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic.)
 - *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic.)
 - *Worker Screening Act 2020* (Vic.)
 - *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Vic.)
 - *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017* (Vic.)
 - *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic.)
 - *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth)
 - *Public Records Act 1973* (Vic)
 - *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.) – Three new criminal offences have been introduced under this Act:
1. Failure to disclose offence: Any adult who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under 16 has an obligation to report that information to police. Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence.
 2. Failure to protect offence: This offence will apply where there is a substantial risk that a child under the age of 16 under the care, supervision or authority of a relevant organisation will become a victim of a sexual offence committed by an adult associated with that organisation. A person in a position of authority in the organisation will commit the offence if they know of the risk of abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.
 3. Grooming offence: This offence targets predatory conduct designed to facilitate later sexual activity with a child. Grooming can be conducted in person or online, for example via interaction through social media, web forums and emails.

Related policies

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) guidelines

- [CECV Guidelines on the Employment of Staff in Catholic Schools](#)
- [CECV Guidelines on the Engagement of Volunteers in Catholic Schools](#)
- [CECV Guidelines on the Engagement of Contractors in Catholic Schools](#)
- [CECV NDIS/External Providers: Guidelines for Schools](#)
- [CECV Positive Behaviour Guidelines](#)

ACC policies

- [Child Safety Code of Conduct](#)
- [PROTECT: Identifying and Responding to Abuse – Reporting obligations](#)
- [Reportable Conduct Policy](#)

Policy owner	ACC Executive Officer
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