



Somerville Secondary College - CHILD SAFE POLICY

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- **STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND WELLBEING POLICY**
- **BULLYING AND HARASSMENT POLICY**

BACKGROUND

On 26 November 2015, the Victorian Parliament passed the Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment (Child Safe Standards) Bill 2015 to introduce child safe standards into law. The standards will commence from 1 January 2016 for most organisations working with children, with the aim of promoting cultural change in the way organisations manage the risk of child abuse and neglect.

The Child Safe Standards are part of the Victorian Government's response to the 'Betrayal of Trust Inquiry' into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and other Non-Government Organisations. The Betrayal of Trust Report found that while the majority of children are safe in organisations and in the community, more work could be done to strengthen existing approaches to child safety.

The Child Safe Standards aim to drive cultural change in organisations that provide services for children so that protecting children from abuse is embedded in everyday thinking and practice.

THE CHILD SAFE STANDARDS

To create and maintain a child safe organisation, an entity to which the standards apply must have:

Standard 1: Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements (See appendix 1)

Standard 2: A child safe policy or statement of commitment to child safety (See Appendix 2)

Standard 3: A code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children (see appendix 3)

Standard 4: Screening, supervision, training and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel (See VIT and Working with Children Policies)

Standard 5: Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse (DET Mandatory Reporting policy which can be found at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/safety/Pages/childprotection.aspx>)

Standard 6: Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse (Appendix 4)

Standard 7: Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children (See Student Engagement and Wellbeing Policy)

Somerville Secondary College will implement the Child Safe Standards to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all students at the School and promote an organisational culture that manages the risk of child abuse and neglect. Our School has developed policies and procedures that aim to keep children safe. The standards will provide a framework to identify gaps and improve policy and practices around child safety.

Appendix One:

Somerville Secondary College School Child Safe Definitions:

Definitions

A full list of definitions for Ministerial Order No. 870 is available at www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/childsafes.

Child abuse includes—

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

Child-connected work means work authorised by the school governing authority and performed by an adult in a school environment while children are present or reasonably expected to be present.

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 incidents or allegations of child abuse.

School environment means any physical or virtual place made available or authorised by the school governing authority for use by a child during or outside school hours, including:

- a campus of the school
- online school environments (including email and intranet systems)
- other locations provided by the school for a child's use (including, without limitation, locations used for school camps, sporting events, excursions, competitions, and other events).

School staff means:

- in a government school, an individual working in a school environment who is:
 - employed under Part 2.4 of the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (ETR Act) in the government teaching service or
 - employed under a contract of service by the council of the school under Part 2.3 of the ETR Act or
 - a volunteer or a contracted service provider (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary).
- **School governing authority** means:
 - The proprietor of a school, including a person authorised to act for or on behalf of the proprietor; or
 - The governing body for a school (however described), as authorised by the proprietor of a school or the ETR Act; or
 - The principal, as authorised by the proprietor of a school, the school governing body, or the ETR Act.

Appendix Two:

Somerville Secondary College Our commitment to child safety

Somerville Secondary College is committed to safety and wellbeing of all children and young people. This will be the primary focus of our care and decision-making.

Somerville Secondary College has zero tolerance for child abuse.

Somerville Secondary College is committed to providing a child safe environment where children and young people are safe and feel safe, and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives. Particular attention will be paid to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children and children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as the safety of children with a disability.

Every person involved in Somerville Secondary College has a responsibility to understand the important and specific role he/she plays individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children and young people is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make.

In its planning, decision-making and operations Somerville Secondary College 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 issues;
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.

We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously.

Somerville Secondary College is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, removing and reducing these risks (see [SSC Child Safe Risk Register](#)).

Somerville Secondary College has robust human resources and recruitment practices (see '[Recruitment](#)') for all staff and volunteers and is committed to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks and their associated responsibilities.

We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our leadership team, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.

Our children

This policy is intended to empower children who are vital and active participants in our school. 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 in 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 Aboriginal children
- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate equally.

Our staff and volunteers

This policy guides our staff and volunteers on how to behave with children in our school.

All of our staff and volunteers must agree to abide by our code of conduct which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. All staff and volunteers, as well as children and their families, are given the opportunity to contribute to the development of the code of conduct.

Training and supervision

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone in 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 to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse. Our staff also complete mandatory reporting online modules.

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 Aboriginal children, 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 this 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. Our school understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

All people engaged in child-related work, including volunteers, are required to hold a Victorian Institute of Training registration (VIT) or a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this. See the 'Working with Children Check' website www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au for further information

We carry out reference checks and police record checks to ensure that we are recruiting the right people. Police record checks are used only for the purposes of recruitment. 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.

Fair procedures for personnel

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and just to personnel. 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. These allegations are investigated by a member of the principal class. All records are securely stored.

Privacy

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be 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

Our school takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- All Victorian Teachers have a legal responsibility to report incidents where children's safety is at risk. Victorian Government School employees are expected to follow the DET Mandatory Reporting policy which can be found at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/safety/Pages/childprotection.aspx>
- **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.
- **Failure to protect:** People of authority in 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.
- Any personnel who are **mandatory reporters** must comply with their duties.

Risk management

In Victoria, schools 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 schools via social media) unless it is for an educational purpose.

Allegations, concerns and complaints

Our school 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

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
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- observing suspicious behaviour.

Appendix Three:

Somerville Secondary College Child Safety Code of Conduct

The following child safety code of conduct clearly spells out the professional boundaries and acceptable and unacceptable adult/child relationships and behaviours. All staff members at our school are expected to have read and to implement the following 'Child Safety Code of Conduct' at all times.

Making a professional judgment

Adults at Somerville Secondary College will;

- Make judgments about their behaviour in order to secure the best interests and welfare of the child
- Record interactions and share them with a member of the Principal Class.
- Ensure actions taken are warranted, proportionate, safe and applied equitably
- Discuss any misunderstandings, accidents or threats with a leadership team member
- Be aware of their position of trust and ensure an unequal balance of power is not used for their own or others personal advantage or gratification
- Not use their position to intimidate, bully, humiliate, threaten, coerce or undermine children
- Maintain appropriate professional boundaries and avoid behaviour which might be misinterpreted by others
- Not promote relationships which create a personal friendship or are of a sexual nature, or which may become so.

Personal/living space

Adults at Somerville Secondary College will;

- Not invite a child into their home or any home or domestic setting frequented by them, unless the reason for this has been firmly established and agreed with parents and care givers
- School Leadership or the home has been designated as a work place e.g. childminders, foster carers
- Be vigilant in maintaining their own privacy and mindful of the need to avoid placing themselves in vulnerable situations
- Not ask children to undertake personal jobs or errands
- Maintain professional boundaries.

Gifts, rewards and favouritism

Adults at Somerville Secondary College will;

- Be aware of their organisation's policy on the giving and receiving of gifts
- Ensure that gifts received or given in situations that may be misconstrued are declared
- Only give gifts to an individual child as part of an agreed reward system
- Ensure that when operating reward systems, methods and criteria for selection of children for awards are fair and transparent.

Infatuations

Adults at Somerville Secondary College will;

- Deal with infatuations sensitively and appropriately to maintain the dignity and safety of all concerned
- Make sure their own behaviour is beyond reproach
- If they become aware of an infatuation developing or any indications that it may, record it and discuss it with the School Leadership member so that action can be taken to avoid any hurt, distress or embarrassment.

Communication (including the use of technology)

Adults at Somerville Secondary College will:

- Ensure communication takes place within clear and explicit professional boundaries which includes the wider use of technology such as mobile phones, text messaging, e-mails, digital cameras, videos, web-cams, websites and blogs.
- Not share any personal information with a child
- Not request, or respond to, any personal information from a child, other than that which may be appropriate as part of their professional role
- Not give their personal contact details to children, including their mobile number, home phone or personal e-mail address, unless the need to do so is agreed with School Leadership and parents
- Only use equipment e.g. mobile phones, provided by their organisation to communicate with children, making sure that parents/carers have given permission for this form of communication to be used

- Only make contact with children for professional reasons and in accordance with School policy
- Only use text messaging as a last resort when no other forms of communication are possible
- Not use internet or web-based communication channels to send messages
- Use internal e-mail systems in accordance with the schools policy.

Social Contact

Adults at Somerville Secondary College will:

- Not have social contact with children unless the reason for this has been firmly established and agreed with School Leadership
- Not have secret social contact with children and/or their parent(s);
- Always approve any planned social contact with children with School Leadership
- Advise senior management of any social contact that has occurred which may raise concern
- Report and record any situation which may place a child at risk or may compromise the organisation or their own professional standing.

Sexual Contact

Adults at Somerville Secondary College will:

- Not engage in sexual activity with or in the presence of a child, or cause or incite a child to engage in or watch sexual activity, to do so would be considered a criminal offence;
- Not have any form of communication which could be interpreted as sexually suggestive or provocative or make sexual remarks to, or about a child either verbally, written or electronically
- Not discuss their own sexual relationships with or in the presence of children
- Ensure relationships take place within boundaries of respect and professionalism
- Ensure language, attitudes and demeanor do not give rise to comment or speculation
- Be aware that consistently conferring inappropriate special attention and favour upon a child might be construed as part of a grooming process, and as such will give rise to concerns about behaviour.

Physical Contact

Adults at Somerville Secondary College will:

- Be aware that even well intentioned physical contact may be misconstrued by the child, an observer or by anyone to whom this action is described
- Only have physical contact with a child when it is necessary and in ways which are appropriate to their professional or agreed role and responsibilities, never touch a child in a way which may be considered indecent
- Be aware of the child's reactions or feelings and, as far as possible, only use a level of contact which is acceptable to the child and for the minimum time necessary
- Seek permission from the child or the parent, if the child is very young, before physical contact is made and agree what contact is acceptable
- Not assume that when a child is distressed they seek physical comfort
- Always be prepared to report and explain actions and accept that all physical contact is open to scrutiny
- Not indulge in horse play
- Always encourage children, where possible to undertake self-care tasks independently
- Be aware of cultural or religious views about touching and sensitive to issues of gender
- Where there is regular physical contact needed, the nature of this must be agreed with School Leadership and the parent as part of a formally agreed plan
- Where a child initiates inappropriate physical contact, you must sensitively deter them and help them understand the importance of personal boundaries.

Behaviour Management:

Adults at Somerville Secondary College will:

- Not use any form of degrading treatment to punish a child
- Not use sarcasm, demeaning or insensitive comments
- Ensure any sanctions and rewards are part of an agreed behaviour management policy
- Try to defuse situations before they escalate
- Never use corporal punishment
- Follow the behaviour policy and only use physical intervention in exceptional circumstances and as a last resort, when other behaviour management strategies have failed and where there is a risk of physical injury or serious damage to property
- When, using physical intervention, use the minimum force necessary and techniques in line with recommended policy and practice and always report and document the incident

- Be mindful of other factors which may be impacting on a child's behaviour, i.e. bullying, changes in home circumstances

Note: the use of unwarranted physical force is likely to constitute a criminal offence.

Personal/Intimate Care

Adults at Somerville Secondary College will:

- Adhere to the school's code of conduct
- Make other staff aware of the task being undertaken
- Explain to the child what is happening
- Carefully and sensitively observe the emotional responses of the child, and record and report any concerns to School Leadership and parents, if appropriate
- Respect children's privacy at all times
- Avoid any physical contact when children are in a state of undress, other than as part of an agreed care plan
- Not change, in the same place as children
- Not shower or bathe with children
- Not assist with any personal care task which a child can undertake themselves

One to one situations/home visits

Adults at Somerville Secondary College will:

- Ensure that when working alone, full and appropriate risk assessments have been agreed to
- Avoid meetings with a child in secluded areas
- Always inform colleagues and/or parents about one to one contact beforehand, assessing the need to have them present or close by
- Avoid the use of 'engaged' signage on doors where ever possible, these create an opportunity for secrecy or the interpretation of secrecy
- Carefully consider the need of the child when in one to one situation and always report any situation where the child becomes distressed or angry towards you
- Agree what the purpose for any home visit with School Leadership team unless it is an acknowledged and integral part of your role
- Never put yourself into a one to one situation when little or no information is available about the child.

Transporting

Adults at Somerville Secondary College will:

- Ensure requirements around seat belts and car seats are adhered to
- Not offer lifts outside normal working duties unless this has been brought to the attention of School Leadership and been agreed with parents
- Ensure they are fit to drive and free from any drugs, alcohol or medicine that is likely to impair judgement or ability to drive
- Record details of the journey in accordance with agreed DET procedures
- Ensure that there are proper procedures in place for vehicle, passenger and driver safety, including appropriate insurance;
- Ensure that written parent permission has been obtained before travel
- Ensure that any impromptu or emergency lifts are recorded and can be justified if questioned.

Trips and Outings

Adults at Somerville Secondary College will:

- Recognise that they are in a position of trust and ensure that their behaviour remains professional at all times and stays clearly within defined boundaries
- Ensure staff/child ratios and gender mix are appropriate
- Always have another adult present in out of work activities, unless otherwise agreed with by School Leadership
- Ensure risk assessments are undertaken
- Have parental consent to the activity
- Never share beds with children
- Not share bedrooms unless it is a dormitory situation and the arrangements have been agreed with the School Leadership, parents and children.

Photography and Videos

Adults at Somerville Secondary College will:

- Be clear about the purpose of any activity involving photography and what will happen to the images when the activity is concluded
- Be able to justify the reason for having images of children in their possession
- Avoid making images in one to one situations or situations that may be construed as secretive or which show a single child with no surrounding context
- Only use equipment provided or authorised by their school
- Immediately report any concerns if any inappropriate or intrusive images are found
- Have parental consent to take, display and/or distribute any images of children
- Not use images that may cause distress or offence
- Not use mobile phones or any other devices that have a camera to take images of children.

Access to inappropriate images and internet usage

Adults at Somerville Secondary College will:

- Not access, make or store indecent images of children on the internet, to do so would be illegal and lead to a criminal investigation
- Not make or store images of children, gathered as a result of their work, on personal equipment
- Follow their schools guidance on the use of IT equipment
- Ensure that children are not exposed to unsuitable material through Information, Communication Technology
- Ensure that any materials shown to children are age appropriate
- Immediately report any concerns, if any inappropriate or intrusive images are found, to the School Leadership and follow the Mandatory Reporting Policy.

Appendix Four:

Somerville Secondary College Child Safety Risk Management Program

At Somerville Secondary College our child safety risk management strategy is a formal and structured approach to managing risks associated with child safety. Our school Child Safe Policy and Code of Conduct clearly outlines our commitment to implementing the 7 standards for child safety as outlined in the Ministerial Order No. 870.

At Somerville Secondary College our process includes risk assessment (see matrix below), implementation of controls and a monitoring and review process to ensure the currency of the risk management approach.

Risk Rating Matrix

RISK RATING		Consequence				
		Insignificant	Minor	Moderate	Major	Severe
Likelihood	Almost Certain	Medium	High	Extreme	Extreme	Extreme
	Likely	Medium	Medium	High	Extreme	Extreme
	Possible	Low	Medium	Medium	High	Extreme
	Unlikely	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	High
	Rare	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Medium

[Somerville Secondary College Child Safety Risk Register \(School Access\)](#)

[Somerville Secondary College Child Safety Risk Register \(External Access\)](#)

Child Safety Risks and Risk Management Strategies

The list below comprises an inventory of potential child safety risk and risk management strategies.

Risks

- Lack of an organisational culture of child safety
- Familiarity breeding a culture of not reporting issues
- Natural trust of long term employees
- Children alone with one other person unsupervised
- Recruitment of an inappropriate person
- Inappropriate behaviour not reported
- Harassment via email, SMS or other media
- Unsupervised recreational or other activities
- Ad-hoc contractors on the premises (e.g. maintenance)
- Vulnerability of staff and students due to unknown personal issues
- Unknown people and environments at excursions and camps
- False allegations

Risk Management Strategies

- Implement an effective child safety risk management strategy
- Child safety code of conduct
- Child safety reporting procedures
- Induction for all visitors, staff, volunteers and contractors
- Train students and staff to detect inappropriate behaviour
- Counselling and other resources
- CCTV for unsupervised areas, and 'hot spot' areas
- Clear windows to enable visibility of occupants
- Non-lockable doors in hot spots
- Assessment of new or changed physical environments for child safety risks
- Supervision or monitoring of activities
- Online searches (Google, Facebook etc.) to be monitored
- Performance management procedures
- Pre-employment reference checks that include checking for child safety
- Criminal history checks and confirming the currency of
- Online PD modules

At Somerville Secondary College we believe that our in-depth Child Safe Policy's and Code of Conduct enable for the monitoring of risk and risk management.

LINKS AND APPENDICES (including processes related to this policy)

Additional resources and links which are connected with this policy can be located at:

- <http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/childsafepages/default.html>

RATIFICATION

This policy will be reviewed annually or as required should changes arise in regulation or if circumstances change.

This policy was ratified at the School Board held on **22 October 2018** and will be reviewed and updated by not later than October 2019 as part of an annual policy review process.