

Child Safe Environment

RPS COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

Ripponlea Primary School ('RPS') is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people. This will be the primary focus of our care and decision-making.

RPS has a zero tolerance for child abuse.

RPS is dedicated 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.

All allegations and safety concerns are treated seriously. RPS has legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when concerned about a child's safety.

Every person involved in RPS 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.

RPS is committed to regular training of staff and volunteers to ensure individual and the collective understanding of the importance of child safety and individual and collective responsibility to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children is at the forefront of our decision making.

In its planning, decision-making and operations, RPS will do the following.

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.
10. Value the input of and communicate regularly with families and guardians/carers.

GOALS

RPS believes that all students have a right to:

1. take part in learning programs that cater for their individual needs;
2. feel secure in a caring and supportive environment;
3. receive respect, kindness and courtesy and be treated fairly;
4. be valued and accepted for their individuality; and
5. expect that the school rules are fair, consistently implemented and respect the rights of all involved.

All students have a responsibility to treat each other with respect, tolerance and kindness and develop a sense of accountability for their own actions. They are expected to work to achieve their personal best and allow others to do the same.

Staff are expected to provide opportunities for all students to learn and treat students with respect and dignity. They maintain objectivity and professionalism in their relationships with students at all times.

SCOPE

This Policy applies to all RPS staff, contractors, volunteers, student teachers, visitors, parents/guardians and any other members of the RPS community performing child-connected work.

The Policy will apply across the school environment, including school camps, sporting events, excursions and online.

PURPOSE AND IMPLEMENTATION

This Policy is intended to empower children who are vital and active participants in our school and to involve children when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. RPS listens to their views and respects what they have to say.

This Policy also describes RPS's approach to the Child Safe Standards and the framework for creating a child safe school culture and environment where children and young people are safe and feel safe.

1. Code of Conduct:

RPS will ensure each staff member understands their role, responsibilities and the expected behaviour in protecting children from child abuse. The school's culture encourages staff to raise, discuss and scrutinise concerns making it more difficult for abuse to occur and remain hidden.

All RPS staff, contractors and volunteers, whether or not they work in direct contact with children, must agree to abide by the RPS Child Safety Code of Conduct ('Code of Conduct'), which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children and clearly sets out what is appropriate and inappropriate behaviour (see **Appendix 1**).

The Code of Conduct has been approved and sanctioned by the staff and the RPS school council.

The Code of Conduct can also be viewed at www.ripponleaps.vic.edu.au or a free copy can be requested by contacting the school at ripponlea.ps@edumail.vic.gov.au or on 03 95275728.

At least annually, RPS ensures that appropriate guidance and training is provided to staff and volunteers about:

- a. individual and collective obligations and responsibilities for managing the risk of child abuse;
- b. child abuse risks in the school environment; and
- c. RPS's current child safety standards.

RPS also provides high quality staff and volunteer supervision and professional development.

2. Recruitment:

RPS applies best practice standards in the recruitment and screening of staff and will take all reasonable steps to ensure that it engages the most suitable and appropriate people to work with children. RPS will ensure that staff induction, education and training programs are a vital part of our commitment to safeguarding children from abuse and neglect. All prospective staff and volunteers are required to undergo National Criminal History Records check and maintain a valid Working with Children Check. (Also see: RPS **Working with Children Check Policy**).

3. Training:

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone at RPS understands that child safety is everybody's responsibility.

RPS aims for all staff and volunteers (in addition to parents/guardians and children) to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. RPS trains staff and volunteers to identify, assess and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

RPS also supports staff and volunteers through ongoing supervision to develop their skills to protect children from abuse.

New employees and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand RPS'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, appropriate and in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

A **Visitors to School Policy** has been implemented by RPS to manage and supervise visitors to RPS.

4. Fair procedures for personnel:

The safety and wellbeing of children is RPS's primary concern. RPS is also fair and just to its staff. The decisions RPS makes when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.

RPS will record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form, including investigation updates. All records are securely stored. When RPS is gathering information

in relation to a complaint about alleged misconduct with, or abuse of, a child, RPS will listen to the complainant's account of events and take them seriously, check understanding and keep the child (or their parents/guardians) informed about progress.

If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, RPS provides updates to children and families on progress and any actions RPS takes.

5. Education:

RPS delivers appropriate education about:

- a. standards of behaviour for students attending RPS;
- b. healthy and respectful relationships (including sexuality);
- c. resilience; and
- d. child abuse awareness.

6. Privacy

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be staff, volunteers, parents/guardians or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. RPS has 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. (Also see: RPS **Privacy Policy**).

7. Legal responsibilities:

RPS takes its legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- a. 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 police.
- b. Failure to protect: People of authority in RPS 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.
- c. Any personnel who are mandatory reporters must comply with their duties.

8. 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, RPS proactively manages risks of abuse to our children.

RPS has risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks, which include risks posed by physical onsite environments (for example, any doors that can lock), online environments (for example, no staff or volunteer is to have contact with a child in organisations on social media) and offsite environments, including school camps, sporting events and excursions.

9. Allegations, concerns and complaints

RPS takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. RPS staff and volunteers are trained to deal appropriately with allegations.

RPS will 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.

- a. **Forming a belief of reasonable grounds:** RPS has a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if there is a reasonable belief that an incident took place. A person may form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection after becoming aware that a child or young person's health, safety or wellbeing is at risk. Factors contributing to reasonable belief may be:
 - a. a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves);
 - b. behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed;
 - c. someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it; or
 - d. observing suspicious behaviour.
- b. **Reporting a belief:** Mandated staff members (Teachers and Principals) must make a report to appropriate authorities including the Department of Human Services and Victoria Police as soon as practicable after forming a belief on reasonable grounds that a child or young person is in need of protection. Staff members, whether or not mandated, need to report to the Principal or Assistant Principal their belief when the belief is formed in the course of undertaking their professional duties. A report must be made as soon as practicable after forming the belief and on each occasion during which they become aware of any further reasonable grounds for the belief. If one staff member has a different view from another staff member about making a report and the staff member continues to hold the belief that a child is in need of protection, that person is obliged to make a report.

RPS's policy and procedures for reporting a child safety allegation, concern or complaint are set out in the Department of Education and Training (DE&T) **Child Protection - Reporting Obligations** (see **REFERENCES**).

DEFINITIONS

The following important definitions are derived from *Ministerial Order 870 - Child Safe Standards - Managing the risk of child abuse in schools*:

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); and
- 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 being: an individual working in a school environment who is:

- employed under Part 2.4 of the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 in the government teaching service; or
- employed under a contract of service by the council of the school under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006; or
- a volunteer or a contracted service provider (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary).

RELATED SCHOOL POLICIES

- Working with Children Check
- Visitors to School
- Privacy
- Camps and Excursions
- Student Engagement & Inclusion
- Mandatory Reporting
- Antibullying & Cyberbullying
- Cyber Safety and Use of Electronic Devices
- Family Participation
- Playground Supervision
- Duty of Care

REFERENCES

- DE&T Child Protection Reporting Obligations
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/safety/Pages/childprotectobligation.aspx>
- DE&T School Policy & Advisory Guide – Duty of Care
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/safety/Pages/dutyofcare.aspx>
- DE&T Child Safe Resources:
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/protect/Pages/default.aspx>
- VRQA ChildSafe Standards: <http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/childsafes>

Ratified by School Council: 11 September 2018

Next review date: 2020

CHILD SAFE Code of Conduct

Ripponlea Primary School ('RPS') is committed to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. Our school community recognises the importance of, and a responsibility for, ensuring our school is a safe, supportive and enriching environment which respects and fosters the dignity and self-esteem of children and young people and enables them to thrive in their learning and development.

This Code of Conduct aims to protect children and reduce any opportunities for child abuse or harm to occur. It also assists in understanding how to avoid or better manage risky behaviours and situations. It is intended to complement child protection legislation, Department of Education and Training policy, school policies and procedures, professional standards and codes of ethics as these apply to staff and other personnel.

The Principal and school leaders of RPS will support implementation and monitoring of the Code of Conduct, and will plan, implement and monitor arrangements to provide inclusive, safe and orderly schools and other learning environments. The Principal and school leaders of RPS will also provide information and support to enable the Code of Conduct to operate effectively.

All staff, contractors, volunteers and any other member of the school community involved in child-related work are required to comply with the Code of Conduct by observing expectations for appropriate behaviour below. The Code of Conduct applies in all school situations, including school camps and in the use of digital technology and social media.

Acceptable behaviours

As staff, volunteers, contractors and any other member of the school community involved in child-related work individually, we are responsible for supporting and promoting the safety of children by:

- upholding the school's statement of commitment to child safety at all times and adhering to the school's child safe policy;
- treating students and families in the school community with respect, both within the school environment and outside the school environment, as part of normal social and community activities;
- listening and responding to the views and concerns of students, particularly if they are telling you that they or another child has been abused or that they are worried about their safety/the safety of another child;
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of students with culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds;
- promoting the safety, participation and empowerment of students with a disability;
- reporting any allegations of child abuse or other child safety concerns to the school's leadership;
- understanding and complying with all reporting or disclosure obligations (including mandatory reporting) as they relate to protecting children from harm or abuse;

- if child abuse is suspected, ensuring as quickly as possible that the student(s) are safe and protected from harm.

Unacceptable behaviours

As staff, volunteers, contractors, and any other member of the school community involved in child-related work we must not:

- ignore or disregard any concerns, suspicions or disclosures of child abuse;
- develop a relationship with any student that could be seen as favouritism or amount to 'grooming' behaviour (for example, offering gifts);
- exhibit behaviours or engage in activities with students which may be interpreted as abusive and not justified by the educational, therapeutic, or service delivery context;
- ignore behaviours by other adults towards students when they appear to be overly familiar or inappropriate;
- discuss content of an intimate nature or use sexual innuendo with students, except where it occurs relevantly in the context of parental guidance, delivering the education curriculum or a therapeutic setting;
- treat a child unfavourably because of their disability, age, gender, race, culture, vulnerability, sexuality or ethnicity;
- communicate with a student through personal or private contact channels (including by social media, email, instant messaging, texting, etc.), except where that communication is reasonable in all the circumstances, related to school work or extra-curricular activities or where there is a safety concern or other urgent matter;
- photograph or video a child in a school environment, except in accordance with school policy or where required for duty of care purposes;
- in the school environment or at other school events where students are present, consume alcohol contrary to school policy or take illicit drugs under any circumstances.

This Code of Conduct was approved by the Ripponlea Primary School Council on 11 September 2018 and will be reviewed:

- **if legislative or other changes require**
- **if a reportable incident occurs in order to assess the effectiveness of the Code of Conduct and whether any modification is required**
- **by no later than December 2020.**