

CHILD SAFE POLICY

A Statement about our Commitment to Child Safety

Matthew Flinders Girls Secondary College (MFG) is committed to child and student safety. We want students to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all students and children, as well as our staff and volunteers.

We are committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all students. We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures.

We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a student's safety, which we follow rigorously. MFG is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks.

The school has robust human resource and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers. Our school is committed to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks.

We support and respect all students, as well as our staff and volunteers. We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal students, the cultural safety of students from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for students with a disability.

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

Our Students

This policy is intended to empower our students who are vital and active participants in our organisation. We involve them when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say.

We promote diversity and tolerance in our organisation, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome. In particular we:

- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal students
- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of students from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- ensure that students 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 and around children in our organisation.

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 students. All staff and volunteers, as well as students 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 organisation understands that student and child safety is everyone's responsibility.

Our organisational culture aims for all staff and volunteers (in addition to parents/carers and students) 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
- promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal students, the cultural safety of students from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds, and the safety of students with a disability.

New employees and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand our organisation's commitment to student and child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting students from abuse, as well as checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate (please refer to our 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 students. We develop selection criteria and advertisements, which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities. Our organisation understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

We actively encourage applications from Aboriginal peoples, people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability.

All people engaged in child-related work, including volunteers, are required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this check and its currency.

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 and are discarded after the recruitment process is complete. We do retain our own records (but not the actual criminal record) if an applicant's criminal history 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.

Fair Procedures for Personnel

The safety and wellbeing of students and 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 Compass, which is our online student management system, 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 as an organisation take.

Privacy

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they are staff members, 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 organisation takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- **Failure to disclose:** Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to the police.¹
- **Failure to protect:** People of authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.²
- Any personnel who are **mandatory reporters** must comply with their duties.³

Risk Management

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified. 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 on social media for any purpose other than their education).

Regular Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years and following significant incidents if they occur. We will ensure that families and students have the opportunity to contribute. Where possible we will do our best to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

¹ 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.

Further information about the failure to disclose offence is available on the Department of Justice and Regulation website <www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence>.

² Further information about the failure to protect offence is available on the Department of Justice and Regulation website <www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence>.

³ 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.

Allegations, Concerns and Complaints

Our organisation 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 students, 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 student 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 observed⁴
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- observing suspicious behaviour.

This policy was ratified by the Matthew Flinders Girls Secondary College, College Council:

Date: 17/10/2016

Council President: Peter Hughes

Principal: Michelle Crofts

It will be reviewed every second year or after any significant incident to student or child safety.

⁴ For example behaviour, please see **An Overview of the Victorian Child Safe Standards:**
<www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/word_doc/0005/955598/Child-safe-standards_overview.doc>