

## CHILDSAFETYPOLICY

### PURPOSE

At Billanook Primary School, the safety of every one of our children is paramount. We want children to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and school volunteers. We have a commitment to **zero tolerance of child abuse**. Staff at our school have a responsibility to respond to the safety, care and welfare of students, in all school environments and outside of school hours. This is a commitment which is led by our School Council, School Leadership team, all staff and is shared openly and transparently with all members of our school community.

We are committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all children. We have zero tolerance of child abuse and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently in accordance with our policies and procedures. We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are concerned about a child's safety and will follow these rigorously, when required.

We are committed to preventing child abuse by identifying risks early and removing and reducing these risks. At Billanook Primary School, staff take part in regular training and education about child abuse risks. We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability.

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

**If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse phone 000.**

### **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 at Billanook Primary School and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome here.

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.

### **In Ministerial Order No. 870, child abuse is listed as:**

- any act committed against a child involving –
  - a sexual offence; or
  - an offence under section 49B(2) of the Crimes Act 1958 (grooming)

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- the infliction, on a child of –
  - Physical violence; or
  - Serious emotional or psychological harm
- Serious neglect of a child.

### SCOPE

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

### POLICY

#### **Guidelines for Implementation:**

##### **Our staff and volunteers**

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

All of our staff, School Councillors 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 school's Code of Conduct. A signed copy of the agreement will be kept on file at school, in accordance with privacy legislation.

##### **Training and supervision**

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone at Billanook Primary School understands that child safety is a collective responsibility.

Our school culture aims for all staff and volunteers (in addition to parents 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.

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 children, the cultural safety of children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds,
- and promote the safety of children with a disability.

New employees take part in an induction program and are assigned a mentor to ensure they understand our school's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse. Their behaviour towards children must be safe and appropriate. (Please refer to Billanook Primary School's Code of Conduct). Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services (DHS) and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

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### **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 organisation understands that, when recruiting staff and volunteers, we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

We carry out reference checks and ensure all teaching staff are registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT). All employees engaged in child-related work, including office staff, integration aides and volunteers, are required to hold a valid Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this Check. When working in the classroom, all volunteers should be within the line of sight of DET employees. All other personnel working in our school (for example; cleaner, gardener, plumber, etc.) must hold a valid Working with Children's Check.

### **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 evidence-based.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form. (Appendix A) including investigation updates. All records are securely stored.

If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to the children involved, and their 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 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. The storage of all personal information will adhere to all aspects of privacy legislation and requirements from DET.

### **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<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence)

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- **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<sup>2</sup>.

All staff at Billanook Primary School must complete annual Mandatory Reporting training. This is completed at the beginning of every school year through the **Protecting Children – Mandatory Reporting** and other Obligations eLearning Module. This ensures all staff are aware of their responsibilities, as all staff who are mandatory reporters must comply with their duties<sup>3</sup>.

### Risk management

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

We have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess and take steps to minimise child abuse risks. These 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).

### Allegations, concerns and complaints

At Billanook Primary School we take all allegations seriously and have practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our staff 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 or if they notice inappropriate behaviour. We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place (see information about failure to disclose above).

If an adult has a **reasonable belief** that an incident has occurred then they must report the incident.

#### **Factors contributing to reasonable belief include:**

- 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<sup>4</sup>
- Someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- Suspicious behaviour is observed.

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<sup>2</sup> 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](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence)

<sup>3</sup> 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.

See the Department of Health and Human Services website for information about how to make a report to child protection [www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/guide-to-making-a-report-to-child-protection-or-child-first](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/guide-to-making-a-report-to-child-protection-or-child-first)

<sup>4</sup> 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](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/word_doc/0005/955598/Child-safe-standards_overview.doc)

### REVIEW CYCLE AND EVALUATION

Evaluation of this policy will be carried out by the School Council as part of the cyclic review process, in three years time, or beforehand, if a significant issue arises. Families and students will have an opportunity to contribute to the reviewing of this policy.

This policy was last updated on:

**Date:**

Feb 2020

**Evaluation and Review:**

Feb 2021

**Ratified and Approved by School Council: Date**