



# Catholic Schools Child Safe Schools

## Guide for Catholic Schools Developing a Child Safety Code of Conduct

*The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) holds the care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people as a central and fundamental responsibility of Catholic education. This 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 2016).*

### Introduction

Seven new Victorian Child Safe Standards came into effect on 1 January 2016 and apply to all organisations involved in child-related work in Victoria, such as schools, churches, kindergartens, children's services, out-of-home care services, youth services and local councils.

On 22 December 2015, the Victorian Minister for Education provided [Ministerial Order No. 870](#) (State of Victoria, Department of Education and Training 2016) which provides the framework for how schools will be required to comply with the Standards. This Ministerial Order requires schools to be compliant from 1 August 2016 and overall responsibility for ensuring compliance rests with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA).

This Guide has been developed in consultation with the Independent Education Union Victoria/Tasmania (IEU), and is provided to assist Victorian Catholic schools to reach compliance with **Standard 3**, being concerned with the development of a Code of Conduct for school employees, volunteers, contractors and ministers of religion.

### Requirements of the Ministerial Order

The Ministerial Order specifies the following requirements for schools regarding a Code of Conduct:

*The school governing authority must develop, endorse, and make publicly available a code of conduct that:*

- a) *has the objective of promoting child safety in the school environment;*
- b) *sets standards about the ways in which school staff are expected to behave with children;*
- c) *takes into account the interests of school staff (including other professional or occupational codes of conduct that regulate particular school staff), and the needs of all children; and*
- d) *is consistent with the school's child safety strategies, policies and procedures as revised from time to time (State of Victoria, Department of Education and Training 2016).*

Please note that the Ministerial Order defines some terms broadly. Some relevant definitions are included at *Appendix 1*.

## Key Points to Note

- The Code of Conduct developed by each Catholic school is to be applicable to school employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy.
- Each school should undertake meaningful consultation with staff and others in developing its Code of Conduct.
- The Code of Conduct must be appropriate to each individual school.
- Once finalised, the Code of Conduct should be made widely available in an ongoing basis.

## Suggested Process

### 1. *Becoming familiar with this guide and related resources*

Catholic school principals are responsible for ensuring that the school develops a Child Safety Code of Conduct and for arranging endorsement of the Code by the school governing authority.

The principal may wish to allocate responsibility for leading the development of the Child Safety Code of Conduct to a member of the school leadership team or other appropriate school leader. The principal and delegated staff member/s should become familiar with the Child Safe Standards, the Ministerial Order, the CECV Commitment Statement, other CECV and diocesan resource material, related VRQA advice and resources, as well as the contents of this Guide.

This Guide is provided to assist each Catholic school develop or review its own Child Safety Code of Conduct. It includes:

- a suggested process for developing a Child Safety Code of Conduct
- a suggested template to support schools to develop a customised Code of Conduct
- a sample Code of Conduct based on the statements of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours suggested by the VRQA that maybe included in a school's code of conduct. The list of behaviours is not intended to be exhaustive, but may assist schools when customising their codes of conduct to the expectations and needs of their own communities.

The above resources should be considered in conjunction with the VRQA information sheet on the [Child Safety Code of Conduct](#) (VRQA 2016a) and the [Child Safety Code of Conduct – Acceptable and Unacceptable Behaviour Guide](#) (VRQA 2016b).

### 2. *Consultation*

Each school will develop its own Child Safety Code of Conduct in consultation with its own staff. Involving teaching and non-teaching staff, volunteers, families and children can provide greater understanding of their unique insights and concerns regarding child safety which can inform the content of the Code.

The process for consultation can be undertaken during the school's regular meeting processes, including meetings of staff, school boards (or equivalent), Parents & Friends and other groups. Consideration could be given to holding a broader meeting inviting staff, parents, parish members and/or others.

The process of consultation should provide some information about the Victorian Child Safe Standards and the intent of a Child Safety Code of Conduct. The consultation should be based on the Sample Code of Conduct and the template and contained within *Appendices 2 and 3* of this Guide, as well as the [Child Safety Code of Conduct: Acceptable and Unacceptable Behaviour Guide](#) (VRQA 2016b).

### **3. *Creating the Code***

The delegated staff member and school leadership should use the information gained through consultation, this Guide and the school's existing vision, mission and policies to review and update the current Code or to draft and finalise a new Child Safety Code of Conduct.

A Code of Conduct should be direct and in plain and simple language which is easily understood. It should outline behaviours that are acceptable and those that are unacceptable.

It is acknowledged that all staff engaged as teachers already have obligations to adhere to the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) [The Victorian Teaching Profession Code of Conduct](#) (VIT 2015). It should be remembered that the Child Safety Code of Conduct is particular to matters of safeguarding children and young people in line with the requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards. It does not replace other professional or occupational Codes. It applies to employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy. This is a stand-alone Child Safety Code of Conduct that should not be integrated into any other Codes that may exist within the school.

### **4. *Endorsement***

The Code should be provided to the school's governing body for review and ratification/endorsement.

### **5. *Making the Code available***

Once endorsed, the Code should be widely disseminated and visible within the school community (e.g. school website; newsletters; posted in prominent school locations; included in staff and family handbooks; included in staff, volunteer, and contractor induction kits/processes; included in annual staff training).

### **6. *Embedding the Code***

The school will need to develop practices and systems to ensure all school staff (employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy) and parents are informed about the Code and its implications on an ongoing basis. It should be supported by supervision, professional development and training.

The Code of Conduct will be included:

- as part of induction training for new leadership members, staff, clergy, contractors and volunteers  
(Note: induction of new principals and school governing authorities into the Child Safe Standards is undertaken by diocesan offices or employing authorities)
- as part of annual training for existing leadership members, staff, contractors and volunteers

- to inform parent/carers and other persons associated with the school of the expected behaviour for the school's leadership, staff, contractors and volunteers
- to support and inform the school's protocols and reporting procedures should breaches of the Code be suspected or identified
- in employment advertisements and contracts to ensure compliance
- in considering ways to communicate the Code to students.

Schools may wish to include **a section for signature** on copies of the school's Code to provide a record that staff, contractors and volunteers have been provided with a copy of the Code.

### 7. *Related School Policies*

Ensure the Code of Conduct is aligned with all existing school documents pertaining to child safety, e.g. wellbeing, pastoral care, student supervision, duty of care, volunteers, camps and excursions (including overseas travel), bullying policies and disciplinary procedures.

### 8. *Reviewing the Code*

The Code of Conduct should be reviewed and updated regularly according to usual school document review processes.

## References

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) 2016, *Commitment Statement to Child Safety: A safe and nurturing culture for all children and young people in Catholic schools*, CECV, East Melbourne, accessed 16 May 2016  
<http://cevn.cecv.catholic.edu.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=8589940208>.

State of Victoria, Department of Education and Training 2016, *Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools Ministerial Order No. 870*, , Education & Training Reform Act 2006, Gazette No. S2, accessed 16 May 2016  
[www.gazette.vic.gov.au/gazette/Gazettes2016/GG2016S002.pdf](http://www.gazette.vic.gov.au/gazette/Gazettes2016/GG2016S002.pdf).

Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) 2015, *The Victorian Teaching Profession Code of Conduct*, VIT, Melbourne, accessed 19 May 2016 [www.vit.vic.edu.au/media/documents/imported-files/spl/Code-of-Conduct-2015.pdf](http://www.vit.vic.edu.au/media/documents/imported-files/spl/Code-of-Conduct-2015.pdf).

Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) 2016a, *CHILD SAFETY STANDARD 3: Child safety code of conduct*, State of Victoria, Melbourne, accessed 19 May 2016  
[www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/childsafes/Pages/documents/Child%20Safety%20Code%20of%20Conduct.docx](http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/childsafes/Pages/documents/Child%20Safety%20Code%20of%20Conduct.docx).

VRQA 2016b, *CHILD SAFETY STANDARD 3: Child safety code of conduct – acceptable and unacceptable behaviour*, State of Victoria, Melbourne, accessed 19 May 2016  
[www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/childsafes/Pages/documents/Code%20of%20Conduct%20Acceptable%20and%20Unacceptable%20Behaviour.docx](http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/childsafes/Pages/documents/Code%20of%20Conduct%20Acceptable%20and%20Unacceptable%20Behaviour.docx).

## Appendix 1: Definitions

The Ministerial Order provides the following definitions:

**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* (Vic.) (grooming)
- the infliction, on a child, of:
  - physical violence, or
  - serious emotional or psychological harm, or
  - 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** being: an individual working in a school environment who is:

- directly engaged or employed by a school governing authority;
- a volunteer or a contracted service provider (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary); or
- a minister of religion.

## Appendix 2: Child Safety Code of Conduct SAMPLE

Safeguarding Children and Young People

Code of Conduct

St Sample's School

19 May 2016

*Central to the mission of St Sample's is an unequivocal commitment to fostering the dignity, self-esteem and integrity of children and young people and providing them with a safe, supportive and enriching environment to develop spiritually, physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially.*

### Purpose

This Code of Conduct has a specific focus on safeguarding children and young people at St Sample's School against sexual, physical, psychological and emotional abuse or neglect. It is intended to complement child protection legislation, school policies/procedures and professional standards, codes or ethics as these apply to staff and personnel.

All staff, volunteers, contractors, clergy and board/school council members at St Sample's School are expected to actively contribute to a school culture that respects the dignity of its members and affirms the Gospel values of love, care for others, compassion and justice. They are required to observe child-safe principles and expectations for appropriate behaviour towards and in the company of children, as noted below.

### Acceptable behaviours

All staff, volunteers, contractors, clergy and board/school council members are responsible for supporting the safety of children by:

- adhering to the school's child-safe policy and upholding the school's statement of commitment to child safety at all times
- taking all reasonable steps to protect children from abuse
- treating everyone in the school community with respect (modelling positive and respectful relationships and acting in a manner that sustains a safe, educational and pastoral environment)
- listening and responding to the views and concerns of children, particularly if they are telling you that they or another child have 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 children (for example, by never questioning an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child's self-identification)
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children with culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds (for example, by having a zero tolerance policy towards discrimination)
- promoting the safety, participation and empowerment of children with a disability (for example, during personal care activities)
- ensuring as far as practicable that adults are not alone with a child
- reporting any allegations of child abuse to the school's leadership (or child safety officer if the school has appointed someone to this role).

- understanding and complying with all reporting obligations as they relate to mandatory reporting and reporting under the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.)
- reporting any child safety concerns to the school's leadership (or child safety officer if the school has appointed someone to this role)
- if an allegation of child abuse is made, ensuring as quickly as possible that the child(ren) are safe.

## Unacceptable behaviours

Staff and volunteers must not:

- ignore or disregard any suspected or disclosed child abuse
- develop any 'special' relationships with children that could be seen as favouritism (for example, the offering of gifts or special treatment for specific children)
- exhibit behaviours with children which may be construed as unnecessarily physical (for example, inappropriate sitting on laps)
- put children at risk of abuse (for example, by locking doors)
- initiate unnecessary physical contact with children or do things of a personal nature that a child can do for themselves, such as toileting or changing clothes
- engage in open discussions of a mature or adult nature in the presence of children (for example, personal social activities)
- use inappropriate language in the presence of children
- express personal views on cultures, race or sexuality in the presence of children
- discriminate against any child, including because of age, gender, race, culture, vulnerability, sexuality, ethnicity or disability
- have contact with a child or their family outside of school without the school's leadership or child safety officer's (if the school has appointed someone to this role) knowledge and/or consent or the school governing authority's approval (for example, unauthorised after-hours tutoring, private instrumental/other lessons or sport coaching); accidental contact, such as seeing people in the street, is appropriate
- have any online contact with a child (including by social media, email, instant messaging etc.) or their family (unless necessary e.g. by providing families with enewsletters or assisting students with their school work)
- use any personal communication channels/device such as a personal email account
- exchange personal contact details such as phone number, social networking sites or email addresses
- photograph or video a child without the consent of the parent or guardians
- work with children while under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs
- consume alcohol or drugs at school or at school events in the presence of children.

(Adapted from Source: VRQA)

I, \_\_\_\_\_, confirm that I have been provided with a copy of the above Code of Conduct.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3: Child Safety Code of Conduct TEMPLATE

[NOTE: A Word version of this template is available for you to customise]

Safeguarding Children and Young People

Code of Conduct

[SCHOOL NAME]

[DD/MM/YYYY]

[School statement in here that may incorporate vision, mission, principles]

### Purpose

This Code of Conduct has a specific focus on safeguarding children and young people at **[INSERT SCHOOL NAME]** against sexual, physical, psychological and emotional abuse or neglect. It is intended to complement child protection legislation, school policies/procedures and professional standards, codes or ethics as these apply to staff and personnel.

All staff, volunteers, contractors, clergy and board/school council members at St Sample's School are expected to actively contribute to a school culture that respects the dignity of its members and affirms the Gospel values of love, care for others, compassion and justice. They are required to observe child-safe principles and expectations for appropriate behaviour towards and in the company of children, as noted below.

### Acceptable behaviours

All staff, volunteers, contractors, clergy and board/school council members are responsible for supporting the safety of children by:

- [List behaviours the staff are required to engage in here]
- 

### Unacceptable behaviours

Staff and volunteers must not:

- [List behaviours the staff are required to NOT engage in here]
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I, \_\_\_\_\_, confirm I have been provided with a copy of the above Code of Conduct.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_