Child Safe Standard 7
Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children

Rationale

Developing the capacity in children to raise concerns about their safety requires schools to have a focused and intentional commitment to cultural and structural change that has the empowerment of children as the goal. For Catholic schools, 'the dignity of every person, independent of ethnicity, creed, gender, sexuality, age or ability, is the foundation [of Catholic Social Teaching principles]' (Caritas Australia 2016).

> Schools, in partnership with families, will ensure children and young people are engaged and active participants in decision-making processes, particularly those that have an impact on their safety. This means that the views of staff, children, young people and families are taken seriously and their concerns are addressed in a just and timely manner. Children and young people are also provided with the necessary skills and knowledge to understand and maintain their personal safety and wellbeing (CECV 2016).

In Brief

Standard 7 underlines the critical importance of schools fostering an environment of openness, inclusiveness and respect where children feel valued and 'have an awareness of [their] rights and adults' responsibilities regarding child abuse' (State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services 2015). In such an environment, children are supported by being taught skills to maintain personal safety and simple processes for reporting abuse, inappropriate behaviour or concerns for their safety and they feel comfortable to do so.

Ministerial Order Requirements

The Victorian government has introduced minimum Child Safe Standards into law to ensure that organisations providing services for children create child-safe environments. In accordance with Ministerial Order No. 870 (State of Victoria, Department of Education and Training 2016), under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Vic.), all Victorian schools are required to comply with these standards as part of their registration requirements.

The Ministerial Order specifies the following requirements for schools regarding Standard 7:

1. The school governing authority must develop strategies to deliver appropriate education about:

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

2. The school governing authority must promote the child safety standards required by this Order in ways that are readily accessible, easy to understand, and user-friendly to children (State of Victoria, Department of Education and Training 2016).

Ongoing Compliance

- Identify and document practices that are already in place to promote the empowerment and participation of children and young people in the school.

- Assess the current practice to identify strengths, gaps and areas that require further work. Refer to *A Guide to Support Victorian Schools to Meet Child Safe Standard 7* and *CECV Addendum to: A Guide to Support Victorian Schools to Meet Child Safe Standard 7*.

- Deliver appropriate education about standards of behaviour for students attending the school; healthy and respectful relationships (including sexuality); resilience; and child abuse awareness and prevention.

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- Conduct focus groups and action research to establish children's conceptions of safety, including interpersonal safety.

- Promote the child-safety standards required by the Ministerial Order in ways that are readily accessible, easy to understand, and user-friendly to children.

- Ensure that information and processes for reporting any concerns are accessible to all children in your school, and are specifically adapted to the cultural and social contexts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and children with a disability.

- Raise awareness in the school community about the rights of children.

- Introduce a systematic, age-appropriate, child safety curriculum.

- Build staff capacity to enable meaningful, positive participation of children in the school.

Sustaining a Culture of Child Safety

- Provide students in the school with age-appropriate and accessible information about what child abuse is, their rights to make decisions about their body and privacy, and how they can raise concerns.

- Regularly review the effectiveness of the school's child safety curriculum to enable students to feel safe, respected and empowered to contribute to the school's understanding of child safety and to report an allegation or concern for their own safety.

- In school information, include material of culturally appropriate language, photographs and artwork for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and children with a disability.

- Regularly gather the views and feedback from students in child-friendly ways (focus groups, story time, social media surveys) and implement improvements based on this feedback.

- Provide training for relevant staff and volunteers on methods of empowering children and encouraging their participation.

Indicators of Effective Implementation

Typical features of a school where strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children are embedded are that:

- an environment of trust and participation has been established where the contribution of children and young people is valued

- children in the school are engaged in decisions that affect them and have their views and opinions taken seriously

- children in the school feel safe, respected and empowered to contribute to the school's understanding of child safety and raise concerns about their own safety or that of a peer

- all children in the school understand what child safety is, know their rights and can easily access trusted staff and know what to do when they feel unsafe

- staff in the school understand how to empower and encourage the participation of children in creating a child-safe school

- teachers in the school feel confident and prepared to deliver age-appropriate education about child-protection awareness including healthy and respectful relationships

- children and young people are consulted about wellbeing and child-safety matters

- concerns reported by children in the school are responded to appropriately and promptly.

Resources

Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) 2018a, *eXcel: Wellbeing for learning in Catholic school communities*, CEM, East Melbourne, accessed 1 September 2020 https://cevn.cecv.catholic.edu.au/MelbourneDiocese/Document-File/Students-Support/Student-Wellbeing/Excel-wellbeing/eXcel-Wellbeing-for-learning_Guide_May-2018_CEM.aspx.

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State of Victoria, Commission for Children and Young People 2018, *A Guide for Creating a Child Safe Organisation,* Version 4, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne, accessed 8 April 2021 https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/resources/CSSGuideFinalV4-Web-New.pdf.

State of Victoria, Commission for Children and Young People 2021, *Empowerment and Participation: A guide for organisations working with children and young people*, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne, accessed 8 April 2021 https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/resources/Empowerment-and-Participation-Guide/CCYP-Empowerment-and-participation-guide-for-Web.pdf.

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Caritas Australia 2016, *Catholic Social Teaching*, accessed 18 March 2016 www.caritas.org.au/learn/catholic-social-teaching.

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 school*s, CECV, East Melbourne, accessed 16 May 2016 https://www.cecv.catholic.edu.au/getmedia/b5d43278-51b9-4704-b45a-f14e50546a70/Commitment-Statement-A4.aspx.

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) 2017, *CECV Addendum to: A Guide to Support Victorian Schools to Meet Child Safe Standard 7*, CECV, East Melbourne, accessed 8 April 2021 www.cecv.catholic.edu.au/getmedia/eb0c6ed8-01a8-4adb-aa87-9f6f082492fe/CECV-Addendum-to-the-Cross-Sectoral-Guide.aspx.

State of Victoria, Department of Education and Training 2017, *A Guide to Support Victorian Schools to Meet Child Safe Standard 7, Strategies to Promote Child Empowerment and Participation*, accessed 8 April 2021 https://www.cecv.catholic.edu.au/getmedia/90bf142f-0747-4c9e-b38a-5d0612a66b01/Cross-Sectoral-Guide-Strategies-to-Promote-Child-Empowerment.aspx.

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. †