



# CHILD SAFETY POLICY

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## Introduction

At Aquinas College we recognise that 'God created humanity in his own image' (Gen. 1:27) and therefore we hold the care, safety and wellbeing of the young people who are entrusted to our care as a sacred duty. We live out the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ with particular focus on the dignity of the human person. As a Catholic College our Mission challenges us to 'promote a quality education while developing an awareness of God in our lives, the value and connectedness of all human relationships, a sense of justice, a hopeful spirit and a love of learning'.

## Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to demonstrate the strong commitment of Aquinas College to the care, safety and wellbeing of all students at our College. It provides an outline of the policies, procedures and strategies developed to keep students safe from harm, including all forms of abuse in our College environment, on campus, online and in other locations provided by the College.

This policy takes into account relevant legislative requirements within the state of Victoria, including the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards as set out in [Ministerial Order No. 870](#).

This policy applies to College staff, including College employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy.

## Principles

Catholic schools have a moral, legal and mission driven responsibility to create nurturing school environments where children and young people are respected, their voices are heard and they are safe and feel safe (CECV Commitment Statement to Child Safety).

**The following principles underpin our commitment to child safety** at Aquinas College. All students deserve, as a fundamental right, safety and protection from all forms of abuse and neglect.

- Our College works in partnership with families and the community to ensure that they are engaged in decision making processes, particularly those that have an impact on child safety and protection.
- All students have the right to a thorough and systematic education in all aspects of personal safety, in partnership with their parents/guardians/caregivers.
- All adults in our College, including teaching and non-teaching staff, clergy, volunteers, and contractors, have a responsibility to care for children and young people, to positively promote their wellbeing and to protect them from any kind of harm or abuse.
- The policies, guidelines and codes of conduct for the care, wellbeing and protection of students are based on honest, respectful and trusting relationships between adults and children and young people.

- Policies and practices demonstrate compliance with legislative requirements and cooperation with the Church, governments, the police and human services agencies.
- All persons involved in situations where harm is suspected or disclosed must be treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect.
- Staff, clergy, volunteers, contractors, parents and students should feel free to raise concerns about child safety, knowing these will be taken seriously by College leadership.
- Appropriate confidentiality will be maintained, with information being provided to those who have a right or a need to be informed, either legally or pastorally.

## Definitions used in this Policy

**Child:** A child or a young person enrolled as a student at the College.

**Child abuse** includes:

- any act committed against a child involving:
  - a sexual offence
  - an offence under section 49B(2) of the Crimes Act 1958 (grooming)
- the infliction, on a child, of:
  - physical violence
  - serious emotional or psychological harm
- serious neglect of a child. ([Ministerial Order No. 870](#))

**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. ([Ministerial Order No. 870](#))

**Child neglect** includes a failure to provide the child with an adequate standard of nutrition, medical care, clothing, shelter or supervision to the extent that the health and physical development of the child is significantly impaired or placed at serious risk. ([PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools](#)).

**Child physical abuse:** Generally, consists of any non-accidental infliction of physical violence on a child by any person. ([PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools](#)).

**Child sexual abuse** is when a person uses power or authority over a child to involve them in sexual activity. It can include a wide range of sexual activity and does not always involve physical contact or force. ([PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools](#)).

**Emotional child abuse** occurs when a child is repeatedly rejected, isolated or frightened by threats, or by witnessing family violence. ([PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools](#)).

**Grooming** is when a person engages in predatory conduct to prepare a child for sexual activity at a later date. It can include communication and/or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent/carer. ([PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools](#)).

**Mandatory Reporting:** Mandatory Reporting: The legal requirement under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic.) to protect children from harm relating to physical and sexual abuse. The

principal, teachers, medical practitioners and nurses at a school are mandatory reporters under this Act. ([PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools](#)).

**Reasonable Belief:** When school staff are concerned about the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person, they must assess that concern to determine if a report should be made to the relevant agency. This process of considering all relevant information and observations is known as forming a 'reasonable belief'. A 'reasonable belief' or a 'belief on reasonable grounds' is not the same as having proof but is more than mere rumour or speculation. A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds. ([PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools](#)).

**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). ([Ministerial Order No. 870](#))

**School staff** means 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)
- a minister of religion. ([Ministerial Order No. 870](#))

## Policy Commitments

All students enrolled at Aquinas College have the right to feel safe and be safe. The wellbeing of children in our care will always be our first priority and we do not and will not tolerate child abuse. We aim to create a child safe and child friendly environment where children are free to enjoy life to the fullest without any concern for their safety. There is particular attention paid to the most vulnerable children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and children with a disability.

### Our commitment to our students

- We commit to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people enrolled in our College.
- We commit to providing children and young people with positive and nurturing experiences.
- We commit to listening to children and young people and empowering them by taking their views seriously, and addressing any concerns that they raise with us.
- We commit to taking action to ensure that children and young people are protected from abuse or harm.
- We commit to teaching children and young people the necessary skills and knowledge to understand and maintain their personal safety and wellbeing.
- We commit to seeking input and feedback from students regarding the creation of a safe school environment.

## Our commitment to parents and carers

- We commit to communicating honestly and openly with parents and carers about the wellbeing and safety of their children.
- We commit to engaging with, and listening to, the views of parents and carers about our child-safety practice, policies and procedures.
- We commit to transparency in our decision making with parents and carers where it will not compromise the safety of children or young people.
- We commit to acknowledging the cultural diversity of students and families, and being sensitive to how this may impact on student safety issues.
- We commit to continuously reviewing and improving our systems to protect children from abuse.

## Our commitment to our College staff (College employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy)

- We commit to providing all Aquinas College staff with the necessary support to enable them to fulfil their roles. This will include regular and appropriate learning opportunities.
- We commit to providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm policy and procedures in relation to child safety and young people's protection and wellbeing. This will include annual training in the principles and intent of the Child Safety Policy and Child Safety Code of Conduct, and staff responsibilities to report concerns.
- We commit to listening to all concerns voiced by Aquinas College staff, clergy, volunteers, and contractors about keeping children and young people safe from harm.
- We commit to providing opportunities for Aquinas College employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy to receive formal debriefing and counselling arising from incidents of the abuse of a child or young person.

## Responsibilities and Organisational Arrangements

Everyone employed or volunteering at Aquinas College 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 students is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make. ([CECV Commitment Statement to Child Safety](#))

The College has allocated roles and responsibilities for child safety as follows.

### Guide to Responsibilities of College Leadership

The Principal, the Canonical Administrators, the College Board and College leaders at Aquinas College recognise their particular responsibility to ensure the development of preventative and proactive strategies that promote a culture of openness, awareness of and shared responsibility for child safety. Responsibilities include:

- creating an environment for children and young people to be safe and to feel safe
- upholding high principles and standards for all staff, clergy, volunteers, and contractors
- promoting models of behaviour between adults and children and young people based on mutual respect and consideration
- ensuring thorough and rigorous practices are applied in the recruitment, screening and ongoing professional learning of staff
- ensuring that College personnel have regular and appropriate learning to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address child safety matters

- providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm legislative obligations, policy and procedures in relation to child and young people's protection and wellbeing
- ensuring the College meets the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards as set out in Ministerial Order No. 870.
- ensuring the school takes specific action to protect children from abuse in line with the three new criminal offences introduced under the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic.) and in line with the [PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools](#).

## Guide to Responsibilities of College Staff

Responsibilities of College staff (College employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy) include:

- treating children and young people with dignity and respect, acting with propriety, providing a duty of care, and protecting children and young people in their care
- following the legislative and internal College processes in the course of their work, if they form a reasonable belief that a child or young person has been or is being abused or neglected
- providing a physically and psychologically safe environment where the wellbeing of children and young people is nurtured
- undertaking regular training and education in order to understand their individual responsibilities in relation to child safety and the wellbeing of children and young people
- assisting children and young people to develop positive, responsible and caring attitudes and behaviours which recognise the rights of all people to be safe and free from abuse
- following the College's Child Safety Code of Conduct.

## Organisational Arrangements

The Deputy Principal – Students is the College's Child Safety Officer and is supported by the Heads of Middle and Senior Years, Year Level Leaders and the Child Safety and Wellbeing Coordinator.

## Expectation of our College Staff – Child Safety Code of Conduct

Within the Aquinas College community, we expect College employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy to proactively ensure the safety of students at all times and to take appropriate action if there are concerns about the safety of any child at the College. All College staff must remain familiar with the relevant laws, the code of conduct, and policies and procedures in relation to child protection and to comply with all requirements. We have developed a Child Safety Code of Conduct which recognises the critical role that school staff play in protecting the students in our care and establishes clear expectations of College employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy for appropriate behaviour with children in order to safeguard them against abuse and or neglect.

Our Code also protects College staff through clarification of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

## Student Safety and Participation

At Aquinas College we actively encourage all students to openly express their views and feel comfortable about giving voice to the things that are important to them.

We teach students about what they can do if they feel unsafe and enable them to understand, identify, discuss and report on child safety. We listen to and act on any concerns students, or their parents or carers, raise with us.

The College has implemented welfare support structures and programs for students empowering them to seek support if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable. Through various levels of the pastoral chain, staff have been entrusted with the responsibility to assist students in need. This structure is explained to the student body as part of their induction at the commencement of each school year. Students are encouraged to have a voice and approach any of the following: Homeroom teacher/Mentor, Year Level Leaders, Head Middle (7-9) or Senior Years (10-12), the Deputy Principal – Students or any other staff member, teaching or non-teaching.

Another level of support for students who are feeling unsafe is the counselling team at the Youth & Family Centre (YFC). Students can self-refer and support structures are engaged immediately to ensure student safety.

Student Case Management meetings are overseen each fortnight by the Deputy Principal – Students and include the Heads Middle/Senior Years, relevant Year Level Leaders, the Health Centre Manager, the Director Counselling Services and the Director Educational Support Services. Ongoing management of any student safety issue are discussed and documented to enable swift and appropriate resolution.

Several years ago, Aquinas College adopted Case Management Protocols which have a particular focus on critical student incidents after school hours. If a student or concerned adult reports a matter relating to student safety or wellbeing, an after hours phone number is activated within the key staff members responsible for pastoral care. This ensures that the matter can be responded to immediately and support offered via both internal and external agencies if required.

All members of the Aquinas College Community (students, staff and visitors) have the right to their personal safety and wellbeing. Our Safe School Policy has the direct intention of preventing bullying and harassment. Students are empowered to report any incident or suspected incident of bullying or harassing behaviour aimed at them or any other Aquinas student to any member of staff for follow up action and resolution.

Students also have a voice through the Student Leadership Council to raise broader safety issues.

Aquinas College has embedded the principles of Restorative Practices where often a resolution to a safety issue is found through a mediation process. This empowers any aggrieved student to have a voice and shape any acceptable outcome to the matter concerning them.

More serious safety issues are referred to the College Principal who has legislated processes to follow with the assistance of key staff members and Catholic Education Melbourne.

## Reporting and Responding

Our College records any child safety complaints, disclosures or breaches of the Child Safety Code of Conduct, and stores the records in accordance with security and privacy requirements. Our College complies with legal obligations that relate to managing the risk of child abuse under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic.), the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic.) and the recommendations of the [Betrayal of Trust](#) report.

Child protection reporting obligations fall under separate pieces of legislation with differing reporting requirements.

Our College's Child Protection – Reporting Obligations Policy sets out the actions required under the relevant legislation when there is a reasonable belief that a child at our College is in need of protection or a criminal offence has been committed, and provides guidance and procedures on how to make a report.

Our policy assists staff, volunteers and families to:

- identify the indicators of a child or young person who may be in need of protection
- understand how a 'reasonable belief' is formed
- make a report of a child or young person who may be in need of protection
- comply with mandatory reporting obligations under child protection law and their legal obligations relating to criminal child abuse and grooming under criminal law.

The College has also established internal processes to ensure that appropriate action is taken to respond to concerns about the wellbeing and/or safety of a student.

Students can be referred to our Counselling Team at the Youth and Family Centre (YFC) by any member of staff, a friend or they can self-refer if they wish. Once referred and assessed, engagement with staff within the pastoral chain or external agencies as mandated/required is then enacted. Where appropriate, parents/carers are contacted and informed of any relevant safety issue.

Any student safety issue is then case managed until an acceptable resolution is finalised.

Our Safe School Policy directs students to seek advice or notify any trusted adult with information should they feel concerned, threatened or compromised in any way either for themselves or for another student(s). Teaching is a relational profession and an important element of good practice is establishing a rapport with students. Therefore, there will be instances where a student will confide in a Subject Teacher, a Homeroom Teacher or Mentor regarding sensitive material. Consistent with rules pertaining to Mandatory Reporting and our own Aquinas Case Management practice, such sensitive information can never stay with just one person, be they the Subject Teacher, Homeroom Teacher or Mentor, nor can the confidentiality of that information be promised. Any report from a parent or a child about a serious issue needs to be referred immediately to the relevant Year Level Leaders.

In the case of an After Hours Emergency, staff are encouraged to follow the specified directions in the Case Management Protocol and Procedures document. The Year Level Leader may then refer his/her concerns to their Head of School. One of these particular student managers, acting quickly and sensitively, will then liaise with the Deputy Principal - Students or the Principal, and the Youth and Family Centre who will, if indicated liaise with Police, the Department of Human Services (DHS) or any other relevant outside agencies. Depending on the particular circumstances, the reporting teacher may still be involved in the management of the student and his/her issue, but in conjunction with the appointed student case manager.

#### Issues for referral:

Mandatory Reporting

Sexual assault, Domestic violence, Neglect

## Case Management

### After Hours Emergencies

#### Prolonged Absence

- School Refusal
- Acute Illness
- Chronic Illness

#### Mental Health

- Suicide Ideation
- Self-Harm
- Psychotic Episodes
- Safety Risk
- Eating Disorders
- Acute Anxiety

#### Serious Offences

- Bullying (Including Cyber Bullying)
- Risk Taking Behaviour (Drugs and Alcohol)
- Sexting
- Violent Outbursts
- Anti-Social Behaviour (Fighting)
- Threats of Violence

#### Family

- Grief and Loss
- Incapacitated Parent
- Student Carer
- Separation/Divorce
- Family Violence
- Out of Home Care

## After Hours Emergencies – Critical Incident Response.

Students or parents do contact teachers directly via the College email during term breaks, before school, in the evenings or on weekends. Similarly, students may alert staff to messages posted via social media outside school hours whose content is such that it cannot be ignored. Such emergencies are different from those that arise during a school day or College based activity such as a camp or an excursion. In those instances, the established Emergency Management and/or Risk Management Protocols apply.

## Definition of Critical Incident

In the context of these guidelines a critical Incident may be defined as an event which causes disruption to an organisation, creates significant danger or risk, and creates a situation where staff,

students and parents feel unsafe, vulnerable and under stress. Such an incident may be regarded as outside the normal range of experience of the people affected.

## Critical Response Team Number: 9259 3333

### After Hours Emergency

- Staff member to contact the **Critical Response Hotline 9259 3333**. Critical Response Team members will then offer appropriate advice.
- The Critical Response Team Member will liaise with relevant parties including the Director, YFC.
- In the case of student self-harming or expressing suicidal thoughts, the advice to parents is that they take their child as an outpatient to the local hospital.
- If the child is unwilling to go, Emergency Services is to be contacted e.g. ambulance, police.
- Matters can be referred to the DHS Crisis line for students under the age of 17.
- If it is a criminal matter, the parents are advised to contact Emergency Services, ambulance, police etc.
- In the case of a critical incident involving a death of a student or serious accident, our Critical Response Team will gather to determine actions moving forward. This may include the Principal, Deputy Principals, Assistant principals, Heads and the YFC.

Our complaints and disclosure processes are outlined and detailed in the following policies and procedures:

- Grievance and Complaints Policy
- Pastoral Care Policy
- Protect Protocols
- A Safe School Policy
- Restorative Practices Policy

## Screening and Recruitment of College Staff

Aquinas College will apply thorough and rigorous screening processes in the recruitment of employees and volunteers involved in child connected work. Our commitment to child safety and our screening requirements are included in all advertisements for such employee, contractor and volunteer positions, and all applicants are provided with copies of the College's Child Safety Code of Conduct and the Child Safety Policy.

When recruiting and selecting employees, contractors and volunteers involved in child-connected work, we make all reasonable efforts to:

- confirm the applicant's Working with Children Check and National Police Check status and/or professional registration (as relevant)
- obtain proof of personal identity and any professional or other qualifications
- verify the applicant's history of work involving children
- obtain references that address the applicant's suitability for the job and working with children.

We have processes for monitoring and assessing the continuing suitability of College staff to work with children, including regular reviews of the status of Working with Children Checks and staff professional registration requirements such as Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registration.

## Child Safety – Education and Training for College Staff

Aquinas College provides employees, volunteers and clergy with regular and appropriate opportunities to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address child safety matters. This includes induction, attendance at Compliance Meetings, ongoing training and professional learning to ensure that everyone understands their professional and legal obligations and responsibilities, and the procedures for reporting suspicion of child abuse and neglect.

New staff to the College will be inducted into the College's Child Protection strategies, including policies and processes. The appropriate documentation is linked to the Staff Handbook. Ongoing training and professional learning for all staff is included in the professional learning program.

## Risk Management

At Aquinas College we are committed to proactively and systematically identifying and assessing risks to student safety across our whole school environment, and reducing or eliminating (where possible) all potential sources of harm. We document, implement, monitor and periodically review our risk management strategies for child safety and ensure that the strategies change as needed and as new risks arise.

The Deputy Principal - Students is the College's Child Safety Officer and is supported by the Child Safety and Wellbeing Coordinator, Heads of Middle and Senior Years as well as Year Level Leaders. This group, together with the Assistant Principal - Operations and the OH&S Committee, will monitor and evaluate appropriate risk management strategies.

## Relevant Legislation

- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic.)
- Working with Children Act 2005 (Vic.)
- Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic.)
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic.)
- Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)
- Crimes Act 1958 (Vic.) – Three new criminal offences have been introduced under this Act:
  - **Failure to disclose offence:** Any adult who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under 16 has an obligation to report that information to police. Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence.
  - **Failure to protect offence:** The offence will apply where there is a substantial risk that a child under the age of 16 under the care, supervision or authority of a relevant organisation will become a victim of a sexual offence committed by an adult associated with that organisation. A person in a position of authority in the organisation will commit the offence if they know of the risk of abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.

- **Grooming offence:** This offence targets predatory conduct designed to facilitate later sexual activity with a child. Grooming can be conducted in person or online, for example via interaction through social media, web forums and emails.

## Related Policies

### Catholic Education Melbourne Policies

- [Policy 2.19: Child Protection – Reporting Obligations](#)
- [Policy 2.19a: School Guidelines – Police and DHHS Interview Protocols](#)
- [Policy 2.20: Complaints Policy](#)
- [Policy 2.26: Pastoral Care of Students in Catholic Schools](#)
- [CEM Procedures for Student Behaviour Management](#)
- [CECV Whole School Approaches to Supporting Positive Behaviour](#)

### School Policies

- Child Protection – Reporting Obligations
- Pastoral Care Policy
- Social Media Policy
- Volunteers at Aquinas Policy
- Grievance and Complaints Policy
- A Safe School Policy
- Case Management Protocols
- Youth & Family Centre Policy
- Duty of Care Policy
- Restorative Practices Policy
- Critical Incident Response (After Hours)
- Mandatory Reporting Guidelines

## Breach of Policy

Allegations against an employee may necessitate engaging external authorities as mandated to commence possible criminal investigation.

Where the Principal is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this policy, the concerned party is advised to contact the Canonical Administrators or the employer. Relevant notification should also be made to Catholic Education Melbourne (Office of Professional Conduct, Ethics and Investigation).

Where any other member of the College community is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this policy, the College is to take appropriate action, including in accordance with our Child Protection – Reporting Obligations, Grievance and Complaints Policy and/or contact Catholic Education Melbourne (Office of Professional Conduct, Ethics and Investigation).

## Review of this Child Safety Policy

At Aquinas College we are committed to continuous improvement of our child safety systems and practices. We intend this policy to be a dynamic document that will be regularly reviewed to ensure it is working in practice and updated to accommodate changes in legislation or circumstance.

This policy has Aquinas College governing authority approval.

This policy will be updated as part of the 3 year review cycle of all College policies.

## References

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) February 2019, [Victorian Catholic Education Multi Enterprise Agreement 2018](#), CECV.

Congregation for Catholic Education 1997, [The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium](#), Vatican.

State of Victoria 2016, [Child Safe Standards](#) – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools: Ministerial Order No. 870, Education & Training Reform Act 2006, Victorian Government Gazette No. S2.

Department of Education, 2016, [PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools](#).

Parliament of Victoria, Family and Community Development Committee, 2013, [Betrayal of Trust](#).