

VISION STATEMENT

We strive to create a school that truly equips young people for their engagement with the world and the challenges of this century, by fostering an attitude of learning with purpose and joy.

VALUES

Our values guide how we respond to concerns and complaints:

- **Truth** – We are open, honest and transparent.
- **Courage** – We speak up, even when it's difficult.
- **Responsibility** – We act promptly to protect children and do what is right.
- **Growth** – We learn from every concern raised to improve our school and child safety culture.

PURPOSE

Sophia Mundi Steiner School is committed to providing a child safe environment where children and young people are safe, feel empowered, and are encouraged to participate in decisions that affect them.

All procedures for reporting and responding to child safety incidents or concerns are designed and implemented taking into account the diverse characteristics of our School community, in alignment with Ministerial Order 1359 and the Victorian Child Safe Standards.

WHAT IS A CHILD SAFETY INCIDENT OR CONCERN?

child safety incidents or concerns can take many forms. These include not only abuse of a child or young person by their parents or carers, but also conduct by other people that can cause harm to a child or young person.

At Sophia Mundi Steiner School, we define child safety incidents or concerns to include all types of child abuse or other harm defined under Victorian legislation, including the key indicators of abuse or harm. These include:

- sexual abuse
- grooming (of a child or an adult with authority for a child)
- physical abuse
- emotional or psychological harm (including exposure to family violence)
- neglect

Breaches of our Child Safe Codes of Conduct also constitute child safety incidents or concerns.

Abuse or other harm may occur over time and potential indicators can be difficult to detect. The perpetrator may be a parent, carer, other family member, staff member, volunteer, contractor, another adult, or even another child.

HOW TO REPORT CHILD SAFETY INCIDENTS OR CONCERNS

Sophia Mundi Steiner School provides multiple child-focused pathways, including options for anonymous disclosure, to enable all students to raise concerns.

Any person, including all staff, volunteers, contractors, parent/carers, students and community members can at any time report concerns about the wellbeing of a child aged under 17 to DFFH Child Protection.

Whenever there are concerns that a child or young person is in immediate danger call the Police on 000.

STUDENTS

There are no limits on how or to whom students can disclose any child safety incident or concern or make a complaint about a staff member, volunteer, or contractor.

Students are encouraged to speak with their Class Teacher, Guardian, or a member of the Wellbeing staff. Complaints may be made in person, by phone, by email, or in writing, or via the Student Voice Box in the Library. Students may also disclose a concern verbally or in writing or drawing, through class work or artworks.

PARENTS, CARERS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Parents, carers, family members, and community members who have child safety concerns about a student should contact the School's **Wellbeing staff** or **leadership**. If the concern relates to the Principal, contact the Secondary Assistant Principal, as per the Child Safety Policy.

STAFF, VOLUNTEERS AND CONTRACTORS

All staff, volunteers, and contractors must follow **PROTECT: Four Critical Actions for Schools – Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse**.

Staff must report all child safety incidents or concerns involving students to Wellbeing staff or, if the matter involves the conduct of a staff member, to the Principal.

Internal reporting does not remove or replace the obligation to report externally where required by law.

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

All staff

- Listen respectfully to concerns and seek to resolve issues early.
- Immediately report any child-safety-related complaints to a Child Protection Officer or the Principal.
- Follow the School's internal and external reporting requirements.
- Never make a judgment about the truth of a complaint.

Child Protection Officers

- Support staff to understand their reporting obligations.
- Assist in managing, investigating, and responding to child safety-related complaints.
- Monitor compliance with this policy.

Principal

- Oversees the management of all complaints, other than complaints relating to the principal.
- Ensures fair handling, record keeping, and compliance, including retaining a register of formal complaints (listing the date, subject and resolution) for reporting to the governing board on an annual basis and to be available to the VRQA as required.
- Reports serious, unresolved, or child-safety-related matters to the Board and/or relevant authorities.

Board of Directors

- Handles complaints concerning the Principal or complex matters that have been escalated.
- Responds to appeals lodged in relation to an unresolved formal complaint.
- Reviews trends and outcomes for continuous improvement.

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO INTERNAL REPORTS

The School will take appropriate and prompt action in response to all child safety incidents or concerns, including all allegations or disclosures of abuse or other harm. This includes:

- reporting all matters that meet relevant thresholds to **Child Protection, Victoria Police, the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP)**, and/or the **Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT)**
- cooperating fully with any investigation by an external agency
- protecting any student connected to the incident and providing ongoing support
- taking particular measures to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disability, and students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- securing and retaining records of the incident or concern and the School's response.

OBLIGATIONS TO RESPOND AND REPORT TO EXTERNAL AGENCIES

FAILURE TO PROTECT

It is a criminal offence in Victoria for a person in a position of authority within an organisation to knowingly fail to reduce or remove a substantial risk that a child under 16 under the organisation's care may be sexually abused by an adult associated with the organisation.

Staff must act to reduce foreseeable risks of child abuse or harm and report concerns to the Principal or their delegate.

MANDATORY REPORTING TO CHILD PROTECTION

Teachers, the Principal, registered psychologists, nurses, early childhood workers, and school counsellors are legally required to make a report to the **Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (Child Protection)** if, in the course of their professional duties, they form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child under 17 is in need of protection due to physical or sexual abuse and the parents have not protected or are unlikely to protect the child.

NON-MANDATORY REPORTING TO CHILD PROTECTION

Any person may make a report to **Child Protection** if they have significant concerns for a child's wellbeing or believe the child is in need of protection or therapeutic treatment.

Sophia Mundi requires all staff to make such reports when appropriate, in accordance with the **PROTECT Four Critical Actions**.

MANDATORY REPORTING TO POLICE

It is School policy that the following must be reported to **Police**:

- sexual offences committed by a student under 18 against another person
- concerns for a student's immediate safety
- knowledge or suspicion that a student aged 18 or over is being harmed (with their consent to report)
- extreme or high-risk illegal activity by a student.

REPORTABLE CONDUCT

The **Principal** (as the Head of the Organisation) must notify the **CCYP** of any allegation that a staff member has committed reportable conduct or misconduct that may involve reportable conduct.

Reportable conduct includes:

- sexual offences or misconduct against, with, or in the presence of a child
 - physical violence
 - behaviour causing significant emotional or psychological harm
 - significant neglect.
- If the allegation concerns the Principal, a senior member of the leadership team will assume this responsibility.

TEACHER MISCONDUCT (VIT NOTIFICATION)

Sophia Mundi must notify the **Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT)** if a registered teacher has been charged with or convicted of a relevant offence, or issued with a negative **Working with Children Check** notice.

Staff must immediately report any conduct that raises concerns about a teacher's fitness to teach.

RESPONDING TO SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR IN CHILDREN & STUDENT SEXUAL OFFENDING

Sophia Mundi references the **True Relationships & Reproductive Health Traffic Lights® Framework** to guide staff in recognising and responding to sexual behaviour in children.

The framework categorises behaviours as:

- **Green light** – age-appropriate and curious behaviours
- **Orange light** – concerning or outside normal behaviour, requiring monitoring and support
- **Red light** – harmful or forceful behaviours, requiring immediate protection and reporting

All concerning or harmful behaviours require action, support, and, where appropriate, external reporting. When staff suspect or become aware of student sexual offending, they must follow **PROTECT: Four Critical**

Actions for Student Sexual Offending and make relevant reports to **Victoria Police** and **DFFH Child Protection**.

RESPONDING TO OTHER CONCERNS ABOUT STUDENT WELLBEING

All wellbeing concerns are taken seriously and acted upon.

Staff owe a duty of care to ensure students feel safe and supported.

Concerns not linked to abuse may still be referred internally to **Wellbeing staff**, or externally to:

- **Victoria Police**
- **DFFH Child Protection**
- **The Orange Door**

The School may also refer students and families to appropriate external support services where needed.

STAFF AND VOLUNTEER RESPONSIBILITIES

Sophia Mundi Steiner School is committed to ensuring that all child safety incidents, disclosures, suspicions or allegations are responded to promptly, appropriately and in accordance with the **Victorian Child Safe Standards, Ministerial Order 1359**, and **PROTECT: Four Critical Actions for Schools**.

1. IMMEDIATE ACTION

If a **staff member or volunteer** witnesses an incident of child abuse, or reasonably believes, suspects, or receives a disclosure or allegation that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused, they must:

- If a child is at **immediate risk of harm**, separate the alleged victim(s) and others involved.
- Administer first aid (appropriate to their level of training).
- Call **000** for urgent medical or police assistance where required to respond to immediate health or safety concerns.
- Notify a member of the **Leadership Team**, the **Wellbeing Team**, or a **Child Safe Officer** as soon as possible. The notified staff member will ensure the School follows the required steps in these procedures.

Important notes for staff and volunteers:

- If uncertain whether a situation gives rise to a child safety concern, **err on the side of caution** and report the concern to **leadership** or **wellbeing staff**.
- If the concern relates to the conduct of the **wellbeing staff**, notify the **Principal**, who will then assume responsibility for ensuring the School follows the correct procedures.

Refer to **Appendix B: Responding to a Disclosure of Child Abuse** for detailed guidance.

2. REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES AND REFERRING TO SERVICES

Once immediate health and safety concerns have been addressed and relevant staff have been informed, **leadership** and **wellbeing staff** must report all incidents, suspicions, and disclosures of child abuse **as soon as possible**.

To ensure compliance with the **Four Critical Actions** and additional requirements under the **Child Safe Standards**, **leadership** or **wellbeing staff** must ensure that:

- All relevant information is reported to the **Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Child Protection, Victoria Police, CCYP**, or other relevant services where required.
- The School Board or governing authority must be informed of serious child safety incidents and ensure compliance with **Ministerial Order No. 1359**.
- The **Principal** or **School Board Chair** must notify the CCYP within three business days of become aware of an allegation of reportable conduct.

Note:

If a staff member is legally required to report to DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police and cannot confirm that the report has already been made by another person, they must **make the report themselves**.

If a staff member believes that a child is not being abused but still holds **significant concerns for their wellbeing**, they must still act. This may include making a referral or seeking advice from **The Orange Door**, or contacting **DFFH Child Protection** or **Victoria Police**.

3. CONTACTING PARENTS OR CARERS

Leadership or **wellbeing staff**, or their delegate, must ensure that parents or carers are notified of concerns unless:

- advised otherwise by DFFH Child Protection, the Orange Door, or Victoria Police, or
- there are safety or wellbeing concerns that make notifying parents inappropriate.

For further guidance, refer to **PROTECT – Contacting Parents and Carers**.

4. ONGOING PROTECTION AND SUPPORT

The **Wellbeing staff** and/or their delegate must ensure appropriate steps are taken to protect the child and other children from ongoing risk of abuse. These steps must be taken in consultation with relevant agencies such as **DFFH Child Protection, Victoria Police**, the **Legal Division**, or the **Employee Conduct Branch**.

Ongoing protection may include further reports to authorities if new information arises or further incidents occur.

Appropriate, culturally sensitive, and ongoing support must be offered to all affected students. Support may include:

- referrals to wellbeing professionals or external services
- development of a safety plan
- student support group meetings
- behaviour management or restorative processes (for student-to-student incidents).

Support plans will be based on advice from relevant authorities, parents and carers, and health practitioners.

5. RECORD KEEPING

Leadership and **wellbeing staff** will ensure that:

- Detailed notes of the incident, disclosure, allegation, or suspicion are taken using the appropriate templates (e.g. *Responding to Suspected Child Abuse* or *Responding to Student Sexual Offending*).
- Notes are made by the staff member or volunteer who reported the matter, where possible.
- Records of immediate and ongoing action are kept securely.
- All notes and related records are stored securely in a locked cabinet within the **Wellbeing Office**, or encrypted and stored in the Child Safety TeamSite on Sharepoint.

FOR SCHOOL VISITORS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

All community members aged 18 years or over have legal obligations to report child abuse.

Any person can make a report to **DFFH Child Protection** or **Victoria Police** if they believe, on reasonable grounds, that a child is in need of protection.

Community members are not required to inform the School if they make a direct report to authorities. However, if a community member is concerned about the safety of a child at the School, they are encouraged to notify the **Principal** so that appropriate support can be arranged.

Refer to **Appendix A** and the **PROTECT Four Critical Actions** for further contact details.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL STAFF

All staff play a vital role in supporting student safety and wellbeing and have a **duty of care** to take reasonable steps to prevent foreseeable harm to students.

Following the steps outlined in this procedure does not replace or discharge other legal obligations. If, after following these actions, a staff member reasonably believes a child remains at risk of abuse, they must:

- Raise the concern with the **Principal** if they believe the School has not taken reasonable steps to prevent or reduce the risk.
- Escalate the matter to the **VRQA** if unsatisfied with the School's response.
- Report directly to the relevant external authority (e.g. **DFFH Child Protection** or **Victoria Police**) if unable to confirm that another staff member has made the report.

RELATED POLICIES

- Child Safety Policy
- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Complaints and Grievances Policy
- Support following incident or disclosure
- School Wellbeing Policy
- Behaviour Management Policy
- Privacy and Records Management Policies
- Whistleblower Policy

7

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Maintained by: Principal

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APPENDIX A

The [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#) for complaints and concerns relating to all forms of child abuse

The [Four Critical Actions: Student Sexual Offending](#) for complaints and concerns relating to student sexual offending

APPENDIX B

Responding To Disclosures of Child Abuse/Assault

All staff members must be aware of the immediate needs of children making disclosures and respond accordingly.

GUIDELINES

When responding to a disclosure, staff members are advised to:

- reassure the child that telling was the right thing to do
- allow the child to tell the story in their own words
- use protective interrupting if their disclosure is in an inappropriate situation
- find a quiet place to talk
- let the child know what will happen next
- assess the child's immediate safety
- complete documentation as soon as possible

Staff members are advised **not to**:

- dismiss or ignore the disclosure
- put words in the child's mouth, push for details or conduct an investigation, as this could jeopardise the interviewing process of Child Protection and Victoria Police
- make the child repeat the disclosure to a third party
- stop the child from talking once there are reasonable grounds for forming a belief that abuse occurred
- promise not to tell when there are clear limits on confidentiality
- confront the person believed to be the abuser
- engage in general staffroom discussion about the disclosure

Protective Interrupting

Protective interrupting is a strategy to prevent students disclosing in front of other students and providing them with the opportunity to disclose in a safe and confidential manner using the following steps:

- acknowledge that the child has been heard and stop further disclosure
- be supportive and gently indicate that they can talk in a more private situation
- quietly arrange to see them as soon as possible
- listen attentively in a private location within the school

Staff members should be aware that a disclosure can arouse personal feelings of shock, anger and helplessness. It is important to conceal these feelings; they can be worked through after the disclosure. Staff members should contact the Principal for information regarding counselling or support.