

Child Safety & Wellbeing Policy

To demonstrate our commitment to creating and maintaining a child safe and child-friendly organisation, where children and young people are safe and feel safe.

Purpose:

It informs our school community of everyone's obligations to act safely and appropriately towards children and guides our processes and practices for the safety and wellbeing of students across all areas of our work.

Scope:

School Board, Staff, Students, enrolled students and families, volunteers, visitors, contractors, community members

**Implemented
by:**

School Coordinator (Principal), Child Safety Officers, Child Safety Working Group

Approved by:

Parent Group, Learning Co-Operative Board

**Communicated
via:**

Website, policy folder, Parent Info Pack, Staff Induction, Staff meetings, Parent Group meetings, Newsletter

Reviewed:

Every two years or following an Incident or Legislative change.

Overview

As a child safe organisation we value diversity in our community, expect engagement from families, and ensure we have practices in place to allow all children and young people to be safe and feel safe. Learning Co-operative is focused on the safety and wellbeing of its students at all times and has a zero tolerance approach to child abuse and harm. Everyone engaged by Learning Co-Operative Limited has a responsibility to protect children from harm.



Definitions

There are a number of terms in this policy that have specific definitions, please see the Child Safe Standards website [here](#) for all relevant descriptions.

Grooming

Under section 49M of the *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)*, grooming occurs when an adult communicates, by words or conduct, with a child under the age of 16 years, or with a person who has care, supervision or authority of the child (for example, the child's parent), with the intention of facilitating the child's involvement in sexual conduct, either with the groomer or another adult.

Grooming may occur in person or online and may involve behaviour designed to establish trust, gain access to a child, normalise inappropriate behaviour, create secrecy or reduce a child's ability to recognise or disclose abuse.

Any concerns about grooming must be treated seriously and responded to in accordance with the School's legal reporting obligations and Protecting Children Policy.

Scope

This policy applies to all employees, contractors, volunteers, and any other individuals engaged by Learning Co-operative who may interact with children. It also applies in any setting where individuals are representing the organisation, including on-site, off-site, online, or within the broader community.

This includes parents, carers, board members and community members who participate in school activities or governance roles.

If your role involves direct interaction with children, you must be particularly aware of and comply with your responsibilities under this policy.

What Child Abuse and Reportable Conduct Looks Like

Abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, or through neglect. It can occur in person, online, or through exposure to harmful behaviour.

Under Victorian law, "reportable conduct" includes:

- sexual offences or misconduct involving a child,
- physical violence towards a child,
- behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm, and
- significant neglect of a child.



Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

Learning co-operative is a child safe organisation which welcomes all children, young people and their families, who are a good match with the school's philosophy, and approach to teaching and learning. We value diversity amongst our enrolled student population and the wider school community.

We believe it is important that families and students participate in decisions regarding child safety and wellbeing matters that affect their child.

We are committed to creating and maintaining a school in which all children and young people are safe and feel safe. Learning co-operative has zero tolerance for child abuse and takes steps to identify and manage any risks of harm to students in our school environment. We proactively identify and manage any risk of harm to students in our school and when child safety concerns are raised or identified we treat these seriously and respond promptly and thoroughly.

We promote positive relationships between students and adults and between students and their peers. These relationships are based on trust and respect.

We recognise that groups more vulnerable or at risk from harm may include:

- Aboriginal students
- Students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Students with disabilities
- Students unable to live at home
- Students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and gender diverse, intersex and queer (LGBTQI +)
- Students experiencing risk or vulnerability.

Inappropriate or harmful behaviour which deliberately targets students based on personal characteristics, values or beliefs is not tolerated at our school and any instances will be addressed with appropriate consequences.

Child safety is a shared responsibility and every person involved in our school has an important role in promoting child safety and wellbeing and is expected to promptly raise any issues or concerns about a child's safety.

We are committed to regularly reviewing our child safe practices and seeking input from our students, families, staff and community to inform our ongoing strategies.



Child Safe Standards

Learning Co-Operative Limited complies with the Victorian Child Safe Standards, which require organisations to implement systems, policies and practices that promote the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

Roles and Responsibilities

The **Co-ordinator** is responsible for ensuring that a strong child safe culture is created and maintained, and implementing and maintaining the school's child safety and wellbeing framework in accordance with Ministerial Order 1359. They will:

- ensure effective child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures and practices are in place and followed
- model a child safe culture that facilitates the active participation of students, families and staff
- enable inclusive practices where the diverse needs of all students are considered
- reinforce high standards of respectful behaviour between students and adults and between students
- promote regular and open discussion on child safety in the school community
- ensure regular training for staff (and volunteers where appropriate) to build deeper understandings of child safety, cultural safety and student wellbeing, including recognising indicators of child abuse and how to respond to disclosures and incidents
- maintain a process for child safety complaints and concerns that is readily accessible to all members of the school community that does not discourage from reporting an allegation to authorities and ensures that complaints and concerns are taken seriously and promptly responded to.

The School Board is responsible for providing governance oversight of child safety and wellbeing and for ensuring that the School maintains a strong child safe culture and meets its legislative and regulatory obligations.

In performing its governance functions, the Board will:

- champion and promote a child safety culture within the broader school community;
- ensure that child safety is a regular agenda item at Board meetings;
- undertake relevant child safety training annually to support informed governance oversight;
- maintain oversight of the School's child safety policies, procedures, risk management processes and practices;
- review the Child Safety Risk Register at least annually;



- monitor the implementation and effectiveness of actions arising from child safety reviews, incidents, complaints and identified risks;
- ensure that child safety and wellbeing is embedded in governance, strategic planning, decision-making and organisational practice;
- ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to identify and manage actual, potential and perceived conflicts of interest in relation to child safety matters;
- ensure that child safety concerns and complaints are managed appropriately where the Coordinator or another person responsible for responding has a conflict of interest or is otherwise unable to act independently;
- ensure that appropriate alternative decision-making or external referral arrangements are used where the Board or its members have a conflict of interest;
- ensure that the School's child safety practices and policies are formally reviewed in accordance with the review process set out in this policy; and
- maintain overall governance oversight and accountability for the safety and wellbeing of students at the School.

All **staff, contractors and volunteers** engaged in child-related work share responsibility for creating and maintaining a child safe environment, and will:

- act in accordance with our Child Safety Code of Conduct and follow the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and other Child Safety Policies
- Actively support the safety, participation and empowerment of students by fostering a culture where students feel safe, respected and able to speak up, and where their views are taken seriously about decisions that affect their lives
- participate in child safety and wellbeing training as determined by the Co-ordinator based on their role
- identify and raise concerns about child safety including following the Four Critical Actions for Schools
- implement practices that respond to the diverse needs of students.

Legal obligations to report. Various people within our school have different levels of responsibility when it comes to their obligations to report child abuse and harm.

- **Mandatory Reporting** - principals, teachers (and others working in schools such as medical practitioners, nurses, police, psychologists) are considered mandatory reporters
- **Failure to disclose** – all adults
- **Failure to protect** – adults in positions of authority
- **Reportable Conduct** – principals

For more information on reporting obligations refer to our Protecting Children Policy.



Governance, Accountability and Conflicts of Interest

Learning Co-operative's child safety and wellbeing framework is overseen by the School Board, with implementation led by the Coordinator and supported by the Child Safety Working Group and Child Safety Officers.

Child safety is a shared governance responsibility. The School Board maintains overall oversight and accountability for ensuring that child safety and wellbeing is embedded in the school's governance, decision-making, policies, practices and risk management.

The Coordinator is responsible for the day-to-day implementation of the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and associated procedures. The Child Safety Working Group supports monitoring, review and continuous improvement of child safe practices and provides recommendations to the Coordinator and School Board.

Managing conflicts of interest

Because members of the School Board and Child Safety Working Group may also be parents, carers, staff or otherwise personally connected to students or families, actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest may arise in relation to a child safety concern, complaint, allegation, incident or decision.

Any person involved in a child safety matter must promptly declare any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest to the person responsible for managing the matter.

A person with a conflict of interest will not participate in the assessment, investigation, decision-making or review of a matter where their involvement could compromise, or reasonably be perceived to compromise, the impartiality or integrity of the process.

Where the Coordinator has an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest, or is otherwise unable to act independently, responsibility for managing the matter will be transferred to the School Board or an appropriately authorised Board member who does not have a conflict of interest.

Where the Chair or another relevant Board member has a conflict of interest, that person will not participate in decisions relating to the matter and responsibility will be assigned to another Board member who is appropriately independent.

Where a matter involves a conflict affecting multiple Board members, or the Board is unable to manage the matter independently, the School will seek appropriate external advice or assistance and, where required, refer the matter to the relevant external authority.

Where a child safety concern or complaint must be reported to an external authority, the School will ensure that internal conflicts of interest do not delay, prevent or otherwise interfere with any required reporting.



Conflicts of interest and the actions taken to manage them will be appropriately documented and retained in accordance with the School's privacy and records management requirements.

The School Board will maintain oversight of the effectiveness of these arrangements and will review conflict-of-interest arrangements as part of its regular review of child safety governance and practices.

Cultural Safety Statement

At Learning Co-operative, we respectfully acknowledge the Wurrunjeri Woi wurrung People of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land our school is on. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present, we recognise their role in caring for Country over tens of thousands of years and their continuing connection to Country, culture, and community. We acknowledge Australia's true history and appreciate the significance of connection to our place as we live, work, and learn together.

We are committed to ensuring that our school is a place where all young people, including Aboriginal young people, feel safe, respected, and comfortable to be themselves. We seek to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the rich cultural heritage of Australia's First Peoples and to create a culturally safe environment where all young people can express their culture, beliefs, and spirituality in the way that they choose. We are committed to listening, learning, and being accountable so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience our school as a place of genuine belonging, respect, and safety.

Cultural safety at our school means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

- Are welcomed and respected without judgement or discrimination
- Feel safe to express their culture and identity
- Are listened to and have their voices influence decisions that affect them

We recognise that cultural safety requires ongoing action and reflection, not just intention.

We commit to:

Creating a culturally safe environment

- Actively prevent and respond to racism, discrimination, and culturally unsafe behaviour
- Embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across our curriculum and daily practice
- Support all children to develop respect for First Nations cultures, histories, and knowledge systems



Value identity and voice

- Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to feel strong in their identity and culture
- Provide opportunities for children and families to share their perspectives and shape our community

Engage with community

- Build respectful, ongoing relationships with local Aboriginal community members and organisations
- Seek guidance to ensure our practices are culturally informed and appropriate

Support staff responsibility and capability

- Ensure all staff, volunteers, and community members understand their role in creating cultural safety
- Provide ongoing learning to build cultural awareness and responsiveness

Ensure policies and practices reflect cultural safety

- Embed cultural safety into our policies, procedures, and everyday practices
- Regularly review and improve our approach based on feedback and reflection

Child Safety Code of Conduct

Our Child Safety Code of Conduct sets the boundaries and expectations for appropriate behaviours between adults and students. It also clarifies behaviours that are not acceptable in our physical and online environments.

We ensure students are informed and understand what is acceptable and what is not acceptable so they can be clear and confident of what to expect from adults in our school.

All staff and volunteers (including Board Members) are required to sign the Child Safety Code of Conduct annually.

Managing Risks to Child Safety and Wellbeing

At our school we identify, assess and manage risks to child safety and wellbeing in our physical and online school environments. These risks are managed through our child safety policies, procedures and practices. Our Child Safety Risk Register is used to record any risks identified related to child abuse, along with actions that will be put in place to manage those risks. The Co-ordinator and



Child Safety Working Group, in conjunction with the School Board monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the actions in the Child Safety Risk Register at least annually.

Student Empowerment

To support child safety and wellbeing at our school, we work holistically to create a democratic, inclusive and supportive environment where strong relationships are reinforced and where we encourage friendships and peer support to ensure a sense of belonging.

We expect students and families to contribute to our child safety approach and understand their rights and their responsibilities.

We inform students of their rights through the Student Enrolment Agreement, RRR lessons, student meetings and Student Council and give them the skills and confidence to recognise unsafe situations with adults or other students and to speak up and act on concerns relating to themselves or their peers. We ensure our students know who to talk to if they are worried or feeling unsafe and we encourage them to share concerns with a trusted adult at any time. Families can also access information on how to report concerns in our Concerns & Complaints Policy.

A key way students are able to feel empowered and have input over their experiences at school is through our student-led Student Council and suggestion boxes in each classroom that are regularly reviewed.

Family Engagement

Our families and the school community have an important role in monitoring and promoting children's safety and wellbeing and helping children to raise any concerns. To support family engagement, we are committed to providing families with information about our school's child safe policies and practices that is accessible, understandable and available in alternative formats where required, and to involving families in our approach to child safety and wellbeing.

We will create opportunities for students and families to have input into the development and review of our child safety policies and practices. These opportunities will be communicated via existing communication channels such as fortnightly family meetings, Slack, email and Student Council. We also invite students and families to raise any ideas for improvement at any point in time.

All of our child safety policies are available on our website and we will inform families and the school community about any significant updates to our child safety policies or processes, and where appropriate strategies or initiatives that we are taking to ensure student safety.



Diversity and equity

We value and celebrate the diversity of our students, families and community and promote caring and respectful environments that are free from discrimination. We recognise that every child has unique skills, strengths and experiences to draw on and our school delivers curriculum content on diversity, equity and inclusion to all students to reinforce these values. We will support staff and volunteers to understand the diverse circumstances of children's and student's lives and provide them with support and training so they can appropriately respond to vulnerable students and children.

Our child safe strategies recognize individuals and supports the needs of groups of children and young people in the community with additional and specific needs and those who may be of higher risk, including:

- Aboriginal children and young people
- children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- children and young people with disabilities
- children unable to live at home or impacted by family violence
- children and young people who identify as LGBTQI+.

During enrolment, by working directly with each family and student we will identify and understand the needs of students and their families, and make reasonable adjustments to support their participation, inclusion and safety.

Addressing Racism

We recognise racism as a form of harmful behaviour that can cause significant emotional and psychological harm to children and young people and is not tolerated at our school.

We take the following measures to identify, confront and address racism:

Identifying racism

- Encourage students and families to report concerns, including experiences of racism
- Monitor student wellbeing, behaviour and complaints data for patterns of concern

Confronting racism

- Staff and volunteers are expected to actively interrupt and address racist behaviour when it occurs
- Clear expectations are set through our Code of Conduct and student behaviour processes
- Students are supported to safely speak up when they witness or experience racism



Addressing racism

- All reports of racism are taken seriously and responded to promptly in line with our Concerns and Complaints Policy
- Appropriate action is taken, which may include:
 - restorative conversations and education
 - behaviour management responses
 - escalation where required
- Support is provided to students who experience racism to ensure their safety and wellbeing
- Incidents are recorded and reviewed to inform ongoing improvements

Suitable Staff and Volunteers

At our school we apply robust child safety recruitment, induction, training and supervision practices to ensure that all staff, contractors and volunteers are suitable to work with children.

This includes:

- Working With Children Checks (WWCC) where required,
- verification of identity and qualifications, and
- Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registration for teaching staff where applicable.

When engaging staff we follow our Recruitment Process and Child Safety Induction Process, and when we engage volunteers we follow our Volunteer & Visitor Process. Additional information can also be found in our Working With Children Policy.

All those engaged in work with children will be supervised appropriately to ensure their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate, and staff will have performance reviews which includes assessing their continuing suitability for child-related work.

Inappropriate behaviour towards children and young people will be managed swiftly and in accordance with our policies and legal obligations.

Child Safety Knowledge, Skills and Awareness

Ongoing training and education are essential to ensuring our staff understand their roles and responsibilities and develop their capacity to effectively address child safety and wellbeing matters.

Staff, board members and volunteers will participate in a range of training and professional learning to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to maintain a child safe environment.

Training will be provided at least annually and be determined based on the role and in line with the School's Whole School Training Plan.



Child Safety Concerns and Complaints Processes

We have clear pathways for raising concerns and complaints through our Concerns and Complaints Policy, including those relating to child safety. By fostering a culture that encourages staff, volunteers, students, parents and the school community to raise concerns and complaints, it makes it more difficult for abuse or misconduct to occur and remain hidden.

A visual guide for students to raise a concern or complaint will be displayed within the school.

Communications

We are committed to communicating with the school community on child safety. We will communicate relevant child safety strategies and information by making sure all child safety policies are on our website, displaying PROTECT posters throughout the school, providing updates in school newsletters or via email and ensuring that child safety is a regular agenda item at staff meetings, board meetings and where appropriate at student council.

Privacy and Information Sharing

The school will collect, use and disclose information about children and their families in accordance with relevant privacy laws. See our Privacy Policy for further information.

Records Management

We acknowledge that good record management practices are a critical element of child safety and wellbeing and will manage our child safety related records in accordance with the Creating, Managing and Retaining Records for Current or Future Child Sexual Abuse Allegations document prepared by the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV), as per our Record Keeping Obligations.

The school will ensure a full and accurate record is made of all aspects of the incident or allegation, including any investigation, response or actions taken. This could include: Enrolment, attendance and absence records, staff rosters and leave records, records of camps and excursions including all students and staff in attendance, visitor sign-in sheets, records outlining volunteer attendance and student work placements, Working with Children Clearances, staff personnel files and performance reviews and observation records.

In addition, the school is required to retain any records which might reasonably be required in the case of a future allegation or investigation. We will take a risk-based approach to determining the level of records to be kept for any possible future allegation. Records must be kept for the required period of time as per the PROV.



Key Organisational Systems and Controls

Our School implements the following key organisational and structural systems and controls as part of our child safety framework to identify, reduce and manage risks to children :

- The development and publishing of this Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.
- A framework of policies, processes and practices that have been designed and informed by our Child Safe Risk Assessment Register.
- A Child Safe Risk Assessment that is conducted annually where specific risks identified are recorded on a register which is reviewed annually by the School Board.
- A Child Safety Code of Conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children is signed by all employees and volunteers annually and reviewed by the Board every two years.
- A Working with Children policy that clarifies who is required to have a Working With Children check.
- A recruitment and induction process that includes procedures for gathering, verifying and recording employment information in relation to child safety and a person's suitability for child-related work.
- Position descriptions include child safe responsibilities and state the requirement to comply with the standards of Ministerial Order 1359
- An overall Whole School Training Plan that establishes specific training that is required by each staff member, volunteer or board member based on their duties.
- Child friendly resources and processes are in place to ensure children know who to talk to if they feel unsafe or have a concern or complaint.
- A Behaviour Management Policy and pathway that establish clear expectations for appropriate behaviour of students, including a Student Code of Conduct
- Education for students which includes recognising grooming, abuse, and unsafe situations
- Digital Technologies Policy and Digital Technology Code of Practice Agreement.
- Concerns and Complaints Policy clearly outlining how to raise concerns of any nature including Code of Conduct breaches or any Child Safety concerns.
- Supervision policies that cover school-based, online and off-site activities.
- A public Statement of Commitment to Child Safety.
- A commitment within this policy to engage with students, staff and families on our Child Safety strategies and policies
- A commitment to strong leadership, governance and accountability in the area of child safety.

Review, Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

Learning Co-operative regularly reviews and evaluates its child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, practices, risk controls and governance arrangements to ensure they remain effective, responsive and consistent with legislative and regulatory requirements. The review process supports continuous improvement and is informed by the experiences and views of students, families, staff, volunteers and the broader school community.



The Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy will be formally reviewed at least every two years and sooner where:

- there is a significant child safety incident, allegation, complaint or identified risk;
- there is a significant change to legislation, regulatory requirements or relevant guidance;
- monitoring or review identifies that a policy, procedure, practice or risk control is not operating effectively;
- feedback from students, families, staff, volunteers or other members of the school community identifies a need for change; or
- the School Board, Coordinator or Child Safety Working Group identifies a need for review.

The School's child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures and practices will be reviewed in accordance with the School's Policy Review Schedule and Child Safety Action Plan. The review process will consider both whether the relevant policy or practice has been implemented and whether it is effective in promoting child safety and wellbeing and managing identified risks.

The review will be coordinated by the Coordinator and Child Safety Working Group and will include consideration of:

- the effectiveness of existing child safety policies, procedures and practices;
- the Child Safety Risk Register, identified risks and the effectiveness of risk controls;
- child safety incidents, allegations, concerns and complaints, including trends, recurring or systemic issues;
- whether previous actions taken in response to incidents, complaints, identified risks or reviews have been effective;
- feedback from students, families, staff, volunteers and the broader school community;
- the effectiveness of student participation, empowerment and feedback processes;
- relevant training, supervision, recruitment and induction practices;
- the effectiveness of arrangements for identifying and managing actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest;
- relevant legislative, regulatory and policy changes; and
- recommendations arising from internal or external reviews, audits, investigations or other relevant processes.

Analysis of Complaints and Incidents

Child safety concerns, complaints, incidents and allegations will be reviewed, where appropriate and consistent with privacy, confidentiality, procedural fairness and legal requirements, to identify opportunities to improve the School's child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, practices and risk controls.

The School will consider whether complaints, concerns or incidents indicate:

- recurring or systemic issues;
- gaps or weaknesses in existing policies, procedures or risk controls;
- a need for additional training, supervision, communication or other preventative measures;



- a need to amend policies, procedures or practices; or
- a need to review the effectiveness of actions previously taken.

Relevant information from complaints, concerns and incidents will be appropriately documented and, where appropriate, de-identified and analysed for systemic improvement. Individual complaints will continue to be managed in accordance with the School's Concerns and Complaints Policy and any applicable legal reporting obligations.

Review Outcomes and Improvement Actions

Following a review, identified issues, findings, recommendations and improvement actions will be documented. Where an improvement action is required, responsibility for the action and an appropriate timeframe for completion will be identified.

The Coordinator and Child Safety Working Group will monitor progress against identified improvement actions and report significant findings and actions to the School Board.

The School Board retains overall governance oversight of the review and continuous improvement process and will monitor the implementation and effectiveness of agreed actions arising from reviews, complaints, incidents, audits and identified risks.

Consultation and Reporting

Students and families will be provided with appropriate opportunities to contribute to the development, review and evaluation of child safety policies, procedures and practices. Staff, volunteers and other relevant members of the school community will also be consulted.

The outcomes of significant reviews, including relevant improvements or changes to child safety policies, procedures or practices, will be communicated to students, families, staff and other relevant members of the school community through appropriate communication channels, having regard to privacy, confidentiality and legal requirements.

Significant changes arising from a review will be incorporated into relevant policies, procedures, risk assessments, training, action plans or other school practices.

The School will retain appropriate records of reviews, findings, decisions, improvement actions and relevant consultation and communication in accordance with its records management obligations.

Related Documentation

- PROTECT Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools
- PROTECT Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: A Template for All Victorian Schools
- Child Safety Risk Assessment
- Excursion and Camp Risk Assessment
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Recruitment Process



- Child Safety Induction Process
- Whole School Training Plan
- Creating, Managing and Retaining Records for Current or Future Child Sexual Abuse Allegations (Public Record Office Victoria)

Related Policies

- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Working With Children Policy
- Protecting Children Policy
- Duty of Care Policy
- Concerns and Complaints Policy
- Student Supervision Policy
- Behaviour Management Policy & Student Code of Conduct
- Privacy Policy
- Digital Technology Policy & Code of Practice
- Records Management Procedure