



Maharishi
School
CONSCIOUSNESS-BASED EDUCATION



Maharishi School

2024 Child Safe Policy

“Knowledge is Structured in Consciousness”

CHILD SAFE POLICY

RATIONALE

Maharishi School (MSAE) is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people. This will be the primary focus of our care and decision-making.

We want children to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers. Our school is committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all children.

We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures. We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously. Maharishi School is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early and removing and reducing these risks. Maharishi School has robust human resources and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers. Our school is committed to training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks.

We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and parent volunteers. We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability. We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our leadership team, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.

This policy is required and informed by clause 8 of Ministerial Order No. 870 – Child Safe Standards Managing the risk of child abuse in schools, which sets out what the Child Safe Standards mean in a school environment. Maharishi School has a commitment to child safety under Child Safe Standard 2. This policy, is publicly available, and communicated to the school community, on the Maharishi School Website (www.maharishischool.vic.edu.au/schoolinformation/policies)

This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, and contractors in the school environment, whether or not they work in direct contact with children or young people. This policy also applies to School Board members where indicated. The policy will apply to the school environment and cover both school hours and outside of school hours.

Every person involved at Maharishi School has a responsibility to understand the important and specific role they play individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children and young

PURPOSE

The Child Safety Policy sets out the school's commitment and approach to creating and maintaining a child safe organisation where children and young people are safe and feel safe and provides the policy framework for the school's approach to the Child Safe Standards.

This policy is intended to empower children who are vital and active participants in our school. We involve them when making decisions (Student Leadership Program and SRC), especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say. The policy's purpose and obligations are to reflect the significant issues related to this matter:

1. We promote diversity and tolerance in our school, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome. In particular we:
 - promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children
 - promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
 - ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate equally.

CHILD SAFE POLICY

This policy guides our staff and volunteers on how to behave with children in our organisation. All our staff and volunteers must agree to abide by our code of conduct which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children.

2. All staff, School Board members, parents/guardians/carers and volunteers of Maharishi School are required to observe child safe principles and expectations for appropriate behaviour towards and in the company of children both in the school environment (during school hours and Out of School Hours care) and outside the school environment such as excursions, sporting events, camps, etc.
3. From 1 July 2017, Victoria has a Reportable Conduct Scheme to oversee allegations of child abuse or misconduct towards children. This means Victorian schools must report any allegations made against their employees or volunteers.
4. Fulfilling the roles and responsibilities contained in the procedure does not displace or discharge any other obligations that arise if a person reasonably believes that a child is at risk of child abuse

GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Child safety principles

In its planning, decision-making and operations, Maharishi School will:

1. Take a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to child safety;
2. Value and empower children to participate in decisions which affect their lives;
3. Foster a culture of openness that supports all persons to safely disclose risks of harm to children;
4. Respect diversity in cultures and child rearing practices while keeping child safety paramount;
5. Provide written guidance on appropriate conduct and behaviour towards children;
6. Engage only the most suitable people to work with children and have high quality staff and volunteer supervision and professional development;
7. Ensure children know who to talk with if they are worried or are feeling unsafe, and that they are comfortable and encouraged to raise such concerns;
8. Report suspected abuse, neglect or mistreatment promptly to the appropriate authorities;
9. Share information appropriately and lawfully with other organisations where the safety and wellbeing of children is at risk; and
10. Value the input of and communicate regularly with families and carers

All school community members of Maharishi School are responsible for supporting the safety, participation, wellbeing and empowerment of children by:

- Adhering to the school's Child Safe Policy at all times
- Taking all reasonable steps to protect children from abuse
- Treating everyone with respect
- Listening and responding to the views and concerns of children, particularly if they are telling you that they or another child has been abused and/or are worried about their safety or the safety of another
- Promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children and children with culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Promoting the safety, participation and empowerment of children with a disability (e.g. personal care activities)
- Ensuring as far as practicable that persons of or over the age of 18 years are not left alone with a child
- Reporting any allegations of child abuse to the School Principal, and ensure any allegation is reported to the police or DFFH - Child Protection
- Reporting any child safety concerns to the Principal
- Ensure as quickly as possible that the child/ren are safe if an allegation of child abuse is made
- Encourage children to 'have a say' and participate in all relevant school activities where possible, especially on issues that are important to them

CHILD SAFE POLICY

Staff and volunteers must not:

- Develop any 'special' relationships with children that could be seen as favouritism
- Exhibit behaviours with children which may be construed as unnecessarily physical (e.g. inappropriate sitting on laps. Sitting on laps can be appropriate sometimes, for example, while reading a storybook to a small child in an open plan area)
- Put children at risk of abuse (e.g. by locking doors)
- Do things of a personal nature that a child can do for themselves, such as toileting or changing clothes
- Engage in open discussion of a mature or adult nature in the presence of children (e.g. personal social activities)
- Use inappropriate language in the presence of children
- Express personal views on cultures, race or sexuality in the presence of children
- Discriminate against any child because of culture, race, ethnicity or disability
- Have contact with a child or their family outside of school without the Principal's knowledge and consent (e.g. babysitting)
- Have any online contact with a child or their family unless necessary (e.g. providing families with school communications)
- Ignore or disregard any suspected or disclosed child abuse

ALLEGATIONS, CONCERNS & COMPLAINTS

Maharishi School takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our staff are trained to deal appropriately with allegations.

We work to ensure all children, families, staff and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour.

We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place.

If a person of or over the age of 18 years has a reasonable belief that an incident has occurred then they must report the incident to the School Principal. If the School Principal, who is allocated responsibility under Clause 11(3)(c)(i) cannot perform his or her role, the procedure for responding to an allegation or disclosure shall be performed by one of the senior staff members on the school's Senior Management Team (Senior Teacher, Administration Manager, School Bursar).

Factors contributing to reasonable belief may be:

- a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves)
- behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- observing suspicious behaviour.

Strategies to embed a child safe culture

Maharishi School's culture encourages staff, students, parents and the school community to raise, discuss and scrutinise child safety concerns. This makes it more difficult for abuse to occur and remain hidden.

All child safety documents, including this policy, the school community Codes of Conduct, the school's Mandatory Reporting Policy and Procedures, [Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#) and the [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#) are readily available on the school's website and in hard copy at the school's General Office for all staff and students to read at any time.

CHILD SAFE POLICY

Child safety is everyone's responsibility. All school staff are required to:

- Act in accordance with the school's Codes of Conduct, which clearly set out the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour
- Act in accordance with the Mandatory Reporting Policy and Procedures at all times, including following the Four Critical Actions for Schools where necessary
- Undertake annual guidance and training on child safety
- Act in accordance with their legal obligations, including:
 - Failure to disclose offence (applies to all persons of or over the age of 18 years)
 - Duty of care (applies to all school staff)
 - Mandatory reporting obligations (applies to all mandatory reporters, including teachers, principals, registered psychologists, and registered doctors and nurses)
 - Failure to protect offence (applies to a person in a position of authority within the school)

Reportable conduct obligations (applies to all school staff in reporting conduct to the principal, and applies to the principal in reporting to Employee Conduct Branch)

Organisational duty of care (applies to the school as an organisation)

For more information on these obligations, see [Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#).

As part of Maharishi School's child safe culture, the school leadership will:

- Consider the diversity of all children, including (but not limited to) the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with disabilities, and children who are vulnerable, when implementing the Child Safe Standards
- Ensure that child safety is a regular agenda item at school leadership meetings and staff meetings
- Encourage and enable staff professional learning and training to build deeper understandings of child safety and prevention of abuse
- Ensure that no one is prohibited or discouraged from reporting an allegation of child abuse to a person external to the school or from making records of any allegation.

As part of Maharishi School's child safe culture, school mandatory reporting staff are required to:

- Complete the Protecting Children – Mandatory reporting and other obligations online module every year [Note that it is a Maharishi School requirement that mandatory reporters complete this training annually and demonstrates compliance with the Child Safe Standards]
- Read the school's Codes of Conduct, upon their induction to the school
- Read the school's Mandatory Reporting Policy and Procedures upon their induction to the school, and maintain familiarity with that document
- Read the school's Child Safety Policy (this document) upon their induction to the school and maintain familiarity with that document.

As part of Maharishi School's child safe culture, in performing the functions and powers given to them under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006, School Board members will:

- Ensure that child safety is a regular agenda item at School Board meetings
- Consider the diversity of all children, including (but not limited to) the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with disabilities, and children who are vulnerable, when making decisions regarding the Child Safe Standards
- Undertake annual guidance and training on child safety, such as the [Child Safe Standards School Council Training PowerPoint](#).
- Approve the Codes of Conduct to the extent that they apply to School Board members and employees, and if updated, note the new document in School Board Meeting minutes
- When hiring employees, ensure that selection, supervision and management practices are child safe (unless delegated to the principal).

School leadership will maintain records of the above processes.

CHILD SAFE POLICY

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

The School Principal will ensure that each person understands their role, responsibilities and behaviour expected in protecting children and young people from abuse and neglect. Staff will comply with the school's Child Safe and Codes of Conduct, which set out clearly the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. Specific child safety responsibilities:

- The School Principal is responsible for reviewing and updating the Child Safety Policy every 3 years.
- The School Principal is responsible for monitoring the school's compliance with the Child Safety Policy. The school community should approach the School Principal if they have any concerns about the school's compliance with the Child Safety Policy.
- The School Principal is responsible for informing the school community about this policy, and making it publicly available.
- Other specific roles and responsibilities are named in Maharishi School's other child safety policies and procedures, including the Codes of Conduct, Mandatory Reporting Policy and Procedures, and Risk Assessment register.

TRAINING & SUPERVISION

Training and education are important to ensure that everyone at Maharishi School understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility.

Our organisational culture aims for all staff, School Board members, parents/guardians/carers and volunteers to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. The school is committed to training our staff and parent volunteers to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse. This training occurs annually or more often as required.

We also support our staff and parent volunteers through ongoing supervision to develop their skills to protect children from abuse and promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds, and the safety of children with a disability and vulnerable children.

New employees and volunteers will be inducted into the school, including by being referred to the Child Safe Policy, the Codes of Conduct, and the Mandatory Reporting Policy and Procedures (available in hard copy at the General Office and Staffrooms, on the school intranet and on the school website). New employees and volunteers will also be supervised regularly and attend staff meetings to ensure they understand Maharishi School's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse, as well as checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate. Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported to the School Principal and will be managed in accordance with school policies, or through appropriate channels, including the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

RECRUITMENT

We take all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children. We actively encourage applications from Aboriginal peoples, people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability. We develop selection criteria and advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities. Our school understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

All people engaged in child-related work, including volunteers, are required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this Check.

We carry out reference checks to ensure that we are recruiting the right people. Police record checks (via Working With Children Check and Victorian Institute of Teaching Registration) are used for the purposes of recruitment. We do retain our own records (but not the actual criminal record) if an applicant's criminal history affected our decision-making process.

CHILD SAFE POLICY

If during the recruitment process a person's records indicate a criminal history, then the person will be given the opportunity to provide further information and context.

FAIR PROCEDURES FOR PERSONNEL

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and just to personnel. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form including investigation updates. All records are securely stored.

If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to children and families on progress and any actions we as an organisation take.

LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

Maharishi School takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- Failure to disclose: Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All persons of or over the age of 18 years in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that if a person of or over the age of 18 years has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to the police.
- Failure to protect: People of authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.
- Any personnel who are mandatory reporters must comply with their duties.

RISK MANAGEMENT

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified (see information about failure to protect above). In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our children. We have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks, which include risks posed by physical environments (for example, any doors that can lock), and online environments (e.g., no staff or volunteer is to have contact with a child from our school on social media).

CONFIDENTIALITY & PRIVACY

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be staff, volunteers, parents or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. We have safeguards and practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected. Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will have access to it.

Maharishi School collects, uses and discloses information about particular children and their families in accordance with Victorian privacy law and other relevant laws. The principles regulating the collection, use and storage of information is included in the school's Privacy Policy.

CHILD SAFE POLICY

RELATED POLICIES & DOCUMENTS

Related policies and documents include:

- Codes of Conduct – Parent/Carer/Guardian, Staff/Volunteer
- Mandatory Reporting Policy and Procedures
- Risk Assessment Register
- [Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#)
- [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#)
- [Recording your actions: Responding to suspected child abuse – A template for Victorian schools](#)
- [Identifying and Responding to Student Sexual Offending](#)
- [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Student Sexual Offending](#)
- Policy and Advisory Library – Duty of Care
- Policy and Advisory Library – Child Protection Reporting Obligations
- [Schools' Privacy Policy](#)

POLICY EVALUATION & REVIEW

To ensure ongoing relevance and continuous improvement, this policy will be reviewed every 3 years. The review will include input from students, parents/carers and the school community.

CHILD SAFE POLICY

APPENDIX A - DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are taken from Ministerial Order No. 870 (Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools). It is important that you understand these definitions as they clarify some key aspects of the requirements of the Ministerial Order and may have a broader scope than what many people might normally think, particularly in relation to child-connected work, child abuse, child safety, school environment and school staff.

“Adult” means “...by a person of or over the age of 18 years”.

Child means a child enrolled as a student at the school.

Child-connected work means work authorised by the school governing authority and performed by a person of or over the age of 18 years in a school environment while children are present or reasonably expected to be present.

Child abuse includes - (a) any act committed against a child involving - (i) a sexual offence; or (ii) an offence under section 49B(2) of the Crimes Act 1958 (grooming); and
 (b) the infliction, on a child, of - (i) physical violence; or (ii) serious emotional or psychological harm; and
 (c) serious neglect of a child.

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.

DFFH – Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

ETR Act means the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 as amended from time to time.

Grooming is a criminal offence under the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic). This offence targets predatory conduct undertaken by a person of or over the age of 18 years to prepare a child, under the age of 16, to engage in sexual activity at a later time. Grooming can include communicating and/or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent/carer. For more information about this offence and reporting obligations see: Child Exploitation and Grooming

Mandatory reporting refers to the legal requirement of certain groups of people to report a reasonable belief of child physical or sexual abuse to child protection authorities.

Reasonable Excuse is defined by law and includes fear for the safety of any person including yourself or the potential victim (but not including the alleged perpetrator or an organisation) where the information has already been disclosed, for example, through a mandatory report to DFFH Child Protection

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) a campus of the school; (b) online school environments (including email and intranet systems); and (c) other locations provided by the school for a child’s use (including, without limitation, locations used for school camps, sporting events, excursions, competitions, and other events).

School governing authority means: (a) the proprietor of a school, including a person authorised to act for or on behalf of the proprietor; or
 (b) the governing body for a school, as authorised by the proprietor of a school or the ETR Act; or
 (c) the principal, as authorised by the proprietor of a school, the school governing body, or the ETR Act.

CHILD SAFE POLICY

Explanatory note: There is a wide variety of school governance arrangements. Depending on the way a school is constituted and operated, the governing body for a school may be the school board, the school council, or some other person or entity. The school governing authorities may share or assign responsibility for discharging the requirements imposed by the Ministerial Order, in accordance with the school's internal governance arrangements.

School staff means: in a non-Government school, an individual working in a school environment who is:

- (i) directly engaged or employed by a school governing authority;
- (ii) a volunteer or a contracted service provider (whether a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary); or
- (iii) a minister of religion.

CHILD SAFE POLICY

APPENDIX B - REPORTING A CHILD SAFETY CONCERN OR COMPLAINT

The school has clear expectations for all staff and volunteers in making a report about a child or young person who may be in need of protection. All staff (including school council employees) must follow the school's Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting Policy and Procedures, including following the [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#) if there is an incident, disclosure or suspicion of child abuse. Immediate actions should include reporting their concerns to DFFH Child Protection, Victoria Police and/or another appropriate agency and notifying the principal or a member of the school leadership team of their concerns and the reasons for those concerns.

Maharishi School will never prohibit or discourage school staff from reporting an allegation of child abuse. The school will always take action to respond to a complaint in accordance with the school's Child Safe and Mandatory Reporting Policies and Procedures. In accordance with Action 4 of the Four Critical Actions for Schools, Maharishi School will provide ongoing support for students affected by child abuse.

The school's Child Safe and Mandatory Reporting Policies and Procedures can be found at the General Office and Staffrooms, in the Teacher Drive on the school's intranet and on the school's website.

CHILD SAFE POLICY

APPENDIX C - RISK REDUCTION & MANAGEMENT

Maharishi School believes the wellbeing of children and young people is paramount, and is vigilant in ensuring proper risk management processes, found in the school's Risk Assessment Register. The school recognises there are potential risks to children and young people and will take a risk management approach by undertaking preventative measures.

We will identify and mitigate the risks of child abuse in school environments by taking into account the nature of each school environment, the activities expected to be conducted in that environment and the characteristics and needs of all children expected to be present in that environment. The school's approach to ensure it provides a Child Safe environment is premised on our commitment that we "Must not negligently fail to reduce or remove the risk".

Maharishi School monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of the actions it takes to reduce or remove risks to child safety. more information can be found in the school's Risk Assessment Register.

Listening to, Communicating with and Empowering Children

Maharishi School has developed a safe, inclusive and supportive environment that involves and communicates with children, young people and their parents/carers. We encourage child and parent/carer involvement and engagement that informs safe school operations and builds the capability of children and parents/carers to understand their rights and their responsibilities. Our school is committed to supporting and encouraging students to use their voice to raise and share their concerns with a trusted person of or over the age of 18 years at any time of need. Students can report abuse to a trusted person of or over the age of 18 years at the school.

When the school is gathering information in relation to a complaint about alleged misconduct with or abuse of a child, the school will listen to the complainant's account and take them seriously, check understanding and keep the child (and/or their parents/carers, as appropriate) informed about progress.

The school will promote the Child Safe Standards in ways that are readily accessible, easy to understand, and user-friendly to children, including:

- All of our Child Safe policies and procedures will be available for the students and parents to read at the General Office and the school website
- PROTECT Child Safety posters will be displayed across the school
- School newsletters will inform students and the school community about the school's commitment to child safety, and strategies or initiatives that the school is taking to ensure student safety
- age-appropriate discussion of child safety with students
- the Child Safe Standards are addressed and explained annually in the School Newsletter and at parent forums

The school will use its health and wellbeing programs to deliver appropriate education to its students about the standards of behaviour for students attending the school, including:

- Respectful Relationships Program
- Restorative Practices
- Relationships and Sexuality Education (Family Planning Victoria)

Communications

This school is committed to communicating our child safety strategies to the school community through:

- Ensuring that the Child Safety Policy (this document), Codes of Conduct, and the Mandatory Reporting Policy and Procedure are available on the school website and in the school's General Office
- Once per term reminders in the school newsletter of our school's commitment to child safety
- Ensuring that child safety is a regular agenda item at school leadership meetings and staff meetings for discussion