MERRIANG SCHOOL

CHILD ABUSE (INCLUDING GROOMING) – IDENTIFICATION AND RESPONSE POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand the information in this policy please contact Merriang School on 9404 2839

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to:

- describe how staff at Merriang School identify and respond to child safety concerns and child abuse following the 4 Critical Actions
- ensure our staff and school community raise concerns about child abuse.

SCOPE

This policy applies to any concern of child abuse or reportable conduct:

- by any adult engaged by the school or school council or any other adult while connected to the school environment (including e.g. staff, volunteers, contractors, service providers and visitors)
- between students
- towards students by members of their family
- towards students by members of the community.

Child abuse and reportable conduct can occur in any physical or online environment and include grooming.

DEFINITIONS

There are many types of child abuse. For more information, see Types of child abuse and what to look for and Child Safety Definitions.

Child abuse includes:

- any act committed against a child involving a sexual offence or grooming
- physical violence against a child
- serious emotional or psychological harm against a child
- serious neglect of a child.

Grooming is a criminal offence under the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic) and is a form of child abuse and sexual misconduct. It is also a form of Reportable Conduct. The offence of grooming is when an adult engages in predatory conduct to prepare a child or young person under the age of 16 for future sexual activity. This can be with the groomer or with another adult. Grooming can occur face-to-face, online or a combination of both.

Grooming behaviour can involve the use of a variety of manipulative and controlling techniques. These can be used to build trust or normalise sexually harmful behaviour.

Reportable Conduct includes:

- a sexual offence committed against, with or in the presence of a child
- sexual misconduct committed against, with or in the presence of a child
- physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of a child
- behaviour causing significant emotional or psychological harm to a child
- significant neglect of a child

by any adult working or volunteering at our school including any employees, volunteers or contractors.

For further information see: Reportable and Notifiable Conduct Policy.

POLICY

Everyone at Merriang School has an important role to:

- prevent child abuse (including grooming) in our school or during school activities
- identify and respond to concerns of child abuse using the 4 Critical Actions – based on the source of abuse:
  - by an adult engaged by the school
  - between students
  - in the family
  - in the community.

Merriang School follows the Department of Education policies on the Policy and Advisory Library (PAL):

- Child abuse (including grooming) – identification and response
- Student to Student Abuse and Harmful Sexual Behaviour
- Reportable and Notifiable Conduct policy.

Merriang School has other policies that are part of our child safety framework and describe actions we take to ensure students are safe and feel safe to raise a complaint. These include:

- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Complaints Policy.

These policies are available on our school website at merriangsds.vic.edu.au

PROCEDURE FOR RESPONDING TO AN INCIDENT, DISCLOSURE, OR ALLEGATION OF CHILD ABUSE

All staff at our school must use the 4 Critical Actions to identify and respond to child abuse. The 4 Critical Actions are:

- Identify child abuse
- Support students in the school
- Refer student to community services
- Report abuse to authorities.

At all times all staff must:

- Respond to an emergency
- Adapt to changing circumstances
- Document their actions.

All staff must follow the 4 Critical Actions - based on the source of abuse:

- 4 Critical Actions to identify and respond to child abuse by an adult engaged by the school
    - Any allegation, complaint, disclosure or concern of abuse (including grooming) by an adult engaged by a school may be reportable conduct under Victoria's Reportable Conduct Scheme and **must be reported**.
- 4 Critical Actions to identify and respond to student-to-student abuse
    - As soon as you form a reasonable belief that a student has been, or is at risk of being, abused by another student **you must act**.
- 4 Critical Actions to identify and respond to child abuse in the family
    - As soon as you form a reasonable belief that a student has been, or is at risk of being, abused by someone in the family **you must act**.
- 4 Critical Actions to identify and respond to child abuse in the community.
    - As soon as you form a reasonable belief that a student has been, or is at risk of being, abused by someone in the community **you must act.**

Our school follows detailed guidance on the 4 Critical Actions for each source of abuse on the PROTECT website. This includes guidance on how to respond to a disclosure of child abuse made by a student or young person in a trauma-informed way and provide appropriate support, including suggested language to use.

To ensure the 4 Critical Actions are followed, staff must immediately notify one of our school's relevant child safety nominated contacts on becoming aware that a student is, or may be, experiencing child abuse (including grooming).

Our child safety nominated contacts are listed in the table below. Our school's child safety nominated contacts work with staff and school leadership to provide oversight and ensure:

- child safety concerns are taken seriously
- the school's response is prompt and thorough
- the relevant 4 Critical Actions and PROTECT guidance are followed.

Anyone can contact these staff about a child safety concern. This includes students, parents/carers, volunteers, or anyone else in the school community who has concerns about child abuse including grooming.

Role	Name	Phone
Principal	Georgia Tsonis	9404 2839
Assistant Principal - Wellbeing	Brendan Colville	9464 3011

Escalating concerns

Following the 4 Critical Actions ensures that our staff take all the necessary steps where there is a concern about abuse, including grooming. If any staff member is concerned that these processes have not been followed they must:

- raise their concerns with the principal and escalate to the regional office via 1800 338 663 or email enquiries@education.vic.gov.au if they remain unsatisfied
- report concerns to the appropriate authorities (e.g. Victoria Police or Child Protection) in line with the 4 Critical Actions.

Reporting concerns about child safety contacts or school leadership

To report any allegations or concerns of abuse including grooming about a listed child safety contact, notify the principal.

To report any allegations or concerns of abuse including grooming by a principal, please contact:

- Department of Education
    - Anyone can contact the Department of Education.
    - Email: enquiries@education.vic.gov.au
    - Phone: 1800 338 663
    - For more information see: Report abuse if you're a current student.
- Department of Education Speak Up service
    - Staff can use the Speak Up service to report improper conduct, fraud or corruption (including to make an anonymous report) or other improper conduct.
    - Website: https://www.pkftalkintegrity.com/?det
    - Email: educationspeakup@pkf.com.au
    - Phone 1800 633 462.

Meeting our legal obligations

Our staff must take reasonable steps to minimise risks of harm to students in their care that is reasonably foreseeable. For further information see: PROTECT child safety frameworks and legal obligations.

Further information on relevant child safety frameworks and legal obligations is in **Appendix 1**.

COMMUNICATION

[Under Ministerial Order 1359: Implementing the Child Safe Standards, the procedures referred to in this policy must be made publicly available.

This policy will be communicated to our school community. It may be:

- published on our school's website
- included in staff induction processes and annual staff training
- communicated to the school community through school newsletters or our electronic student management system
- included in volunteer induction processes and training for relevant volunteers
- discussed in annual staff briefings or meetings
- included in staff handbook or manual
- made available in hard copy available from school administration upon request.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

The following Department of Education policies and guidance are relevant to this policy:

- PROTECT
- Child Safe Standards
- Reportable and Notifiable Conduct Policy
- Child abuse (including grooming) – identification and response
- Student-to-student abuse and harmful sexual behaviour
- Managing and Reporting School Incidents
- Duty of Care
- Restraint and Seclusion

POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Policy last reviewed	28.8.26
Consultation	School Council approved 28.8.26 2026
Approved by	Principal
Next scheduled review date	28.8.30

APPENDIX 1: CHILD SAFETY FRAMEWORKS AND LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

This policy ensures compliance with child safety frameworks and our legal obligations and our school's duty of care obligations. These include:

Child Safe Standards: Victoria's Child Safe Standards help schools create and maintain a child-safe organisation and protect children and young people from harm and abuse. All Victorian schools and school boarding premises must comply with Ministerial Order 1359. Ministerial Order 1359 sets out the actions schools must take to implement the Child Safe Standards.

Reportable Conduct Scheme: The Reportable Conduct Scheme is a child safety mechanism that provides central oversight of how organisations respond to allegations of reportable conduct by a person engaged by the school.

Information sharing: Victorian schools can share confidential information under the Information Sharing Schemes, including the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS). Under CISS, schools can share relevant information about any person to promote the wellbeing or safety of a child or group of children. Under FVISS, schools can share relevant information to assess or manage risk of family violence.

Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management for family violence (MARAM): MARAM sets a consistent, shared approach across Victoria's service system to identify and respond to family violence. The FVISS enables schools to meet their obligations under MARAM.

Mandatory reporting: If a mandatory reporter, while doing their job, forms a belief on reasonable grounds that:

- a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical and/or sexual abuse and
- the child's parents have not protected or are unlikely to protect the child from harm of that type

this must be reported to Child Protection as soon as practicable.

Failure to disclose offence: All adults must report to Victoria Police if they have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child in Victoria.

Failure to protect offence: The offence applies 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.

Further information about these legal obligations is available from:

- Child Safety Frameworks and Legal Obligations
- Department of Education Policy and Advisory Library:
  - Child abuse (including grooming) – identification and response
  - Reportable and Notifiable Conduct.