

Child Safety Policy

Ratification Date:
Update by RNS
Principal 23/06/2022

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This Policy was approved by the RNS Board 28/06/2022

Next Review:

By 1 July 2024 or after an event or changes to the minimum standards as advised by the VRQA

Availability:

Web	Х
Office	Х
On Request	Х

Actions:

Refer Child Safe Standards (for MO 1359) Action List for RNS. For example, first draft new policies prepared by the RNS Principal to be further contextualised to the RNS setting and finalised for Board review by 31.08.2022, including:

- Visitors Policy
- Volunteers Policy

SCHOOL CONTEXT

River Nile School (RNS) is a specialist reengagement senior-secondary school for young women who are Humanitarian refugees and new arrivals to Australia. In general, our school's students are highly vulnerable with backgrounds of complex trauma in their lives. Most RNS students live as independent young adults, and those with parents/carers commonly have parents/carers who are also new to Australia, with low levels of English oracy and literacy and which are not yet well informed about child safety expectations and obligations in Australia. Some RNS students have significant responsibilities as young parents or carers/guardians of younger siblings.

PURPOSE

The RNS Child Safety Policy demonstrates our school's commitment to creating and maintaining a child safe and child-friendly organisation, where children and young people are safe and feel safe.

This policy provides an overview of our school's approach to implementing Ministerial Order 1359 (MO 1359) which sets out how the Victorian Child Safe Standards apply in school environments.

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

This policy:

- Applies to all school staff, volunteers and contractors whether or not they work in direct contact with students. It also applies to school board members where indicated.
- Applies in all physical and online school environments used by students during or outside of school hours, including other locations provided for a student's use (for example, a school camp) and those provided through third-party providers.
- Should be read together with our other child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, and codes refer to the related school policies section below.

DEFINITIONS

Child Abuse

As referenced in Ministerial Order 1359, child abuse includes:

- Any act committed against a child involving:
 - A sexual offence; or

- An offence under section 49M (1) of the Crimes Act 1958; and
- The infliction on a child of:
 - Physical violence; or
 - Serious emotional or psychological harm; and
- Serious neglect of a child

Child-connected work

Child-connected work means work authorised by the River Nile School, RNS Board and/or performed by an adult in the RNS environment while children are present or reasonably expected to be present.

Child safety

As referenced in Ministerial Order 1359, child safety encompasses matters related to protecting all children from 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.

River Nile School environment

The RNS environment means any physical or virtual place made available or authorised by the RNS for use by a child during or outside RNS hours, including:

- A campus of the RNS
- Online RNS environments (including email, intranet and online learning systems) and
- Other locations provided by RNS for a child's use (including, without limitation, locations used for RNS camps, sporting events, excursions, competitions, employment, work placement/work experience, external VET classes and other RNS activities and events.

River Nile School staff

RNS staff means an individual working in an RNS environment who is:

- Employed by the RNS or
- Directly engaged or employed by the RNS Board or
- A volunteer, visitor or a contracted service provider (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary).

Specific definitions for the above and other terms used in this policy or in relation to Victorian Child Safe Standards and Ministerial Order 1359 are available at this link specific definitions including:

- child
- child safety
- child abuse
- child-connected work
- child-related work
- duty of care
- school environment
- school boarding environment
- school staff
- school boarding premises staff
- school governing authority
- school boarding premises governing authority
- student
- volunteer
- vulnerable students

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

River Nile School is a child safe organisation which welcomes all children, young people and their families.

We are committed to providing environments where our students are safe and feel safe, where their participation is valued, their views respected, and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives. Our child safe policies, strategies and practices are inclusive of the needs of all children and students.

We have **no tolerance** for child abuse and take proactive steps to identify and manage any risks of harm to students in our school environments.

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

We take proactive steps to identify and manage any risk of harm to students in our school environment. When child safety concerns are raised or identified, we treat these seriously and respond promptly and thoroughly.

Particular attention is given to the child safety needs of Aboriginal students, those from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, international students, students with disabilities, those unable to live at home, children and young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) and other students experiencing risk or vulnerability. Inappropriate or harmful behaviour targeting students based on these or other characteristics, such as racism or homophobia, are not tolerated at our school, and any instances identified will be addressed with appropriate consequences.

Child safety is a shared responsibility. Every person involved in our school has an important role in promoting child safety and wellbeing and promptly raising 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 volunteers to inform our ongoing strategies.

Child Safe Standards

The Child Safe Standards (the Standards; or CSS) are compulsory minimum standards for all organisations that provide services to children including Victorian schools and early childhood services. The aim of the Standards is to ensure organisations are well prepared to protect children from abuse and neglect.

The 11 Standards are:

- **CSS 1** Organisations establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued
- CSS 2 Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture
- **CSS 3** Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously
- CSS 4 Families and communities are informed, and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing
- CSS 5 Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice
- **CSS 6** People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice
- **CSS 7** Processes for complaints and concerns are child focused
- **CSS 8** Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training
- **CSS 9** Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed
- CSS 10 Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved
- **CSS 11** Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

School Leadership Team

Our School Leadership Team (SLT), which comprises the Principal, Assistant Principal, Leading Teachers and the School Nurse, is responsible for ensuring that a strong child safe culture is created and maintained, and that policies and practices are effectively developed and implemented in accordance with Ministerial Order 1359.

The Principal and Assistant Principal(s) will:

- Ensure effective child safety and wellbeing governance, policies, procedures, codes and practices are in place and followed
- Model a child safe culture that facilitates the active participation of students, families and staff in promoting and improving child safety, cultural safety and wellbeing
- 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 open discussion on child safety issues within the school community including at leadership team meetings, staff meetings and school council meetings
- Facilitate regular professional learning for staff and volunteers (where appropriate) to build deeper understandings of child safety, cultural safety, student wellbeing and prevention of responding to abuse
- Create an environment where child safety complaints and concerns are readily raised, and no one is discouraged from reporting an allegation of child abuse to relevant authorities.

School Staff and Volunteers

All staff and volunteers will:

- Participate in child safety and wellbeing induction and training provided by the school or complete any training provided by the Department of Education and Training or Independent Schools Victoria, and always follow the school's child safety and wellbeing policies and procedures
- Act in accordance with our Child Safety Code of Conduct.
- Identify and raise concerns about child safety issues in accordance with our Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures, including following the <u>Four Critical Actions for</u> Schools
- Ensure students' views are taken seriously and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives
- Implement inclusive practices that respond to the diverse needs of students.

School Board

In performing the functions and powers given to them under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*, School Board members will:

- Champion and promote a child safe culture with the broader school community.
- Review and update this Child Safety Policy after every incident in addition to scheduled three-year reviews.
- Ensure that child safety is a regular agenda item at School Board meetings.
- Undertake annual training on child safety. The School Board will be shown the Child Safe Standards School Training slides presentation from PROTECT.
- Approve updates to, and act in accordance with the Child Safety Code of Conduct to the extent that it applies to School Board employees and members.
- When hiring School Board employees, ensure that selection, supervision and management practices are child safe. At RNS, the School Board employment duties are delegated to the Principal who is bound by this policy.
- Monitor and assess the School's compliance with the Child Safety Policy and ensure it is made publicly available.

Specific Staff Child Safety Responsibilities

RNS has nominated the registered School Nurse and Wellbeing Coordinator, who is also a VIT Registered Teacher and the RNS Health Educator, as a **Child Safety Champion** to support the Principal to implement our child safety policies and practices, including staff and volunteer training.

The responsibilities of the Child Safety Champion are outlined at Guidance for child safety champions.

Our Principal and Child Safety Champion are the first point of contact for child safety concerns or queries and for coordinating responses to child safety incidents.

In addition:

- The School Leadership Team (SLT) is responsible for monitoring the school's compliance with the Child Safety Policy. Anyone in our school community should approach the Principal, Child Safety Champion or a member of the SLT if they have any concerns about the school's compliance with the Child Safety Policy.
- The Principal or delegate is responsible for informing the school community about this policy, making it publicly available and promoting a culture of listening to students and families and acting on their child safety concerns.
- Other specific roles and responsibilities are named in other child safety policies and procedures, including the Child Safety Code of Conduct, Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedures, and Child Safety Risk Register.

Our School has an established **Child Safety, Student Support and Wellbeing Team** that meets regularly (most weeks during school terms) to identify and respond to any ongoing matters related to child and student safety and wellbeing.

Our School's **Student Leaders** provide RNS with a student **Reference Group** on child safety and this group are provided with periodic opportunities to provide input into school strategies on behalf of students. This group meets regularly (~3 times per school term or ~12 times per school year) and child safety is discussed as a specific topic at some meetings across the year.

Our **RNS Board Governance and Compliance Sub-Committee** monitors Risk Management and the Child Safety Risk Register.

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 that students also know what is acceptable and what is not acceptable so that they can be clear and confident about what to expect from adults in the school.

The Child Safety Code of Conduct also refers to processes to report inappropriate behaviour.

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 and wellbeing policies, procedures and practices, and in our activity specific risk registers, such as those we develop for off-site overnight camps, off-site activities and facilities and services we contract through third party providers for student use.

Our **Child Safety Risk Register** is used to record any identified risks related to child abuse alongside actions in place to manage those risks. Our School Leadership Team will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the actions in the Child Safety Risk Register at least annually. The RNS Board is responsible for monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of the school's child safe risk assessment and mitigation strategies at least annually. The Principal together with SLT will be responsible for implementing child abuse mitigation measures in response to the assessment. The RNS Board Governance and Compliance Sub-Committee is responsible for monitoring that this takes place in a timely and effective manner.

The School has additional policies and procedures in place to manage risk in physical and online environments. For example, School Camp Policy, School Excursion Policy and Digital Learning Policy.

Establishing a culturally safe environment

At River Nile School, we are committed to establishing an inclusive and culturally safe school where the strengths of Aboriginal culture, values and practices are respected.

We think about how every student can have a positive experience in a safe environment. For Aboriginal students, we recognise the link between Aboriginal culture, identity and safety and actively create opportunities for Aboriginal students and the Aboriginal community to have a voice and presence in our school planning, policies, and activities.

We have developed the following strategies to promote cultural safety in our school community:

- Begin events and meetings with a Welcome to Country or an Acknowledgement of Country as a standing agenda item.
 - RNS students involved in oral presentations at events and meetings, as part of oracy within a literacy unit or their role as a School Leader or similar, are taught and required to provide an Acknowledgement of Country using proper detail.
 - We use this as an opportunity to pause and reflect or open a discussion about the purpose of this.
- Display plaques and signs to Acknowledge Country and Traditional Owners.
- Display the three official flags in Australia, the Australian National Flag, the Australian Aboriginal Flag and the Torres Strait Islander Flag, visibly near our school reception area.
- Make Aboriginal voice part of decision making in matters that affect Aboriginal students. Be open to different ways of doing and expressing things.
- Build schoolwide knowledge of Aboriginal histories, cultures, perspectives, values, skills and attitudes.
- Ask for feedback from Aboriginal students and their families about what the school does well, and what can be improved.
- Work with the local Aboriginal community to build staff, volunteer and student knowledge and respect for Aboriginal culture and to promote cultural inclusion. For example, Cultural Safety professional development conducted through ABSTARR consulting.
- Recognise key events and anniversaries, for example 21 March Harmony Day.
- Discuss and participate in child safety discussion in class or at information sessions so that the School Community know and understand this policy.

Student empowerment

To support child safety and wellbeing at River Nile School, we work to create an inclusive and supportive environment that encourages students and families to contribute to our child safety approach and understand their rights and their responsibilities.

Respectful relationships between students are reinforced and we encourage strong friendships and peer support in the school to ensure a sense of belonging through:

- Our School values.
- Student Code of Conduct
- Fostering a whole school approach to Respectful Relationships.

We inform students of their rights through:

- All of our child safety policies and procedures being available on the School website http://www.rivernileschool.vic.edu.au/policies
- PROTECT Child Safety posters being displayed across the School.
- Student Handbook
- Student Leaders
- School newsletters and Compass news feeds
- Assembly, Class Homegroup presentations, family and/or community information sessions
- Targeted curriculum activities, for example, health education sessions are incorporated into literacy programs and explicitly cover topics including women's health, women's reproductive rights and consensual relationships.
- Access to our School Nurse and Wellbeing Coordinator, who is also a VIT Registered Teacher and the RNS Health Educator.
- Partnerships with external organisations for delivery of appropriate training, for example, the Family and Reproductive Rights Education Program of The Royal Women's Hospital and Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights training programs.

- Onsite posters that are friendly to young people from Cultural and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds.
- Ongoing training for staff on how to communicate appropriately and assist students to feel safe listened to and empowered
- Document clear procedures for responding to and reporting allegations of child abuse

We aim to give students 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. Students, families and school community members can access information on how to report concerns at our school reception.

Our School is committed to supporting and encouraging students to use their voice to raise and share their concerns with a trusted adult at any time of need. Students can access information on how to report abuse from the website.

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

Family engagement and empowerment

Our families and 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, at River Nile School we are committed to providing families and our community with accessible information about our School's child safe policies and practices and involving them in our approach to child safety and wellbeing.

We will create opportunities for families and community members to have input into the development and review of our child safety policies and practices and encourage them to raise any concerns and ideas for improvement.

We do this by:

- Ensuring all of our child safety policies and procedures are publicly available on the RNS website http://www.rivernileschool.vic.edu.au/policies
- Making all of our child safety policies and procedures available for students, parents and our community on our website and on request at reception.
- Seeking input from families and our school community through newsletters and at student, staff parent and school community meetings.
- Ensuring RNS e-Newsletters inform families and our school community about any significant
 updates to our child safety policies or processes, and strategies or initiatives that we are taking to
 ensure child and student safety.
- Displaying PROTECT Child Safety posters across the school.
- Conducting an annual survey feedback process for students.
- Providing students and families with access to resources in school community languages and translation support, as needed. Around one third of RNS staff have a school community language but translation services are engaged as needed, including for privacy of discussions.

Diversity and equity

As a child safe organisation, we celebrate the rich diversity of our students, families and community and promote respectful environments that are free from discrimination. Our focus is on wellbeing and growth for all.

We recognise that every child has unique skills, strengths and experiences to draw on.

We pay particular attention to individuals and groups of children and young people in our community with additional and specific needs. This includes tailoring our child safety strategies and supports to the needs of:

- Aboriginal children and young people
- Children from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds
- Children and young people with disabilities
- Children unable to live at home or impacted by family violence
- International students
- Children and young people who identify as LGBTIQ+.

Our Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy provides more information about the measures we have in place to support diversity and equity.

Suitable staff and volunteers

At River Nile School, we apply robust child safe recruitment, induction, training, and supervision practices to ensure that all staff, contractors and volunteers are suitable to work with children.

Staff recruitment

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

When recruiting staff, we align with the Department of Education and Training's recruitment policies and guidelines, available on the Policy and Advisory Library (PAL) at:

- Recruitment in Schools
- Suitability for Employment Checks
- School Council Employment
- Contractor OHS Management.

When engaging staff to perform child-related work, we:

- Sight, verify and record the person's Working with Children clearance or equivalent background check such as a Victorian Institute of Teaching registration
- Collect and record:
 - o Proof of the person's identity and any professional or other qualifications
 - o The person's history of working with children
 - References that address suitability for the job and working with children.

Staff induction

All newly appointed staff will be expected to participate in our child safety and wellbeing induction program. The program will include a focus on:

- The Child Safety Policy (this document)
- The Child Safety Code of Conduct
- The Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedures and
- Any other child safety and wellbeing information that school leadership considers appropriate to the nature of the role.

Ongoing training, supervision and management of staff

All staff engaged in child-connected work will be supervised appropriately to ensure that their behaviour towards children and young people is safe and appropriate.

Staff will be monitored and assessed to ensure their continuing suitability for child-connected work. This will be done by regular performance reviews.

Inappropriate behaviour towards children and young people will be managed swiftly and in accordance with our school policies and our legal obligations including making a report to the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) and the Victorian Police. Child safety and wellbeing will be paramount.

Suitability of volunteers

All volunteers are required to comply with our **Volunteers Policy** which describes how we assess the suitability of prospective volunteers and outlines expectations in relation to child safety and wellbeing induction and training, and supervision and management.

Child safety knowledge, skills and awareness

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

In addition to the child safety and wellbeing induction, our staff 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.

Staff child safety and wellbeing training will be delivered at least annually and will include guidance on:

- Our school's child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, codes, and practices
- Completing the <u>Protecting Children Mandatory Reporting and Other Legal Obligations</u> online module annually
- · Recognising indicators of child harm including harm caused by other children and students
- Responding effectively to issues of child safety and wellbeing and supporting colleagues who
 disclose harm
- How to build culturally safe environments for children and students
- Information sharing and recordkeeping obligations
- How to identify and mitigate child safety and wellbeing risks in the school environment.

Other professional learning and training on child safety and wellbeing, for example, training for our volunteers, will be tailored to specific roles and responsibilities and any identified or emerging needs or issues.

RNS Board training and education

To ensure our school Board is equipped with the knowledge required to make decisions in the best interests of student safety and wellbeing, and to identify and mitigate child safety and wellbeing risks in our school environment, the Board is trained at least annually. Training includes guidance on:

- Individual and collective obligations and responsibilities for implementing the Child Safe Standards and managing the risk of child abuse
- Child safety and wellbeing risks in our school environment
- River Nile School child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, codes and practices

Complaints and reporting processes

River Nile School fosters a culture that encourages staff, volunteers, students, parents and the school community to raise concerns and complaints. This makes it more difficult for breaches of the code of conduct, misconduct or abuse to occur and remain hidden.

We have clear pathways for raising complaints and concerns and responding and this is documented in our school's **Managing Complaints**, **Grievances and Concerns Policy**, which can be found on our website.

If there is an incident, disclosure, allegation or suspicion of child abuse, all staff and volunteers (including school board employees) must follow our **Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures**. Our policy and procedures address complaints and concerns of child abuse made by or in relation to a child or student, school staff, volunteers, contractors, service providers, visitors or any other person while connected to the school.

As soon as any immediate health and safety concerns are addressed, and relevant school staff have been informed, we will ensure our school follows:

- the Four Critical Actions for complaints and concerns relating to adult behaviour towards a child
- the <u>Four Critical Actions: Student Sexual Offending</u> for complaints and concerns relating to student sexual offending

Our Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy and Bullying and Harassment Prevention Policy cover complaints and concerns relating to student physical violence or other harmful behaviours.

Communications

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

- Ensuring that key child safety and wellbeing policies are available on our website including the Child Safety Policy (this document), Child Safety Code of Conduct, and the Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedure
- Displaying PROTECT posters around the school
- Updates in our school e-newsletter and webpage
- Ensuring that child safety is a regular agenda item at school leadership meetings, staff meetings and school board meetings.

Privacy and information sharing

River Nile School collects, uses, and discloses information about children and their families in accordance with Victorian privacy laws, and other relevant laws. For information on how our school collects, uses and discloses information refer to our Privacy Policy on the RNS website http://www.rivernileschool.vic.edu.au/policies

Records management

We acknowledge that good records management practices are a critical element of child safety and wellbeing and manage our records in accordance with the Department of Education and Training's policy: Records Management – School Records

Review of child safety practices

At River Nile School, we have established processes for the review and ongoing improvement of our child safe policies, procedures, and practices. We will:

- review and improve our policy every 2 years or after any significant child safety incident
- analyse any complaints, concerns, and safety incidents to improve policy and practice

• act with transparency and share pertinent learnings and review outcomes with school staff and our school community.

Related policies and procedures

This Child Safety Policy is to be read in conjunction with other related school policies, procedures, and codes. These include our:

- Bullying and Harassment Prevention Policy
- Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures
- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Complaints, Grievances and Concerns Policy
- Digital Learning Policy
- Inclusion and Diversity Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy
- Visitors Policy
- Volunteers Policy

Other related documents

- Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools
- Four Critical Actions for Schools
- Identifying and Responding to Student Sexual Offending
- Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Student Sexual Offending
- Recording your actions: Responding to suspected child abuse A template for Victorian schools

Policy status and review

The Principal is responsible for reviewing and updating the Child Safety Policy at least every two years. The review will include input from students, parents/carers and the school community.

The River Nile School Inc.
ABN 20 382 591 724
Reg. Inc. Assoc. No. A0048482L
Endorsed Charity & Deductible Gift
Recipient

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