

Rationale:

The child safe environments policy sets out the school's approach to creating 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.

Aims:

- To provide a commitment to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.
- To recognise the importance of, and a responsibility for, ensuring our school is a safe, supportive and enriching environment which respects and fosters the dignity and self-esteem of children and young people, and enables them to thrive in their learning and development.

Scope:

All staff, volunteers, contractors and whether or not they work in direct contact with children or young people. This policy will apply across a range of school forums (e.g. camps, online) and outside of school hours.

Statement of Commitment to Child Safety:

Lowanna College is committed to safety and wellbeing of all children and young people. This will be the primary focus of our care and decision-making with particular attention paid to the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as the safety of children with a disability, and vulnerable children.

Lowanna College has zero tolerance for child abuse.

Lowanna College is committed to providing a child safe environment where children and young people are safe and feel safe, and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives.

Every person involved in Lowanna College has a responsibility to understand the important and specific role he/she plays individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children and young people is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make.

In its planning, decision-making and operations, Lowanna College 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 issues;
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;
10. Value the input of and communicate regularly with families and carers.

Policy and Procedures:

Policies and procedures outlining school's approach to the Child Safe Standards are outlined below.

- Child Safe Code of Conduct
- 'Child Safety Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures'
- Photographing, Filming and Recording Students Policy
- Student Engagement and Inclusion Policy
- Supervision and Duty of Care Policy
- Visitors Policy
- Volunteers Policy

Further information can be obtained from the Child Safety Officer. At Lowanna College, the Child Safety Officer is the Welfare Team Coordinator.

Further resources and advice on child safety and the Child Safe Standards can be accessed from the Department of Education and Training's [PROTECT site](#).

Legislative responsibilities

This policy applies to allegations of disclosures of child abuse made by or in relation to a child, school staff, visitors or other persons connected to the school environment.

Our school takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- All Victorian Teachers have a legal responsibility to report incidents where children's safety is at risk. Victorian Government School employees are expected to follow the DET Mandatory Reporting policy which can be found at <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/safety/Pages/childprotectobligation.aspx>
- Failure to disclose: Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult 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 school 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.

Further information on Failure to Disclose and Failure to Protect can be found within the Lowanna College Responding to and Reporting Child Abuse Policy and Procedures.

Any personnel who are **mandatory reporters** must comply with their duties.

A Child Safe Culture:

Lowanna College's culture encourages staff to raise, discuss and scrutinise concerns making it more difficult for abuse to occur and remain hidden. Our vision at Lowanna College is one of commitment to high expectations and the belief that students will achieve excellence in their endeavours. Our School Motto, 'Broader Horizons' serves to enrich this vision. At Lowanna College we value respectful relationships. As such, Lowanna College has a set of behaviour norms for all members of the College community, inclusive of staff, students and parents. These behaviour norms are based on the value of mutual respect.

The following are the strategies that Lowanna College will implement to ensure a culture of child safety at our school:

1. To communicate the commitment to child safety to staff, child safety will be a regular item in staff meetings, be included in staff induction processes, be tabled regularly as an agenda item in College Council meetings, and be displayed on posters around the school.

2. To communicate the commitment to child safety to students and families, child safety will be tabled regularly as an agenda item in Student Representative Council meetings, displayed on posters around the school, regularly published in the College newsletter, and published in policies displayed on the College website.
3. Lowanna College will engage only the most suitable people to work with children and have high quality staff and volunteer supervision and professional development;
4. To check suitability for employment and working with children, Lowanna College will follow the guidelines as set out in our 'Volunteers Policy', 'Visitors Policy' and 'Procedures To Maintain Registers Policy'.
5. All members of the teaching service are mandated by law to report signs of physical and sexual abuse and neglect, as detailed in our 'Child Safety Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures'. The 'Child Safety Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures' also details how Lowanna College will ensure members of the teaching service are aware of their obligations for mandatory reporting.
6. Allegations of abuse or safety concerns will be made to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in accordance with mandatory reporting procedures.
7. The College Principal will ensure appropriate supervision for all classes, excursions, camps and activities within the school environment in adherence with relevant school and DET policies and procedures.
8. All staff, volunteers and visitors of Lowanna College have an obligation to read and agree to the College 'Child Safety Code of Conduct'. This is monitored and recorded by the College Principal.
9. To support children who disclose or report abuse, Lowanna College will:
 - a. Work to 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 issues;
 - b. Remain committed to listening and responding to the views and concerns of students, particularly if they are telling us that they or another child has been abused or that they are worried about their safety/the safety of another child;
 - c. Support or assist children who disclose child abuse, or are otherwise linked to suspected child abuse, by:
 - i. establishing regular communication between staff and the child's parent/ guardian/carer (if this is appropriate) to discuss a child's wellbeing and the effectiveness of planned strategies;
 - ii. convene a Student Support Group to plan ongoing monitoring, support, and follow-up of the child's health and wellbeing; and
 - iii. develop and implement a Student Support Plan, which documents the planned support strategies and includes timeframes for review (where possible, these support strategies should be informed by allied health and wellbeing professional with expertise in addressing child abuse and trauma).
10. All allegations of abuse and safety concerns will be reported to the College Principal. The information will be documented and stored securely. Updates will be added to this document and relevant stakeholders informed.

Code of Conduct:

School leaders and managers 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 College 'Child Safety Code of Conduct'. This sets out clear awareness of the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.

All new staff are required to sign the Victorian Institute of Teaching Victorian Teachers Professional Codes of Conduct and Ethics within seven days of employment, and existing staff are required to sign this annually. The College Principal will monitor and kept records of this.

The 'Child Safety Code of Conduct' can be found on the [Lowanna College website](#).

Human Resources Practices and Training:

Lowanna College applies best practice standards in the recruitment and screening of staff, and will take all reasonable steps to ensure that it engages the most suitable and appropriate people to work with children.

We will ensure that staff induction, education and training programs are a vital part of our commitment to safeguarding children and young people from abuse and neglect. All prospective staff and volunteers are required to undergo National Criminal History Records check and maintain a valid Working with Children Check.

The policy and procedures used in the process of recruiting and screening of staff is the responsibility of the Human Resources Coordinator, and is detailed within the 'Procedures To Maintain Registers Policy'.

Reporting a Child Safety Concern or Complaint:

Lowanna College has clear expectations for staff and volunteers in making a report about a child or young person who may be in need of protection. Immediate action should include reporting their concerns to the DHHS Child Protection 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. The school will take action to respond to a complaint.

The school's policy and procedures for reporting a child safety concern or complaint can be found in the 'Child Safety Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures'.

Risk Reduction and Management:

Lowanna College believes the wellbeing of children and young people is paramount, and is vigilant in ensuring proper risk management processes. The College recognises there are potential risks to children and young people and will take a risk management approach by undertaking preventative measures. Risk management processes are reviewed annually or pre/post events, excursions, and incidents.

The school's approach to Child Safety risk reduction and management can be found in the 'Child Safe Risk Assessment Policy'.

Listening to Children:

Lowanna College 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, engagement that informs safe school operations, and builds the capability of children and parents/carers to understand their rights and their responsibilities. Lowanna College promotes student voice through School Council and through thorough classroom discussions around risks and events.

When the College 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 of things and take them seriously, check understanding and keep the child (or their parents/carers) informed about progress.

The school's approach to empowering the student voice can be found in the 'Student Engagement and Inclusion Policy'.

Confidentiality and Privacy:

Lowanna College collects, uses and discloses information about particular children and their families in accordance with Victorian privacy law. The collection, use and storage of information is included in the College "Privacy Policy".

Evaluation:

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure consistency with any advice or instruction received from the DET.

This policy was last ratified by College Council on 11 December 2018.