



Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

1. Commitment to Child Safety

All students participating in Southern Independent School ('SIS') events have the right to feel safe and be safe. The wellbeing of children at SIS events will always be our first priority and we do not and will not tolerate child abuse. We aim to create a child-safe and child-friendly environment where children are free to enjoy life to the full without any concern for their safety.

Child Safety is a shared responsibility. Every person involved in our association has an important role in promoting child safety and wellbeing and promptly raising any issues or concerns about a child's safety.

Particular attention is given to the child safety needs of Aboriginal students, those from culturally and linguistically diverse 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 asexual (LGBTQIA+) and other students experiencing risk of vulnerability. Inappropriate or harmful behaviour targeting students based on these or other characteristics are not tolerated at SIS.

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

2. Purpose

The Southern Independent School's Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy demonstrates our commitment to creating and maintaining a child safe and child-friendly association.

This policy provides an overview of SIS's approach to implementing Ministerial Order 1359 which sets out the application of the Victorian Child Safe Standards.

3. Definitions

"Child" means a child or young person who is under the age of 18 years.

Source: *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic).

For the purpose of this policy reference to "Child" includes those over the age of 18 years who are enrolled students at a Member School.

"Child Abuse" includes any act committed against a child involving:

- (a) any act committed against a child involving:
 - (1) a sexual offence
 - (2) grooming offences under section 49M(1) of the *Crimes Act 1958*
- (b) the infliction, on a child of:
 - (1) physical violence
 - (2) serious emotional or psychological harm
- (c) the serious neglect of a child including exposure to family violence and its effects.

Source: *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic).

"Child Related Work" means:

- (a) work at or for a service, body or place, or that involves a specific activity; and

(b) that usually involves direct contact with a child.

Source: *Worker Screening Act 2020* (Vic)

“Child Safety” includes 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 suspicions, incidents, disclosures or allegations of child abuse.

Source: *Ministerial Order 1359*.

“Duty of Care” refers to the obligation of all staff working with children to take reasonable steps to protect them from reasonably foreseeable harm.

Source: *Child Safe Standards Definition*.

“Grooming” is when a person engages in predatory conduct to prepare a child or young person for sexual activity at a later time.

Grooming can include communicating or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent or carer.

Source: *Child Safe Standards Definition*.

“Mandatory Reporting” is the legal requirement for certain professional groups to report a reasonable belief of child physical or sexual abuse to child protection authorities.

A full definition and Southern Independent School’s policy framework on Mandatory Reporting can be found in the Southern Independent Schools Child Protection – Reporting Obligations Policy available here.

“Member Schools” refers all agreed participants in Southern Independent School’s association. Current member schools are listed on the SIS website:

“School Environment” means any of the following physical, online or virtual places used during or outside schools hours:

- (a) A campus of the school.
- (b) Online or virtual school environments made available or authorised by the school governing authority for use by a child or student (including email, intranet systems, software applications, collaboration tools, and online services)
- (c) Other locations provided by the school or through a third-party provider for a child or student to use including, but not limited to, locations used for:
 - (1) Camps;
 - (2) approved homestay accommodation;
 - (3) delivery of education and training such as registered training organisations, TAFE, non-school senior secondary providers or another school; or
 - (4) sporting events, excursions, competitions or other events.

Source: *Ministerial Order 1359*.

“SIS Committee” refers to the committee detailed on the SIS website. The Committee includes the:

- President
- Vice-President
- Executive Secretary
- Sports Coordinator
- Cultural Coordinator

“SIS Event” refers to any event solely organised and coordinated by the association.

SIS Event specifically excludes any training sessions or events managed by a Member School.

“Staff of Member Schools” for the purpose of this policy means an individual working in a member school who is:

- (a) directly engaged by the member school; or
- (b) a contracted service provider of the member school engaged to perform child-related work; or
- (c) a minister of religion, a religious leader or an employee or officer of a religious body associated with a member school.

Source: *Ministerial Order 1359*.

“Volunteer” means a person who performs work without remuneration or reward for the school or school boarding premises in the school environment or school boarding premises environment.

Source: *Ministerial Order 1359*.

4. Scope

This Policy:

- (a) applies to all staff, volunteers and contractors of SIS and its Member Schools;
- (b) applies in all physical and online environments used by students for the purpose of an SIS event;
- (c) Should be read together with other SIS policies, procedures and documents.

5. Policy Principles & Commitments

5.1. Cultural Safety, Diversity & Equity

As a child safe association, Southern Independent Schools celebrates the rich diversity of the students, families, and communities of our member schools and promote respectful environments that are free from discrimination. SIS has a zero-tolerance policy towards racism.

Full information on SIS's commitment to cultural safety, diversity, and inclusion can be found in the Southern Independent Schools Cultural Safety, Diversity & Inclusion Policy available [here](#).

5.2. Student Empowerment

Member School's are expected to engage with their students on Child Safety as required by the Victorian Child Safe Standards and provide feedback to SIS where it relates to SIS events and/or SIS Policies and Procedures.

Where a student requires further information or clarification on their rights with respect to Child Safety, they are encouraged to speak to their relevant school in the first instance, however, may contact the SIS committee (see contact details [here](#)) should further assistance be required.

5.3. Family Engagement

Families and Member School communities have an important role in monitoring and promoting children's safety and wellbeing and helping children to raise any concerns.

To support family engagement SIS are committed to providing families and the community with accessible information about our child safe policies and procedures and involving them in our approach to child safety and wellbeing.

All Child Safe policies are made available to families on the SIS website and SIS support encourage families to review these documents and communicate any feedback or concerns via a Member School or by contacting the SIS committee directly (see contact details here).

5.4. Child Safety Knowledge, Skills & Awareness

Ongoing training and education is essential to ensuring an ongoing understanding of roles and responsibilities in Child Safety.

Member Schools are required to ensure staff and volunteers are provided with Child Safety training annually, as a minimum. The SIS Committee may request evidence of this as part of their Child Safety review process.

The SIS Committee communicates any shared learning opportunities to Member Schools.

5.5. Suitability of Staff & Volunteers

SIS does not currently directly recruit or employ staff. In the event a direct engagement of staff by SIS is required robust child safe recruitment, induction, training and supervision practices will be applied to ensure that all staff, contractors, and volunteers are suitable to work with children. These practices will be outlined in Policy and Procedure prior to any recruitment.

SIS requires Member School's who staff, contractors and volunteers who will be in attendance at SIS events on the Member School's behalf ensure their suitability to perform child-related work and, as a minimum:

- (a) Sight, verify and record the person's Working with Children clearance or equivalent background check such as a Victorian teaching registration;
- (b) Collect and record:
 - Proof of the person's identity and any professional or other qualifications.
 - The person's history of working with children
 - References that address suitability to work with children.
- (c) Provide a full induction on all Victorian Child Safe Standards.

Members School's must supervise staff engaged in child-connected work to ensure that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate. The SIS Committee may request evidence of this as part of their Child Safety review process

Inappropriate behaviour towards children and young people will be managed swiftly and in accordance with SIS and Member School's policies and legal obligations. Child Safety and Wellbeing will be paramount.

For additional information see Southern Independent School's Child Protection – Reporting Obligations Policy available here.

5.6. Support for Affected Students

Support for the affected students ultimately rests with the relevant Member School. The SIS Committee will confirm with the relevant Member School to ensure students have been offered the necessary support following a Child Safe incident.

Should a student feel they are not being adequately supported they may contact the SIS Committee, who will then liaise with the Member School.

5.7. Child Safety Complaints

SIS fosters a culture that encourages students, parents or carers, staff, contractors and volunteers 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.

Clear pathways for raising complaints and concerns and responding are documented in the Southern Independent School Complaints Handling Policy, available [here](#).

Child Safety Complaints will be promptly investigated by the Committee and any relevant Member School.

5.8. Continuous Improvement

SIS are committed to continually improving and strengthening our Child Safe Program. To ensure our improvements are reflective of those engaged with SIS the following inform our improvement plans:

- (a) Member Schools feedback
- (b) Student feedback
- (c) Parent or Carer feedback
- (d) Community feedback
- (e) Review of Child Safety Incidents
- (f) Review of Legislation updates
- (g) Professional Development & Learning
- (h) Best Practice models

6. Child Safety Code of Conduct

Our Child Safety Code of Conduct set the boundaries and expectations for appropriate behaviours between adults and students. It also clarifies behaviours that are not acceptable at SIS Events or within our association.

The Southern Independent School Child Safety Code of Conduct is available [here](#).

7. Responsibilities

Everyone in attendance at an SIS event has a responsibility to understand the important and specific role they play individually and collectively to ensure the wellbeing and safety of all students is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make.

SIS has allocated roles and responsibilities for child safety as follows:

7.1. SIS Committee

The SIS committee work to ensure the development of preventative and proactive strategies that promote a culture of openness, awareness of and shared responsibility for Child Safety. Responsibilities include:

- (a) Creating and maintaining a strong child safe culture where children and young people feel safe and are safe.
- (b) Upholding high principles and standards for all Member Schools.
- (c) Enabling inclusive practices where the diverse needs of all students are considered.
- (d) Promote regular open discussion on child safety issues with SIS and Member School's communities.

- (e) Modelling and reinforcing appropriate behaviours between adults and children and young people.
- (f) Creating and maintaining 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.
- (g) Ensuring that SIS meets the specific requirements of Ministerial Order 1359.

7.2. Member Schools

Member Schools responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- (a) Adhering to SIS Policies and Procedures.
- (b) Maintaining individual School compliance with Ministerial Order 1359.
- (c) Advising the SIS Committee of any Child Safety concerns arising from an SIS event.

7.3. Member School Staff, Volunteers & Contractors.

Responsibilities of Member School Staff, Volunteers & Contractors include, but are not limited to:

- (a) Acting in accordance with SIS policies and procedures.
- (b) Modelling and reinforcing appropriate behaviours between adults and children and young people.
- (c) Ensuring all child safety complaints are raised.
- (d) Ensuring students' views are taken seriously and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives.
- (e) Modelling inclusive practices that respond to the diverse needs of students.
- (f) Participating in all Child Safe Training offered.

8. Privacy and Information Sharing

SIS collects, uses and discloses information about children and their families in accordance with Victorian privacy laws, and other relevant laws. For more information refer to the Southern Independent School Privacy Policy available [here](#).

9. Record Management

Records related to Child Safety Incidents are maintained by the SIS Secretary.

Records relating to specific students or staff, volunteers and/or contractors will be shared with the relevant Member School. Further distribution will be on a need-to-know basis and determined by the SIS committee.

Records are maintained in accordance with the Public Records Office Victoria Standards and only disposed of in accordance with the law.

10. Risk Management

SIS are committed to proactively and systematically identifying and assessing risks to student safety and reducing or eliminating (where possible) all potential sources of harm.

We document, implement, monitor and periodically review our risk management strategies for child safety and ensure that the strategies change as needed and as new risks arise.

11. Consultation

SIS consults with all Member Schools in the development of Policies and Procedures and welcomes feedback from students, parents or carers or the wider SIS community.

12. Review & Approval

This policy is to be reviewed, approved and endorsed annually, as a minimum, by the SIS Committee.

Last Review: July 2023.

Next Review: July 2024.