



ST MARY'S COLLEGE
THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

UNDER-18 SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

1. Purpose

This document outlines the College's commitment to creating a safe organisation for all Under-18 persons. It sets out the College's approach to providing the highest level of protection for Under-18 persons in its care and provides information and guidance on how the safety of Under 18 persons will be managed by the College (**Policy**).

This Policy takes into account relevant legislative requirements within the state of Victoria, including the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards as set out in Ministerial Order No. 870.

2. Statement of Commitment

As an academic residential community, the College is strongly committed to ensuring that all its members, guests and visitors can enjoy an environment that is safe and free from danger and risk as far as reasonably practicable.

This commitment extends to creating and maintaining a safe culture and environment for all Under-18 persons. The College pays particular attention to those who are most vulnerable, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and children with a disability.

The abuse of Under-18 persons is not tolerated by the College.

3. Definitions

The following definitions apply for the purpose of this Policy and the Under-18 Safe Environment Code of Conduct:

- **Child** means any person who is under the age of 18 years.
- **Child abuse** means any act committed against a child involving a sexual offence or grooming for sexual conduct, the infliction of physical violence, serious emotional and psychological abuse or the serious neglect of a child.
- **Child-connected work** means work authorised by the College and performed by an adult in the College environment while Under-18 persons are present or reasonably expected to be present.

- **Child safety** means matters relating to protecting all Under-18 persons from child abuse, managing the risk of child abuse, providing support to Under-18 persons at risk of child abuse, and responding to incidents or allegations of child abuse.
- **External Group** means external teachers, supervisors, coaches, mentors or similar who are not College Staff and Volunteers that utilise the College facilities from time to time and are engaged in child-connected work.
- **Staff and Volunteers** means all individuals working at the College, whether as an employee, tutor, student mentor, elected student leader, volunteer or contractor.
- **Under-18 person** means a child being any person under the age of 18.
- **Under-18 person Safety Officer** means the person appointed by the College to manage the child safety reporting process.

4. Application

This Policy applies to College Staff and Volunteers.

There are three groups of Under-18 persons that are potentially connected with the College:

- (1) First year undergraduate residents who are under 18 when they take up residence at the College. At the time of entry in February this is usually a group of about 5-10 students, who in almost all cases become 18 in the course of the year.
- (2) The children of resident members of staff. There are currently no such children in the College but there have been in the past and could well be again in the future. It is likely that such children would interact with older members of the community to varying degrees.
- (3) Under-18 persons who are part of groups, such as secondary schools and sporting teams, who make use of the College facilities during the summer vacation period. In most cases they reside at the College for one or more nights under the supervision of members of staff or volunteers associated with the organisations who have organised the visit.

5. Principles: The right to child safety and participation

The College is required to comply with the seven Child Safe Standards established by the Victorian Government. The standards are as follows:

Standard 1: Strategies to embed an organizational culture of child safety

Standard 2: Child Safety Policy / Statement of Commitment

Standard 3: Child Safety Code of Conduct

Standard 4 School staff selection, supervision and management practices for a child-safe environment

Standard 5: Procedures for responding to and reporting allegations of suspected child abuse

Standard 6: Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse

Standard 7: Strategies to promote child empowerment and participation

To strengthen its existing approach to preventing and responding to child abuse, the College values the involvement of Under-18 persons within the College in dealing with College affairs. The College encourages Under-18 persons to express their opinions and provides opportunities for the voice of those persons to be heard and considered.

Further, the College encourages all Staff and Volunteers as well as any other individuals involved with the College, including parents, carers, guardians or friends of Under-18 persons at the College to raise concerns about child safety and be confident that they will be taken seriously.

6. The College's Values

- The College is a values-based and diverse community that is committed to building a strong culture of child safety.
- Through its leadership, and by involving all residents actively in its affairs, the College strives to ensure an ethical and values-driven environment that is characterised by respect and the dignity of each individual.
- The College's values are prominently displayed and implanted in its residents through an educational process.
- The College has an Under-18 Safe Environment Code of Conduct which sets out the appropriate standards of behaviour for adults interacting with Under-18 persons at the College.
- The Under-18 Safe Environment Code of Conduct refers explicitly to a safe environment for Under-18 persons and establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour around children.

7. Recruiting staff, volunteers and student leaders

- The College has developed a Standard Operating Procedure for Recruitment and Ongoing Management of staff to ensure a Safe Environment for Under-18s which

applies best practice standards for recruitment and screening of staff, volunteers and student leaders.

- The College makes all reasonable efforts when recruiting and selecting Staff and Volunteers involved in child-connected work to:
 - confirm they hold a valid Working with Children Check or similar check (where required by law);
 - confirm, via a National Police Check, that they do not have any convictions for child related offences;
 - undertake a reference check that addresses the person's suitability for the job;
 - examine the person's history of working with Under-18 persons; and
 - verify the applicant's personal identity and professional or other qualifications (where applicable).
- The College will periodically monitor and review the status of Working with Children Checks and other applicable professional requirements to ensure they remain up to date.
- All groups visiting the College are required to be under the supervision of appropriately qualified responsible adults, who must be in possession of a valid Working with Children Check.

8. Expectations of staff, volunteers and student leaders

- Everyone employed or volunteering at the College has a responsibility to understand the role he/she plays individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all Under-18 persons is observed at all times.
- The College expects its Staff and Volunteers to proactively ensure the safety of Under-18 persons at all times and to take appropriate action if there are concerns about the safety of any Under-18 person at the College.
- All College Staff and Volunteers must remain familiar, and comply, with relevant laws, the Under-18 Safe Environment Code of Conduct, the Fair Treatment Policy, and other policies and procedures in relation to the protection of Under-18 persons.

9. Training of staff and volunteers

- The College will ensure that staff and volunteers involved in child-related work receive appropriate guidance and specific training in relation to:
 - their individual and collective obligations and responsibilities for managing the risk of child abuse;
 - their obligations in relation to child safety under this Policy, the Under-18 Safe Environment Code of Conduct, and the Fair Treatment Policy;

- guidance and strategies on how to meet these obligations;
 - guidance in relation to the processes for responding to, and reporting, suspected child abuse;
 - guidance on expected standards of conduct, including acceptable and unacceptable behaviours when interacting with Under-18 persons;
 - the specific risks of child abuse in the College environment; and
 - understanding the nature and signs of child abuse and how to identify abuse, prevent it, and protect children from harm.
- This training will be initially provided at induction and the College will thereafter provide ongoing training and professional development in relation to child safety.

10. Specific Risks to Child Safety at the College

Under-18 persons

As detailed above, the College has identified three primary groups of Under-18 persons that are connected with the College:

1. First year undergraduate residents who are under 18 when they take up residence at the College.
2. The children of resident members of staff of the College.
3. Persons under-18 who are part of groups, such as secondary schools and sporting teams, who make use of the College facilities.

Alcohol and drugs

- The College has identified alcohol and drugs as a potential risk factor to child safety at the College.
- The College obtains a liquor licence for events when appropriate and has in place all measures required to comply with this licence relating to Under-18 persons.
- The College will make all reasonable attempts to ensure these measures are strictly observed.
- All members of the College involved in the organising and serving of alcohol will be trained and in possession of the necessary qualifications.
- The College has zero tolerance of illicit drugs.
- The College will make all reasonable attempts to ensure that the measures outlined in this policy are strictly observed.

- This includes creating safe environments where alcohol is consumed outside officially sanctioned events and taking all possible measures to ensure that there is no possession or consumption of illegal drugs at the College.

Cyber, online and mobile phone safety

- The College has identified that the use of technology is a potential risk factor to child safety at the College.
- The College acknowledges that Under-18 persons are particularly vulnerable in the online environment and will, so far as practicable, keep up-to-date with changes in the online environment to limit the risk to Under-18 persons at the College.

11. Risk management

- The College will include the safety of Under-18 persons as a fixed element in its risk management procedures and risk management assessment matrix.
- The College has the following procedures in place to manage the specific risks to child safety at the College:
 - Policy for Management of Under-18 students at a student event where alcohol is served
 - Under-18 Safe Environment Policy for External Groups
 - Policy for Recruitment and Ongoing Management of staff to ensure a Safe Environment for Under-18s
- The College will document, implement, monitor and periodically review its risk management strategies for child safety and report the outcomes to Council.
- The College will proactively manage this process to ensure that the strategies change as needed and as any new risks arise in the future.

12. Responding to and reporting suspected child abuse

- The College will use the specific reporting processes incorporated at Schedule 1: Reporting Obligations for Child Abuse of the Colleges Fair Treatment Policy and procedures.
- The College will ensure it complies with legal obligations that relate to managing the risk of child abuse under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)* and the *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)*.
- The College also has established internal processes to ensure that appropriate action is taken to respond to concerns about the wellbeing and/or safety of a children and Under-

18 persons as set out in the Processes for Responding to and Reporting Suspected Child Abuse.

- The College has appointed an Under-18 person Safety Officer to manage the process of responding to a report of suspected child abuse. The Under-18 person Safety Officer is Mrs Brenda Renfrew, the College Secretary. Mrs Renfrew can be contacted on 03 9349 9502.

Record keeping

- The College records any breaches of this Policy, the Under-18 Safe Environment Policy for External Groups, the Under-18 Safe Environment Code of Conduct, or any other child safety complaints disclosures that relate to child safety, and stores the records in accordance with security and privacy requirements.
- The College keeps a confidential record of all action taken, including any internal investigations and reports made to statutory or professional bodies.

13. Management of this Policy

Time-line of implementation

- In developing and implementing the policy the College has worked together with the other Colleges of the University of Melbourne and with the University itself.

Who is responsible for this policy?

- The overall responsibility for the implementation and development of this policy is borne by the Principal.
- The day-to-day supervision of the policy is in hands of the Under-18 person Safety Officer, Mrs. Brenda Renfrew, who can be contacted on 03 9349 9502.

Review of this Policy

- The College is committed to continuous improvement of our child safety systems and practices.
- We intend this policy to be a dynamic document that will be regularly reviewed, to ensure it is working in practice and updated to accommodate changes in legislation or circumstance.

Communication of this Policy

A copy of this Policy will be available:

1. on the College website; and
2. at the College office.

Related College Policies

- Under-18 Safe Environment Code of Conduct
- Processes for Responding to and Reporting Suspected Child Abuse
- Under-18 Safe Environment Policy for External Groups
- Policy for Recruitment and Ongoing Management of staff to ensure a Safe Environment for Under-18s
- Policy for Management of Under-18 students at a student event where alcohol is served
- St Marys' College Community Expectations Document
- Student Handbook

Guidelines relating to this Policy are included in the College Handbook or available upon request to office@stmarys.unimelb.edu.au