

Child Safety

Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy

February 2022



Context

As a Catholic school and a Ministry of Mercy Education Ltd, Our Lady of Mercy College (OLMC) has a mission-driven, moral and legal responsibility to build and nurture child-safe school environments and to take every precaution to protect children and young people from all forms of harm and abuse.

Our Mission, Vision and Values statement attests to our commitment to nurturing a school environment where students are respected, their voices are heard and they feel safe. This policy gives expression to these commitments and to the College's steadfast resolve to provide a safe and secure environment for students.

Purpose and Scope

This policy complements OLMC's Child Safety Policy but differs from it in that it applies primarily to students. The College seeks to ensure that students understand what being safe means, also, that they accept shared responsibility for promoting and supporting child safety as a priority at OLMC.

Principles

- All students deserve, as a fundamental right, safety and protection from all forms of abuse and neglect.
- The College is committed to providing an inclusive education which values the dignity and differences in each student and which celebrates diversity and difference.
- All students have the right to a thorough and systematic education in all aspects of personal safety.
- All adults in our College, including teaching and non-teaching staff, clergy, volunteers, contractors and College Council members, have a responsibility to care for students, to positively promote their wellbeing and to protect them from any kind of harm or abuse.
- OLMC's policies, guidelines and codes of conduct for the care, wellbeing and protection of students are based on honest, respectful and trusting relationships between adults and young people. They also demonstrate compliance with legislative requirements and cooperation with the Church, governments, the police and human services agencies.
- All persons involved in situations where harm is suspected or disclosed will be treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect.
- Students are strongly encouraged to raise concerns about their safety or that of their peers, knowing these will be taken seriously by the staff member to whom they

share their concerns. Appropriate confidentiality will be maintained, with information being provided to those who have a right or a need to be informed, either legally or pastorally.

Policy Commitments

Our commitment to students

- (a) We commit to the safety and wellbeing of all students enrolled at OLMC.
- (b) We commit to providing students with positive and nurturing experiences.
- (c) We commit to listening to students and empowering them by taking their views seriously, and addressing any concerns that they raise with us.
- (d) We commit to taking action to ensure that students are protected from abuse or harm.
- (e) We commit to teaching students the necessary skills and knowledge to understand and maintain their personal safety and wellbeing.
- (f) We commit to seeking input and feedback from students regarding the creation of a safe school environment.

Understanding Risks to Child Safety

At OLMC, through our curriculum and pastoral program, we will assist students to understand, identify, discuss and report child safety risks and harmful behaviours. The following conceptual definitions of child safety risks and harmful behaviours will be applied:

Sexual offence – when a person involves a child in sexual activity, or deliberately puts the child in the presence of sexual behaviours that are exploitative or inappropriate to the child’s age and development.

Grooming – predatory conduct undertaken by an adult (18 years or over) to prepare a child for sexual activity at a later time.

Family violence: Family violence is defined under the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic.) to include behaviour that causes a child to hear, witness or be exposed to the effects of family violence such as abusive, threatening, controlling or coercive behaviour. While family violence does not form part of the official definition of ‘child abuse’ in the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic.), the impact of family violence on a child can be a form of child abuse, for example, where it causes serious emotional or psychological harm to a child. A child can also be a direct victim of family violence.

Student sexual offending. Refers to sexual behaviour that is led by a student 10 years and over which may amount to a sexual offence.

Physical violence – when a child suffers or is likely to suffer significant harm from a non-accidental injury or injuries inflicted by another person.

Serious emotional or psychological harm – when a child is repeatedly rejected, isolated or frightened by threats or the witnessing of family violence. It can also result from conduct that exploits a child, such as encouraging a child to engage in inappropriate or risky behaviours.

Serious neglect – a failure to provide a child with an adequate standard of nutrition, medical care, clothing, shelter or supervision to the extent that the health and physical development of the child is significantly impaired or placed at serious risk.

Child abuse – this includes any act committed against a child/young person involving:

- a sexual offence
- grooming
- physical violence
- serious emotional or psychological harm
- serious neglect.

Student Responsibilities

We expect that our students will accept shared responsibility for child safety and promote this priority throughout the College. In practice, this means that each student is strongly encouraged to observe the following procedures:

1. If you have been abused or feel unsafe, you can tell a teacher or any adult at OLMC. All school staff members have a responsibility to protect students under their care. They will be able to help you.
2. If you think someone has been abused or is unsafe (for example, a friend, another student, a sibling), you should talk to an adult you trust. Any staff member at OLMC will be able to help.
3. You can assist the other student, your friend or a sibling by encouraging them to tell a trusted adult. Even if the student/your friend/your sibling has specifically asked you not to tell an adult, you still should.

In sharing your concerns, know that:

- The adult will listen to your concerns and help you.
- Information will only be shared with people who can support and protect you.
- In some cases, the people helping you are required by law to tell the police, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFS) Child Protection services and/or your family to prevent any further abuse, or risk of abuse.

The College has a Code of Conduct that applies to all staff, volunteers, contractors, clergy and Council members. It is titled *Safeguarding Children and Young People Code of Conduct* and is accessible from the College website under About Us/Student Safety. If you are concerned about a staff member's behaviour or actions, you are encouraged to refer to this as a guide for discerning the appropriateness of the staff member's behaviour. Even if the particular behaviour you are concerned about is not listed in the Code of Conduct, we encourage you to report your concerns to a trusted adult within the College.

Review of this Policy

At OLMC we are committed to continuous improvement of our student safety systems and practices. We intend this policy to be a dynamic document that will be regularly reviewed to ensure it is effective. In this process, the views of our students will be sought and we will provide opportunities to facilitate this.

Related Policies

OLMC College Policies

- Safeguarding Children and Young People Code of Conduct
- Mercy Education Ltd & OLMC Code of Conduct for Staff and Volunteers
- Counselling Services Policy
- Child Protection Reporting Obligations

- Mercy Education Ltd & OLMC Privacy Policy
- Student Acceptable Use of Digital Technologies, Devices and Social Media Policy
- Student Anti Bullying Policy
- Student Wellbeing Policy
- Staff Responsible Use of Social Media Policy
- Visitors on Campus Policy

Approval Authority:	College Leadership Team
Person Responsible:	Head of Student Wellbeing
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