

STANDARD 7

Strategies to Promote the Participation & Empowerment of Children at Newport Gardens Primary School

Rationale

- It must be acknowledged that a significant power imbalance exists between children and adults. Specific efforts must be taken to ensure the voices of children are heard. Enabling and promoting the participation of children has many benefits including:
 - demonstrating a commitment to upholding the rights of children
 - providing you with the opportunity to check that what the school is doing is actually what children want
 - strengthening the commitment of children to the school
 - building the communication and leadership skills of children
 - building cultural understanding and respect
 - enhancing the safety of children
- When children are respected and valued, they are much more likely to speak up about issues of safety and wellbeing. If children feel they cannot express themselves in the school, there is a risk that any harm that is occurring will remain undiscovered and ongoing.
- Becoming a child safe organisation means developing strategies to communicate and engage with all children who are involved with the school. It is important to ask children when they feel safe, and when they feel unsafe – their comments may surprise you.
- To create a true child safe organisation, it makes sense to ask those you are trying to protect when they feel safe and when they feel unsafe. Their comments and insight will always be different from the adult perspective. Well-intentioned people put policies and procedures aimed at protecting children in place, yet it is rare that children know these policies exist.
- Often children do not know what to do if they feel unsafe or are concerned about something.
- The concept of 'safety' is very broad and means different things to different people, especially children. It is much easier to understand the concept of 'physical' safety and the need for safe practices around hygiene, road and water safety, slippery surfaces, pool fencing, sign-in and sign-out procedures and staff supervision ratios. All of these contribute to the physical protection of children.
- In a child safe organisation, we also want to promote 'psychological' safety.
- Even if the physical environment is as safe as we can make it, when children feel unsafe we need to understand why and respond to their needs. Psychological safety means children feel valued, respected and cared for. They know they can speak to people if they feel unsafe or unhappy, and that something will be done to address their concerns. Knowing this increases their self-esteem, which boosts their confidence and empowers them to speak up when necessary.
- Children also contribute valuable insight and ideas towards the creation of a meaningful child safe organisation. Children may be able to identify strengths, weaknesses, risks and dangers in activities that may not be identified by other methods.
- Children must be empowered to understand their rights, recognise what abuse is and understand it is not 'okay' and that they can do something about it.

Purpose

- To ensure Newport Gardens Primary School complies with the legislative requirements of MO 870.
- To ensure the school demonstrates its commitment to creating a child safe culture.
- To ensure the school develops strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children that are compliant with the Child Safe Standard 7.
- To ensure the promotion of:
 - the cultural safety of Aboriginal children
 - the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
 - the safety of children with a disability

Implementation

- The promotion of a child safe culture is this school's highest priority.
- Over a period of time, children's views will be sought by:
 - consulting directly with children about what they think makes the school safe for them
 - giving children age-appropriate information about the standards of care they are entitled to, particularly about their rights
 - teaching children how to raise concerns, make complaints or let someone know they feel unsafe
 - regularly checking with parents and children that they are aware of relevant child safe policies and procedures and that the child safety culture is visible.
- The school envisages that some of the strategies and possible outcomes will be:

Consulting & Talking with Children	Practical Suggestions	Possible Positive Outcomes
Establish what safety means to children Ask children when they feel safe and when they feel unsafe.	Ensure the physical environment is safe, warm and friendly towards children.	Children's insight and responses will inform the development of the Child Safe Policy, Code of Conduct and complaints management process. The school will be alerted to any physical danger in the environment.
Educate children about their rights	Run informal education sessions on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Teach children that with every right they enjoy, they need to meet its corresponding responsibility. Undertake activities on rights versus wants.	Children will understand their basic human rights and also understand they need to meet their responsibilities. Children will know the difference between a 'right' and a 'want'.
Include children in policy development	Explain what the school is attempting to do and ask the children for their ideas, opinions and suggestions. Run small discussion groups, and provide refreshments and activities. Give regular breaks.	The school will have a Child Safe Policy that children understand and which represents their suggestions. Practical suggestions will be contributing to a physically safe environment.
Encourage children to develop their own Code of Conduct	Ask children what is acceptable behaviour and what is unacceptable behaviour. This includes behaviour of adults towards children, of children towards adults and of children towards children. Formulate a code of conduct using 'DO' and 'DO NOT' or 'WE WILL' and 'WE WILL NOT' statements.	The school will have a child friendly Code of Conduct written by children for children. The school will have guidelines for staff and volunteers about their interactions, expected behaviour and relationships with children.

- The school will utilise existing forums as well as providing other opportunities for input from children. Ideas from children will be sought formally by completion of the annual Student Attitude to School Survey, through the JSC and through informal conversations with small groups lead by the Child Safe Officer and conversations with class teachers.
- The school will encourage the participation of Aboriginal children if applicable, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and children with a disability to participate in school forums.
- The school will know that Standard 7 has been successfully implemented when:
 - reporting procedures for when a child feels unsafe are accessible for all children
 - children understand what child abuse is, and their rights (age appropriate)
 - children understand how to report an allegation of abuse or concern for their safety to the school, a trusted adult and external bodies (for example, the police)
 - children feel safe, empowered and taken seriously if they raise concerns
 - children feel empowered to contribute to the school's understanding and treatment of child safety
 - children's reports of concern are responded to appropriately
 - staff understand how to empower children and encourage their participation

Evaluation

- This Standard will be reviewed as part of the school's three-year review cycle, if an incident occurs or if guidelines change (latest information July 2016).

This document, Standard 7, was ratified by School Council in

References:

Creating a Child Safe Organisation Guide p.50

An Overview of the Victorian Child Safe Standards State of Victoria, DHHS November 2015

And Protect – Identifying All Forms of Child Abuse in Victorian Schools 2016

