

Statement

Giant Steps Melbourne

Commitment to Child Safety



“The School’s policies which are made from time to time are made pursuant to the requirements set out in Schedule 4 clause 12 of the *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017*.”

Reviewed July 2020

COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

Statement

Giant Steps Melbourne has developed the following Child Protection and Safety Policy. This policy is an overarching document that provides key elements of our approach to protecting children from abuse.

The policy forms the foundation of the Giant Steps Melbourne procedures, practices, decision-making processes and ultimately the Giant Steps Melbourne culture with respect to child safety.

It is designed to be published on our public website as well as communicated through other mediums such as newsletters, our annual report and within induction and welcome packs for Giant Steps Melbourne Board Members, Staff and Volunteers.

The following is a Child Protection and Safety Policy that meets the guidelines set out in Standard 2 of the Victorian Child Safe Standards.

Objectives

This policy provides the framework for:

- the development of work systems, practices, policies and procedures that promote child protection within Giant Steps Melbourne;
- the creation of a positive and robust child protection culture;
- the promotion and open discussion of child protection issues within the Giant Steps Melbourne; and
- compliance with all laws, regulations and standards relevant to child protection in Victoria.

Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

At Giant Steps Melbourne we have a zero tolerance for child abuse and are committed to acting in children's best interests and keeping them safe from harm. Giant Steps Melbourne regards its child protection responsibilities with the utmost importance and as such, is committed to providing the necessary resources to ensure compliance with all relevant child protection laws and regulations and maintain a child safe culture.

Child abuse includes sexual offences, grooming, physical violence, serious emotional or psychological harm, serious neglect and a child's exposure to family violence. Giant Steps Melbourne is committed to the protection of all children from all forms of child abuse and demonstrates this commitment through the implementation of a comprehensive Child Protection Program designed to keep children safe.

Legislative Responsibilities

Giant Steps Melbourne including the Board, staff and community takes its legislative responsibilities seriously in regard to all matters of child safety.

Our Policies and Procedures in this area state that all personnel are mandatory reporters and are required to comply with their duties as such.

Irrespective of our legislative requirements, Giant Steps Melbourne is committed to reporting any inappropriate behaviour through the appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

Child Safe Values & Principles

The Giant Steps Melbourne commitment to child safety is based on the following overarching principles that guide the development and regular review of our work systems, practices, policies and procedures to protect children from abuse.

1. All children have the right to be safe.
2. The welfare and best interests of the child are paramount.
3. The views of the child and a child's privacy must be respected.
4. Clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children are established in our Code of Conduct.
5. The safety of children is dependent upon the existence of a child safe culture.
6. Child safety awareness is promoted and openly discussed within our Giant Steps Melbourne community.
7. Procedures are in place to screen all Staff, Direct Contact Volunteers** Third Party Contractors and External Education Providers who have direct contact with children.
8. Child safety and protection is everyone's responsibility.
9. Child protection training is mandatory for all Giant Steps Melbourne Board Members, staff and Direct Contact Volunteers.
10. Procedures for responding to alleged or suspected incidents of child abuse are accessible for all members of the Giant Steps Melbourne community.
11. Children from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds have the right to special care and support including those who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
12. Children who have any kind of disability have the right to special care and support.

***Direct Contact Volunteers are those volunteers who are involved in providing support, guidance and supervision directly to students and could potentially have direct contact with students during the normal course of providing the volunteer service.*

Aims

The aim of this Policy, and related Policies and Procedures, is to:

- Empower our children to be vital and active participants at Giant Steps Melbourne;
- Ensure our staff, including any contractors, and volunteers are committed to providing our students with a child safe environment;
- Ensure that any allegations, concerns or complaints about a child's safety is taken seriously and that each and every one is treated consistently with our procedures regarding such matters; and

- Promote and value the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children and those from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse background.

Our Students

Giant Steps Melbourne is an independent special school for children with Autism. At the forefront of every action that we take or decision that we make, we ensure that our children with Autism are safe, are valued and can participate fully in school life.

We understand that our students have a variety of abilities and levels of understanding and processing of information. We understand that our children have an increased risk and vulnerability of being subject to abuse. This increased risk is due to a number of factors, including communication difficulties, personal care needs and possible intellectual or cognitive disability. We understand that we must be more vigilant and have stronger strategies and controls to counter these risks.

At Giant Steps Melbourne we promote the value that each student must be viewed independently and that staff and volunteers must not make assumptions about the student's ability to understand.

At Giant Steps Melbourne we maintain increased vigilance in identifying indicators or warning signs of possible abuse. We understand that many actions or behaviours that may be signs of abuse by a child without autism, may actually be manifestations of the student's Autism/ co-morbid conditions and/or developmental delay. An example of this may be inappropriate public behaviour, such as touching oneself. Therefore, we maintain records of our students' normal behaviours and are vigilant about identifying any changes in their behaviour.

Irrespective of our students' perceived limitations and abilities, Giant Steps Melbourne will endeavor to:

- Teach our children about their bodies and about being safe in all environments;
- Teach, enable and facilitate independence for all our children in regard to personal care to reduce their risks of abuse in the future; and
- Inform our children about "safe" people and the means to communicate any concerns, allegations or complaints.

Risk Management

Giant Steps Melbourne acknowledges that being a special school for children with autism we have some unique risk factors based on our children's needs and behaviours. Our risk management procedures ensure that these unique factors are included in all areas of risk management.

We have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess and minimize child abuse risks, including risks posed by physical environments and environments outside of school.

The Working with Children Act 2005 (Vic) defines 'direct contact' as any contact between a person and a child (aged under 18) that involves:

- physical contact; or
- face to face contact; or
- contact by post or other written communication; or

- contact by telephone or other oral communication; or
- contact by email or other electronic communication.

Examples of Direct Contact Volunteer activities may include volunteers involved in Giant Steps Melbourne camps and excursions, assisting in learning activities, weekly visitors including hairdressers and assistance dogs.

Child Protection Program

Giant Steps Melbourne is committed to the effective implementation of our Child Protection Program and ensuring that it is appropriately reviewed and updated. We adopt a risk management approach by identifying key risk indicators and assessing child safety risks based on a range of factors including the nature of our Giant Steps Melbourne activities, physical and online environments and the characteristics of the student body.

Our Child Protection Program relates to all aspects of protecting children from abuse and establishes work systems, practices, policies and procedures to protect children from abuse.

It includes:

- clear information as to what constitutes child abuse and associated key risk indicators;
- clear procedures for responding to and reporting allegations of child abuse;
- strategies to support, encourage and enable Staff, Volunteers, Third Party Contractors, External Education Providers, parents and students to understand, identify, discuss and report child protection matters;
- procedures for recruiting and screening Giant Steps Melbourne Board Members, Staff and Direct Contact Volunteers;
- procedures for reporting reportable conduct and/or misconduct;
- pastoral care strategies designed to empower students and keep them safe;
- education programs to support independence and understanding as well as protective behaviours– Becoming Me
- policies with respect to cultural diversity and students with disabilities;
- a child protection training program;
- information regarding the steps to take after a disclosure of abuse to protect, support and assist children;
- guidelines with respect to record keeping and confidentiality;
- policies to ensure compliance with all relevant laws, regulations and standards (including the Victorian Child Safe Standards); and
- a system for continuous review and improvement.

As a part of Giant Steps Melbourne's induction process, all staff and Direct Contact Volunteers are required to complete a selection of training modules on Child Safety, Mandatory Reporting and Reportable Conduct.

All staff, Direct Contact Volunteers and Giant Steps Melbourne Board members are provided with additional, ongoing child protection training at least annually.

Staff, Volunteers, Third Party Contractors and External Education Providers are supported and supervised by the Giant Steps Melbourne Principal to ensure that they are compliant with the Giant Steps Melbourne approach to child protection.

Responsibilities

Child protection is everyone's responsibility. At Giant Steps Melbourne all members of the Giant Steps Melbourne Board and Staff, as well as Volunteers, have a shared responsibility for contributing to the safety and protection of children. Specific responsibilities include:

Giant Steps Melbourne Board

Each member of the Giant Steps Melbourne Board is required to ensure that appropriate resources are made available to allow the Giant Steps Melbourne Child Protection and Safety Policy and the Child Protection Program to be effectively implemented and are responsible for holding the Principal and Management / Executive team accountable for effective implementation.

The Principal

The Principal is responsible, and will be accountable for, taking all practical measures to ensure that this Child Protection and Safety Policy and the Giant Steps Melbourne Child Protection Program are implemented effectively and that a strong and sustainable child protection culture is maintained within Giant Steps Melbourne.

Staff

Giant Steps Melbourne has vigorous human resources and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers. We actively encourage the recruitment of personnel who have a background and are skilled in working with children, especially with children with autism. Our recruitment processes rigorously ensure that our personnel are equipped to deal with challenging behaviour in an appropriate and safe manner and that all staff and volunteers are aware of our legislative responsibilities.

All people engaged in child related work, including volunteers, are required to hold a valid Working with Children Check. Validation of the Check is verified upon the commencement of each person engaged at Giant Steps Melbourne.

Giant Steps Melbourne is committed to regularly training and educating our staff on child abuse risks. Child Safety is included as an agenda item in each weekly Whole School Meeting.

We train our staff to identify, assess and minimize the risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse in our children.

Giant Steps Melbourne takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate such allegations. Staff are trained to deal appropriately with such allegations, including the means by which to communicate with our children and their individual abilities.

Giant Steps Melbourne has a strict Code of Conduct which guides our staff on the standards of conduct required when working with our children. New employees are supervised to ensure they understand our commitment to child safety and to ensure their behaviour is appropriate and conforms to our Code of Conduct.

All staff are required to be familiar with the content of our Child Protection and Safety Policy and our Child Protection Program and their legal obligations with respect to the reporting of child abuse. It is each individual's responsibility to be aware of key risk indicators of child abuse, to be observant, and to raise any concerns they may have relating to child abuse with the Giant Steps Melbourne Principal.

Direct Contact Volunteers

All Direct Contact Volunteers, as defined in this policy, are required to be familiar with the content of our Child Protection and Safety Policy, our Child Protection Program and their legal obligations with respect to the reporting of child abuse.

It is each individual's responsibility to be aware of key risk indicators of child abuse, to be observant, and to raise any concerns they may have relating to child abuse with the Giant Steps Melbourne Principal.

Indirect Contact Volunteers

Indirect Contact Volunteers (or 'Indirect Volunteers') are those volunteers who are involved in providing support and services whilst not directly assisting a specific group of students.

All Indirect Volunteers are responsible for contributing to the safety and protection of children in the Giant Steps Melbourne environment.

All Indirect Volunteers are required by the Giant Steps Melbourne to be familiar with our Child Protection and Safety Policy and our Child Safety Code of Conduct.

Examples of Indirect Contact Volunteer activities may include assisting with Giant Steps Melbourne administrative functions.

Third Party Contractors

All Third Party Contractors (service providers) engaged with Giant Steps Melbourne are responsible for contributing to the safety and protection of children in the Giant Steps Melbourne environment.

Third Party Contractors include, for example, maintenance and building personnel, consultants, casual teachers, tutors, sports coaches and Giant Steps Melbourne cleaners.

This also includes music teachers and other extra-curricular teachers and instructors who are engaged with students and their families directly, rather than Giant Steps Melbourne, but have an agreement with Giant Steps Melbourne to use the Giant Steps Melbourne's facilities

Direct Contact Contractors

Direct Contact Contractors are:

- those who have direct contact** with students during the normal course of their work;
- those who may be in a position to establish a relationship of trust with a student notwithstanding that unsupervised access to students would be rare (for example full-time maintenance personnel); and
- any contractors whom a school is legally required to screen.

The Working with Children Act 2005 (Vic) defines 'direct contact' as any contact between a person and a child (aged under 18) that involves:

- physical contact; or
- face to face contact; or
- contact by post or other written communication; or
- contact by telephone or other oral communication; or
- contact by email or other electronic communication.

Indirect Contact Contractors

Indirect Contact Contractors are those contractors who do not meet the definition of "Direct Contact Contractor". Refer to Third Party Contractors' Responsibilities for more information.

All service providers engaged by Giant Steps Melbourne are required by Giant Steps Melbourne to be familiar with our Child Protection and Safety Policy and our Child Protection Program.

Giant Steps Melbourne may include this requirement in the written agreement between it and the service provider.

External Education Providers

An External Education Provider is any organisation that Giant Steps Melbourne has arranged to deliver a specified course of study that is part of the curriculum, to a student or students enrolled at Giant Steps Melbourne. The delivery of such a course may take place on Giant Steps Melbourne premises or elsewhere.

All External Education Providers engaged by Giant Steps Melbourne are responsible for contributing to the safety and protection of children in the Giant Steps Melbourne environment.

All External Education Providers engaged by Giant Steps Melbourne are required by Giant Steps Melbourne to be familiar with our Child Protection and Safety Policy and our Child Protection Program.

Giant Steps Melbourne may include this requirement in the written agreement between it and the External Education Provider.

Reporting Child Protection Concerns

Our Child Protection Program provides detailed guidance for members of the Giant Steps Melbourne Board, staff and Direct Contact Volunteers as to how to identify key risk indicators of child abuse and how to report child abuse concerns to one of our Giant Steps Melbourne nominated Principal. It also contains detailed procedures with respect to the reporting of child abuse incidents to relevant authorities.

Staff, Third Party Contractors, External Education Providers, Volunteers, students, parents/guardians and other community members who have concerns that a child may be subject to abuse or grooming are asked to contact the Principal or Senior Staff members listed below.

Communications will be treated confidentially.

| Name | Position | Contact Number | Email Address |
|-------------------|----------------------------|----------------|--|
| Kerrie Nelson | Principal | 0423 002 569 | Kerrie.nelson@giantsteps.net.au |
| Catherine Haining | Head of Therapy Services | 0414 323 875 | Catherine.haining@giantsteps.net.au |
| Sam Kershler | Secondary Program Director | 0401 999 983 | Sam.kershler@giantsteps.net.au |

Whenever there are concerns that a child is in immediate danger the Police should be called on 000