Child Safe Standards and workplace learning

A guide for schools

Note: All reference to 'schools' in this guide includes school boarding premises.

The Victorian Government takes the wellbeing and safety of children very seriously.

Victoria's Child Safe Standards (the Standards) strengthen child safe environments and protect children and young people from harm and abuse. The Standards make sure that children and young people in organisations including schools and early childhood settings feel safe and are safe. All Victorian schools are required to take deliberate steps to meet the minimum requirements and strengthen their culture of child safety.

[Ministerial Order 1359 – Implementing the Child Safe Standards – managing the risk of child abuse in schools and school boarding premises](#) provides the framework for child safety in schools.

There are 11 Child Safe Standards, and these apply in all school environments. The school environment includes workplace learning environments where students undertake:

- Work experience
- Structured Workplace Learning
- School community work or volunteering, and
- School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SBATs), including Head Start apprenticeships and traineeships.

Refer to the [definitions resource on PROTECT](#) for definitions of terms used in the Child Safe Standards and Ministerial Order 1359.

For detailed guidance on implementing the Child Safe Standards see: [Schools - guidance | Victorian Government](#) (www.vic.gov.au)

What are the child safety implications for workplace learning?

The Child Safe Standards require schools to put in place systems and processes to help prevent harm to students in all school environments, including workplace learning environments. All students are vulnerable to child safety risks. Arrangements with third parties and external agencies can also create child safety risks. They create opportunities for unknown people to have contact with students.

Requirements to keep children, young people, and students safe, include but are not limited to:

- schools' focus on safety for Aboriginal students
- understanding the diverse circumstances of children and students
- involvement of families and students in child safety
- better management of child abuse risks in physical and online environments.

For detailed guidance on implementing the Child Safe Standards see: Schools - guidance | Victorian Government (www.vic.gov.au)

To comply with Child Safe Standard 2 and Child Safe Standard 9, schools must develop and implement risk management actions to make sure children are safe from abuse in the physical and online school environment.

Child Safe Standard 2 requires schools to:

- develop, record, and implement risk management actions to make sure children are safe in the school environment
- monitor, annually review and evaluate child safety and wellbeing risks.

Schools are therefore required to develop and implement risk management strategies prior to students undertaking workplace learning to ensure that every student can have a positive experience in a safe environment and that the school complies with the requirements of Ministerial Order 1359.

What is a child safety risk management approach?

Child safety risk management is a systematic process for managing risks associated with child safety. The process includes identifying and assessing the types of child safety risks, considering the potential harm to students, identifying new and existing controls and monitoring and reviewing the controls to ensure they are effective.

Implementing the school's child safety risk management approach for workplace learning arrangements

In developing a child safety risk management approach, schools should take the following steps in relation to students undertaking workplace learning:

1. Assess the types of child safety risks in workplace learning environments

Schools should seek input and perspectives from a wide range of people, including staff, students and parents who may have different views on what safety looks like for their child in workplace learning environments.

   a.   What are the potential child safety risks to students in workplace learning environments? (Refer to the table in this guide for some examples.)

   b.   What are students' views on child safety risks in workplace learning environments? Are there some workplace learning environments which might present higher risks to child safety than others?

   c.   Are there opportunities for adults to be alone with students, unseen by others?

   d.   Are there opportunities for adults to form relationships with students that could lead to child abuse?

2. Consider potential harm

It is standard practice to assess causes and consequences when analysing risks. For child safety risks, it is also important to consider all types of potential injury or harm to a child.

You should always consider the consequence of child abuse and harm to be severe or catastrophic. This is because assessing the consequences of harm is complex. The same form of abuse can have very different impacts on children. This makes it difficult to predict how a harm will affect a child. Some consequences may take many years to surface and may have a cumulative impact. For this reason, harms caused by child abuse is always significant or severe for a child and their family. Therefore, all child safety risks have severe consequences.

3. Identify existing and new controls and treatments

   a.   What strategies, practices or procedures are already in place to control the risk?

   b.   Who is responsible for implementing the strategies and by when?

   c.   Are staff, parents, and students aware of them?

   d.   Are all the existing controls in place?

   e.   Are the existing controls sufficient to address the identified child safety risks in workplace environments?

   f.   Are further risk management strategies needed through additional treatments or other prevention, detection, or mitigation strategies?

   g.   Who is responsible for implementing the additional strategies and by when?

4. Monitor and review the risk approach for workplace learning environments

    a. Have the strategies been fully implemented?

    b. How effective were they? How do you know?

    c. What improvements are needed?

For further information and guidance refer to Child Safety Risk Management guidance on PROTECT.

What strategies could be implemented to control child safety risks in workplace learning environments?

The department provides a number of resources to support schools and employers entering into workplace learning arrangements to ensure that students' health, moral and material welfare, safety, and wellbeing will not be compromised. These resources include Ministerial Orders, Structured Workplace Learning and work experience arrangement forms and guidelines which are available at:

- Work experience: https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/work-experience/policy

- Structured Workplace Learning: https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/structured-workplace-learning/policy

- School community work (NB: Resources developed for government schools only): https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/school-community-work/policy

- School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships: https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/school-based-apprenticeships-and-traineeships/policy

In relation to potential child safety risks in workplace learning environments, schools should consider including the following control measures in their risk management approach:

1. Provide information to employers about the Child Safe Standards and examples of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours in dealing with students. The department has developed a fact sheet for employers, which can be accessed at: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/child-safe-standards-and-workplace-learning-fact-sheet-for-employers.docx

2. Make employers aware of the school's approach and expectations for child safety by providing them with a copy of the school's Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Child Safety Code of Conduct.

3. If the employer is an in scope organisation for the Child Safe Standards, schools should request a copy of the employer's Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy, and Child Safety Code of Conduct. For a list of in scope organisations, see: CCYP | Who do the Standards apply to?

4. Implement strategies to promote child empowerment and participation for students participating in workplace learning. As part of Child Safe Standard 7, schools must ensure that processes for complaints and concerns are accessible, child-focused, and easily understood by students.

5. Make sure that the students have the skills and knowledge to recognise abuse or other risks to their safety. They should know the process for raising concerns and be confident to make complaints or let someone know they feel unsafe while in a workplace learning environment.

6. Make sure parents are aware of the risks for children in workplace learning environments.

The school environment includes workplace learning environments. School must therefore maintain ongoing oversight and proactively check in with students and the employer to ensure successful learning and safety outcomes.

What actions must schools undertake in response to an incident, disclosure, or suspicion of child abuse in a workplace learning environment?

School staff must be aware of and comply with their legal obligations to report suspected child abuse and provide ongoing appropriate support. School staff must report any incident, disclosure, or suspicion that a student has been abused, or is at risk of being abused. This includes abuse that has, or is suspected to have, taken place within or outside of school grounds and hours.

Schools must follow the department's Protecting Children — Reporting and Other Legal Obligations Policy which includes the Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures or Suspicions of Child Abuse.

More information

- Child Safe Standards: Schools - guidance | Victorian Government (www.vic.gov.au)

- Child Safe Standards templates and resources | Victorian Government (www.vic.gov.au)

- Duty of Care: Policy | education.vic.gov.au

- Commission for Children and Young People: New Child Safe Standards

For further advice, please email child.safe.schools@education.vic.gov.au

What are some examples of potential risks to students in workplace learning environments?

Unintentional/accidental harm

Poor physical environment leading to injury

Poor supervision

High-risk activity

Lack of risk mitigation strategies in place

Psychological or emotional abuse

Bullying by adults or other children

Threatening language

Intentional ignoring and isolating (either face-to-face, online or via other technology

Shaming, hazing

Neglect

Lack of supervision

Not meeting the specific physical or cognitive needs of children

Other potential risks

School staff and employers not aware of signs of abuse

Students not informed about how to raise concerns

Families not informed about child safety risks for children in workplace environments and how to raise concerns

Physical abuse

Physical violence e.g. hitting, punching, kicking, pushing

Cultural safety not upheld

Lack of cultural respect

An environment that does not support the child to express their cultural identity

Racial or cultural vilification or discrimination

Treating a student unfavourably because of their disability, age, gender, race, culture, vulnerability, sexuality or ethnicity

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse, assault and exploitation (face to face or online)

Inappropriate touching or overly familiar or inappropriate behaviour towards a student

Grooming (face to face or online)

Inappropriate conversations (either face-to-face, online or via other technology)

Crossing professional boundaries e.g. contact with any student outside of school hours

Based on the PROTECT guidance to support schools to implement the Child Safe Standards

Last updated 16 March 2023