

Standard 7 – Strategies to Promote the Participation and Empowerment of Students

29 April 2019



**VIRTUAL
SCHOOL VICTORIA**

Description

Organisations need to ensure children and young people feel safe and comfortable in reporting concerns or allegations of abuse. Organisations should have simple and accessible processes that help children and young people understand what to do if they want to report abuse, inappropriate behaviour or concerns for their safety. All personnel need to have an awareness of children and young people's rights and adults' responsibilities regarding child abuse.

Rationale

Children and young people often do not report abuse because they feel uncomfortable or they do not know how to raise their concerns or allegations of abuse. Some organisations do not have simple and accessible processes assisting children and young people to understand their rights and how to report concerns regarding their safety.

Strategies at the Virtual School Victoria

Following are strategies that support VSV student understanding of their rights and how to report concerns regarding their safety:

- Provide children and young people with child-appropriate and accessible information about what child abuse is, their rights to make decisions about their body and their privacy, that no one has a right to injure them, and how they can raise concerns about abuse. Information is included in welcome packs and as a discrete module in Launch Pad and VCE O (11/12 Orientation (from 2019.)
- Ensure information and processes for reporting concerns are accessible to all children and young people, for example by having policies and procedures that are able to be accessed and understood by children with a disability in the VSV website.
- Ensure information and processes for reporting concerns are culturally appropriate for Aboriginal children and young people. A way to help ensure this could include engaging with parents of Aboriginal children and young people, local Aboriginal communities or an Aboriginal community controlled organisation to review information and processes.
- Consider access and culturally appropriate language, photographs and artwork for Aboriginal children and young people, children and young people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and children with a disability when drafting communications materials.
- Gather feedback from children and young people through VSV Student Voice, for example through surveys, focus groups, story time and social media, about whether they would feel safe and taken seriously if they were to raise concerns, and implement improvements based on this feedback.
- Enable children and young people to express their views and make suggestions on what child safety means to them, and on child safe policies, reporting and response procedures, and acknowledge and act upon these where possible. For example, views could be gathered through suggestion boxes, feedback sessions, emails or online (via wikis or other social media).
- Ensure services are accessible for people with a disability, for example provide appropriate communication aids such as hearing loops.
- Train relevant staff (e.g. Student Voice) and volunteers on methods of empowering children and young people and encouraging children and young people's participation.
- Ensure Aboriginal children and young people are accepted when identifying as Aboriginal, and that staff and volunteers understand appropriate responses to children and young people identifying as Aboriginal.
- Encourage participation and empowerment of children and young people in other organisational activities, such as organisational planning and decision-making.

- The VSV Indigenous Cultural Inclusion Officer is responsible for raising awareness in the community about children and young people's rights, for example through staff conversations with families and communications such as websites and newsletters.

Successful implementation of this standard will be evident at the VSV when the following is in place:

- reporting procedures for when a child or young person feels unsafe are accessible for all
- children and young people understand what child abuse is, and their rights (age appropriate)
- children and young people understand how to report an allegation of abuse or concern for their safety to the organisation, a trusted adult and external bodies (for example, the police)
- children and young people feel safe, empowered and taken seriously if they raise concerns
- children and young people feel empowered to contribute to the organisation's understanding and treatment of child safety
- children and young people's reports of concern are responded to appropriately
- staff understand how to empower children and young people and encourage their participation.



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