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Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Purpose

The Central Coast Montessori Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy sets our commitment to creating and maintaining a child-safe and child-friendly organisation, where children and young people are safe and feel safe.

This policy provides an overview and framework for our approach to NSW Child Safe Standards as outlined in the Child Safe Standards for Permanent and Temporary Care, and relevant legislation such as the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 and the Working with Children Act 2012.

Specifically, this policy provides the framework for:

- Values and principles underpinning child safety and wellbeing at Central Coast Montessori
- Development of systems, practices, policies, and procedures which promote child safety and wellbeing
- Creating a positive and robust child-safe culture
- Meeting our legislative and moral obligations for the protection of children from abuse and harm
- Informing our community of everyone's obligations to act safely and appropriately towards children and following our processes and practices for the safety and wellbeing of students at all times.

Scope

The Central Coast Montessori Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy applies to all activities and locations where children are under the supervision or care of Central Coast Montessori.

This policy applies to all staff, Board Members, volunteers, and contractors, whether or not they work in direct contact with students. It also applies in all physical and online environments used by students during or outside of hours, including locations provided by Central Coast Montessori for a student's use (for example, a camp) and those provided through third-party providers.

It should be read together with our other child safety and wellbeing documents, procedures, and codes of conduct – refer to the Related Documents section below.

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Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

Central Coast Montessori is a child-safe organisation that welcomes all children, young people, and their families. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children, including those under our care and supervision. Central Coast Montessori recognises its responsibility for ensuring a safe and supportive environment that respects the rights of children and fosters their enrichment and wellbeing.

Our approach to creating and maintaining a child-safe environment is guided by the core belief that every student matters every day. Our mission 'to deliver an exceptional educational experience that fosters the growth of each child through leading teaching and learning programs, a wide array of opportunities, within a culture of high expectations, empowering students to excel' can only be achieved if our students are safe, feel safe, and are empowered to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

We are committed to providing environments where our students are safe and feel safe, where their participation is valued, their views respected, and their voices heard. Our child-safe policies, processes, and codes are inclusive of the needs of all children and their families.

Central Coast Montessori has zero tolerance for child abuse in any form and takes proactive steps to identify and manage any risks of harm to students in our environments. When child safety or wellbeing concerns are raised or identified, we treat these seriously and respond promptly and thoroughly.

We prohibit the use of any form of corporal punishment. We promote respectful relationships between students and Guides, and between students and their peers. These relationships are based on respect, honesty, kindness, trust, and empathy.

Particular attention is given to the child safety needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, international students, students with disabilities and other students experiencing risk or vulnerability. Inappropriate or harmful behaviour targeting students based on these or other characteristics is not tolerated, and any instances identified will be addressed through the appropriate processes as set out in our Student Code of Conduct.

Child safety is a shared responsibility. Every person involved in Central Coast Montessori has an important role in promoting child safety and wellbeing and promptly raising any issues or concerns about a child's safety.

We are committed to regularly reviewing our child-safe practices and seeking input from our students, families, and staff to inform our ongoing processes.

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NSW Child Safe Standards

Central Coast Montessori is committed to upholding the NSW Child Safe Standards, which are enforced under the Child Safe Standards for Permanent and Temporary Care and relevant legislation such as the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 and the Working with Children Act 2012.

These standards focus on:

1. Culturally safe environments
2. Embedding child safety and wellbeing in governance and leadership
3. Empowering children and young people regarding their rights
4. Involving families and communities
5. Equity and respect for diverse needs
6. Ensuring the suitability of those working with children
7. Having child-focused risk management procedures
8. Providing ongoing education and training for staff and volunteers
9. Ensuring safe physical and online environments
10. Regularly reviewing and improving practices
11. Documenting policies and procedures to ensure safety.

Child Safety and Wellbeing Program

Central Coast Montessori upholds its commitment to child safety through the implementation of our Child Safety and Wellbeing Program, which addresses the Child Safe Standards.

This program includes:

- This Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Procedures for responding to and reporting allegations of child abuse
- Procedures for child-safe recruitment practices, including screening of new employees
- Strategies for child safety and wellbeing risk management
- Guidance on and procedures for the participation and empowerment of children and young people, including supporting equity and diversity and incorporating age appropriateness in all aspects of our Child Safety and Wellbeing Program

- A designated Child Safety and Wellbeing Officer who is the first points of contact for raising child protection issues
- Information on the key risk indicators of child abuse
- Annual training incorporating key elements of the program for all staff
- Ensuring that child safety and wellbeing are discussed regularly at leadership meetings and staff meetings.

The Child Safety and Wellbeing Program is made available to all staff via the staff portal/policies.. Relevant aspects of the program, including policies, are communicated to parents, contractors, and volunteers through the Central Coast Montessori app, the Central Coast Montessori website and contractor agreements.

Child Safety and Wellbeing Officer

Central Coast Montessori has appointed a Child Safety and Wellbeing Officer, whose role includes acting as a resource to assist and advise in child safety and wellbeing matters and being a first point of contact for raising child protection concerns.

Central Coast Montessori's Senior Child Safety and Wellbeing Officer is:

Tina Forsyth, Deputy Principal
Email: tina@ccm.nsw.edu.au

Managing Risks to Child Safety and Wellbeing

At Central Coast Montessori, we actively seek to identify, assess, and control risks to child safety and wellbeing in all aspects of our physical and online operations and environments. The management of child safety and wellbeing risks occurs at all levels of the organisation and is reflected in the policies, procedures, codes, and practices of Central Coast Montessori. The processes for identifying, assessing, and controlling risks are implemented through our Risk Management Policy and Risk Management Framework.

Child safety and wellbeing risks which arise through the regular operation of Central Coast Montessori are captured in our Child Safety and Wellbeing Risk Register. The risk register and the effectiveness of our risk controls are reviewed annually by the leadership team, or more regularly if there is a change to our operations or other factors which may impact child safety and wellbeing risks. Our leadership team takes into account the causes and consequences of child safety risks.

Risk controls identified through the risk assessment process are incorporated into our Child Safety and Wellbeing Program

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Establishing a Culturally Safe Environment

At Central Coast Montessori, we are committed to establishing an inclusive and culturally safe environment where the strengths of Aboriginal culture, values, and practices are respected, along with those of all children from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Our Wellbeing Curriculum embeds opportunities for students to learn about the richness of other cultures and provides avenues for our students to celebrate their culture and diversity.

As a community, we endeavour to ensure that every student has a positive experience in a safe environment. For Aboriginal students, we recognise the link between culture, identity, and safety, and actively create opportunities for these students and the Aboriginal community to have a voice and presence in our planning, policies, and activities.

Student Empowerment

To support child safety and wellbeing at Central Coast Montessori, we work to create an inclusive and supportive environment that encourages students and families to contribute to our child safety approach and understand their rights and responsibilities.

Respectful relationships between students are reinforced, and we encourage strong friendships and peer support to ensure a sense of belonging.

Family Engagement and Communications

Our families and the Central Coast Montessori community play an important role in monitoring and promoting children's safety and wellbeing as well as helping children raise any concerns.

To support family engagement, Central Coast Montessori is committed to providing families and the community with accessible information about our child safety and wellbeing policies and practices, and involving them in our approach to child safety and wellbeing.

We create opportunities for families to have input into the development and review of our child safety policies and practices and encourage them to raise any concerns and ideas for improvement.

Central Coast Montessori communicates the child safety processes to the community through:

- Newsletters published on our app and website to inform about any significant updates to child safety and wellbeing policies, processes, and initiatives that we are taking to ensure student safety and wellbeing.

- Ensuring that key child safety and wellbeing policies and procedures are available on our website.

Diversity and Equity

As a child-safe organisation, we celebrate the rich diversity of our students, families, and community, and promote respectful relationships and environments that are free from discrimination. Our focus is on wellbeing and growth for all.

We recognise that every child has unique skills, strengths, and experiences to draw upon, and that these attributes contribute positively to our environment and the learning experiences of others.

We pay particular attention to individuals and groups of children and young people in our community with additional and specific needs. This includes tailoring our child safety and wellbeing strategies and supports to the needs of:

- Aboriginal children and young people
- Children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Children and young people with disabilities
- Children unable to live at home or impacted by family violence
- International students
- Children and young people who identify as LGBTIQA+.

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Suitable Staff and Volunteers

At Central Coast Montessori, we apply robust child-safe recruitment, induction, training, and supervision practices to ensure that staff, contractors, and volunteers are suitable to work with children.

Staff Recruitment

When recruiting staff, we follow standard recruitment policies and procedures, which include:

- Ensuring that all prospective employees have read and understood this policy and our Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Ensuring that all Position Descriptions include consistent requirements in relation to child safety and wellbeing
- Requiring that all staff, contractors, and volunteers hold either a valid Working with Children Check (WWCC) or equivalent clearance
- Including standardised screening questions in all interview guides
- Undertaking reference checks that include suitability for working with children.
- Staff Induction

All newly appointed staff are expected to complete our child safety and wellbeing training. The training includes:

- Becoming familiar with and understanding Central Coast Montessori's Child Safety, including:
- The Child Safety and Policy (this document)
- The Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Procedures for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse (including Mandatory Reporting)
- How to access the policies and procedures
- Identifying risk indicators of child abuse and harm
- Knowing where to go for help (our Child Safety and Wellbeing Officers)
- Any other child safety and wellbeing information that Central Coast Montessori considers appropriate to the nature of the role.
- Ongoing Supervision and Management of Staff

All staff engaged in child-connected work will be supervised appropriately to ensure their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate. Staff will be monitored and assessed to ensure their continuing suitability for child-connected work. This will be done through regular meetings with the Principal, Deputy Principal, classroom observations, annual child safety and wellbeing training, First Aid and Anaphylaxis training, and professional development supporting student wellbeing and respectful relationships and consent.

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Suitability of Volunteers and Contractors

All volunteers and contractors are required to comply with our Child Safety Policy and the relevant contents of our Child Safety and Wellbeing Manual, which describe how we assess the suitability of prospective volunteers and contractors. Expectations regarding child safety and wellbeing induction, training, supervision, and management will depend on the role of the volunteer or contractor.

Child Safety Knowledge, Skills and Awareness

In addition to the child safety and wellbeing training for new employees, our staff will participate in ongoing training and professional learning to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to maintain a child-safe environment.

Staff child safety and wellbeing training will be delivered at least annually and will include guidance on:

- Our Child Safety and Wellbeing policies, procedures, codes, and practices
- Recognising indicators of child harm, including harm caused by other children
- Responding effectively to issues of child safety and wellbeing and supporting colleagues who disclose harm
- How to build culturally safe environments for children
- Information sharing and recordkeeping obligations
- How to identify and mitigate child safety and wellbeing risks in the environment.

Staff are supported through the Central Coast Montessori management team and are reminded of their responsibilities during staff meetings and specific professional development. Other professional learning and training on child safety and wellbeing, tailored to specific roles and responsibilities, will address any identified or emerging needs or issues.

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Governance and Oversight

The leadership team at Central Coast Montessori is responsible for ensuring a strong child-safe culture is created and maintained. This includes the development and implementation of child safety policies and practices that align with the Child Safe Standards.

The leadership team is also responsible for:

- Ensuring that effective child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, codes, and practices are in place and implemented within their respective areas of responsibility
- Modelling a child-safe culture that facilitates active participation of students, families, and staff in promoting and improving child safety, cultural safety, and wellbeing
- Enabling inclusive practices where the diverse needs of all students are considered
- Reinforcing high standards of respectful behaviour between students and Guides, and among students
- Promoting regular open discussions on child safety and wellbeing issues within the community, including at leadership meetings and staff meetings
- Facilitating ongoing professional learning for staff, contractors, and volunteers (where appropriate) to build a deeper understanding of child safety, cultural safety, student wellbeing, and prevention of and response to abuse
- Encouraging child safety and wellbeing complaints and concerns to be raised and ensuring no one is discouraged from reporting an allegation of child abuse to relevant authorities.

Complaints and Reporting Processes

Central Coast Montessori fosters a culture that encourages and expects staff, volunteers, students, parents, and the community to raise concerns and complaints. This approach makes it more difficult for breaches of the code of conduct, misconduct, or abuse to occur and remain hidden.

We have clear pathways for raising complaints or concerns and responding to them. This is documented in our Complaints Policy available on the Central Coast Montessori website. We also have specific Student Complaint Procedures in place.

Privacy and Information Sharing

Central Coast Montessori will collect, use, and disclose personal information about children and their families in accordance with our Privacy Policy and the Australian Privacy Principles. For information on how we collect, use, and disclose information, refer to Central Coast Montessori's Privacy Policy, available on the website.

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Records Management

We acknowledge that good records management practices are a critical element of child safety and wellbeing and manage our records in accordance with the Australian Society of Archivists: Records Retention Schedule for Non-Government Schools, 2nd Edition.

Review of Child Safety Practices

We have established processes for the review and ongoing improvement of our child-safe policies, procedures, and practices.

We will:

- Review and improve our child safety policies and procedures at least every two years or after any significant child safety incident
- Analyse complaints, concerns, and safety incidents to improve policy and practice
- Act with transparency and share pertinent learnings and review outcomes with staff and our community
- Ensure that child safety and wellbeing is discussed regularly at leadership meetings, staff meetings, and Board meetings.
- The Child Safety and Wellbeing Officer is responsible for overseeing the review of our Child Safety Policy.

Definitions

Child means a child or young person who is under the age of 18.

Child safety includes matters related to protecting all children from abuse, managing the risk of child abuse, providing support to a child at risk, and responding to suspicions, incidents, disclosures, or allegations of child abuse.

Child abuse includes:

a) Any act committed against a child involving:
    i) A sexual offence
    ii) Grooming offences under relevant legislation
b) The infliction, on a child, of:
    i) Physical violence

ii) Serious emotional or psychological harm
c) Serious neglect of a child, including exposure to family violence and its effects.

Child-connected work means work authorised by Central Coast Montessori and performed by an adult in an environment while children are present or reasonably expected to be present.

Contractor means a contracted service provider engaged by Central Coast Montessori to perform child-related work.

Central Coast Montessori Board is the governing body comprising its board of directors.

Central Coast Montessori environment means any of the following physical, online, or virtual places used during or outside of hours:

a) A campus of Central Coast Montessori
b) Online or virtual environments made available or authorised by Central Coast Montessori for use by a child or student (including email, intranet systems, software applications, collaboration tools, and online services)
c) Other locations provided by Central Coast Montessori or through a third-party provider for a child or student to use, including, but not limited to, locations for:
i) Camps
ii) Approved homestay accommodation
iii) Delivery of education and training such as registered training organisations, TAFEs, non-school senior secondary providers, or another school
iv) Sporting events, excursions, competitions, or other events.

Staff means a person who is directly employed by Central Coast Montessori.

Student means a person who is enrolled at or attends Central Coast Montessori.

Volunteer means a person who performs work without remuneration or reward for Central Coast Montessori in the environment.

Responsibilities

Central Coast Montessori Board
The Board is responsible for:

- Ensuring that governance arrangements support and prioritise a child-safe culture, promoting the cultural safety and wellbeing of children and protecting them from all forms of harm
- Ensuring that standards of conduct in relation to child safety and wellbeing are defined and established through policies and procedures, and communicated at all levels of the organisation
- Acquiring up-to-date knowledge of child safety and wellbeing matters

- Understanding the nature of Central Coast Montessori's operations and child safety and wellbeing risks associated with these operations
- Ensuring that appropriate resources are available to implement the Child Safety and Wellbeing Program effectively
- Ensuring appropriate processes for receiving and considering information regarding child safety and wellbeing issues and that timely responses can be enacted
- Ensuring compliance with legal and regulatory obligations regarding child safety and wellbeing
- Ensuring ongoing monitoring to verify the provision and use of resources allocated to managing child safety and wellbeing issues and their effectiveness
- Ensuring that child-safe recruitment and selection practices are employed when appointing new members to the Board
- Acting in accordance with the Child Safety Code of Conduct, ensuring that child safety and wellbeing are regular agenda items at Board meetings
- Undertaking annual child safety training.

Principal

The CEO | Principal, as a delegate of the Board, is responsible for taking practical measures to ensure that:

- The Child Safety Program is implemented effectively
- Actions and behaviours of the leadership foster a child-safe culture
- Appropriate Child Safety and Wellbeing Officers are appointed and trained
- A strong and sustainable child-safe culture is maintained
- Child safety and wellbeing incidents and concerns are managed in accordance with our policies and procedures
- The Board receives regular reports on child safety and wellbeing matters
- Central Coast Montessori is complying with its legal and regulatory obligations with respect to child protection.

Child Safety Officer

The role of Child Safety Officer is assigned to Central Coast Montessori's Deputy Principal.. Key responsibilities of the Child Safety and Wellbeing Officer include:

- Having a sound working knowledge of the Child Safety Policy
- Without replacing any legal reporting obligations any person may have, promptly managing the response to an allegation or disclosure of child abuse and ensuring that the allegation or disclosure is taken seriously
- Helping to ensure that the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy is communicated clearly to key stakeholders

- Assisting in the effective implementation of the Child Safety Policy
- Ensuring clear procedures are in place to allow people to report child protection concerns
- Promoting child safety and wellbeing issues within the community and responding to general queries regarding the Child Safety Policy
- Ensuring a strong and sustainable child-safe culture is embedded within Central Coast Montessori
- Assisting staff, contractors, and volunteers in identifying signs of abuse and understanding how to respond and when to make a referral either internally or to an external agency
- Acting as the first point of contact for staff or other community members raising child safety and wellbeing concerns and assisting in coordinating appropriate responses to incidents, including liaising with authorities and responding appropriately to a child who makes or is affected by an allegation of child abuse.

Senior Executive Leadership Team

The Executive leadership team is responsible for:

- Ensuring that a strong child-safe culture is created and maintained, with effective policies and practices developed and implemented in accordance with relevant legislation
- Ensuring effective child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, codes, and practices are in place and implemented within their respective areas of responsibility
- Modelling a child-safe culture that facilitates the active participation of students, families, and staff in promoting and improving child safety, cultural safety, and wellbeing
- Reinforcing high standards of respectful behaviour between students and Guides, and among students
- Promoting regular open discussions on child safety and wellbeing issues within the community, including at leadership meetings and staff meetings
- Facilitating ongoing professional learning for staff, contractors, and volunteers (where appropriate) to deepen understanding of child safety, cultural safety, student wellbeing, and prevention of and response to abuse
- Encouraging child safety and wellbeing complaints and concerns to be raised and ensuring that no one is discouraged from reporting an allegation of child abuse to relevant authorities.

Volunteers and Contractors

Are responsible for:

- Successfully completing induction(s) and training set out by the School to comply with this Child Safety Policy
- Being aware of and complying with their legal obligations for the mandatory reporting of child abuse
- Being aware of key risk indicators of child abuse, being observant to, and raising any concerns relating to child protection with one of the School's Child Safety and Wellbeing Officers or a member of Senior Management
- Ensuring students' views are taken seriously and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives.

Relevant Legislation, Standards and Codes

Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998

Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012

Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998

Education Act 1990

NSW Child Safe Standards (2016)

Crimes Act 1900

Family Violence Prevention Act 2019

Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act 1987

NSW Ombudsman Act 1974