

Guidelines for staff, volunteers and visitors working with students from Woodville Primary School both on and offsite, and online

Woodville Primary School is committed to providing a safe, nurturing environment that encourages curiosity, promotes learning, personal growth and wellbeing for all students. We strive to develop adaptability and resilience so students can become valued members of the local, global communities and be prepared for future life experiences.

All staff, volunteers, contractors, visitors and school council members at Woodville Primary School are expected to actively contribute to a school culture that respects the dignity of its members and follows the school's core values of Respect, Responsibility, Resilience and Inclusion. They are required to observe child safe principles and expectations for appropriate behavior towards, and in the company of children. This applies equally to daily school life and out of hours/offsite events such as excursions, camps and out-of hours activities. *The Child Safety Code of Conduct* must be read, signed and adhered to all at times.

This document outlines legal issues and professional boundaries for adults working or volunteering with children and young people. It has been sourced primarily from *Protective practices for staff in their interactions with children and young people – guidelines for staff working or volunteering in education and care setting*, Government of South Australia, Department of Education and Child Services, 2011.

In addition, staff are referred to the following policies and procedures developed by the Department of Education and Training Victoria (DET), and Woodville Primary School. In particular:

- [Ministerial Order 870 – Child Safe Standards – managing the risk of child abuse](#), December 2015
- [Child Safe Standards](#), VRQA, 2016
- Woodville Primary School documents:
 - Child Safety Policy
 - Safe guarding children and young people – Code of Conduct
 - Supervision and duty of care Policy
 - Yard duty policy
 - Digital technologies Policy (including Acceptable Use)
 - Mandatory Reporting Policy and Procedures
 - Student engagement and inclusion Policy
 - Excursions and camps policy and procedures
 - Incursions Policy

Duty of Care and Supervision

Teachers and other staff in a school have a responsibility to take reasonable steps to protect students from risks of injury, including those that may be encountered within the online learning environment. Teachers must understand their Duty of Care responsibilities and other school-based policies that work to support it such as the Student Engagement Policy and Acceptable Use Agreements.

Teachers are required to supervise all learning environments; the school grounds, the classroom and excursions - online spaces are also considered a learning environment. Therefore as part of that duty, teachers are required to adequately supervise students who are working in these spaces. This duty also requires protection from risks that could arise (that is, those that the teacher should reasonably have foreseen) and against which preventive measures could be taken.

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/bullystoppers/Pages/prindutycare.aspx>

Teaching Profession Code of Conduct (VIT)

<http://www.vit.vic.edu.au/media/documents/imported-files/spl/Code-of-Conduct-2015v2.pdf>

The Victorian Institute of teaching (VIT) has developed a Code of Conduct for the Victorian teaching profession. It identifies a set of principles, which describe the professional conduct, personal conduct and professional competence expected of a teacher by their colleagues and the community.

Teachers at Woodville Primary School are expected to be familiar with, and abide by this Code of Conduct. The following guidelines outline, in more detail expected behaviours of adults:

Professional Boundaries

Education and care professions rely on the fostering of positive relationships between adults and children and young people. Learning and care settings are places where all staff can have significant influence in the lives of children and young people because the relationship involves regular contact over relatively long periods of time. These features of education and care professions make it extremely important that staff understand how to foster positive relationships in ways that do not compromise children and young people’s welfare.

The professional boundaries outlined in these guidelines apply beyond specific education or care sites and beyond specific cohorts of children and young people. For example, where staff are participating or have participated in interschool sport events or combined school trips or camps, they are expected to respect professional boundaries with all the children and young people involved in those activities.

The following examples will assist staff in establishing and maintaining expected boundaries. This list is not exhaustive.

Boundary	Example of Violation
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inappropriate comments about a child/young person’s appearance, including excessive flattering comments • Inappropriate conversation or enquiries of a sexual nature (eg questions about a child or young person’s sexuality or his/her sexual relationship with others) • Disrespectful or discriminatory treatment of, or manner towards, young people based on their perceived or actual sexual orientation • Use of inappropriate pet names • Vilification or humiliation • Jokes or innuendo of a sexual nature • Obscene gestures and language • Facilitating/permitting access to pornographic material. Facilitating/permitting access to sexually explicit material that is not part of endorsed curriculum. Failing to intervene in sexual harassment of children and young people • Correspondence of a personal nature via any medium (eg phone, text message, letters, email, internet postings) that is unrelated to the staff member’s role. This does not include class cards/bereavement cards etc
Personal Disclosure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussing personal lifestyle details of self, other staff or children and young people unless directly relevant to the learning topic and with the individual’s consent
Physical contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unwarranted or unwanted touching of a child or young person personally or with objects (eg pencil or ruler) • Corporal punishment (physical discipline, smacking etc) • Initiating, permitting or requesting inappropriate or unnecessary physical contact with a child or young person (eg massage, kisses, tickling games) or facilitating situations which unnecessarily result in close physical contact with a child or young person • Use of physical restraint except where it is absolutely necessary to keep a young person safe
Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • *Inviting/allowing/encouraging children and young people to attend the staff member’s home (see the following page for country/local community considerations) • Allowing children and young people access to a staff member’s personal internet locations (eg social networking sites) • *Attending children and young people’s homes or their social gatherings • *Being alone with a child or young person outside of a staff member’s responsibilities • Entering change rooms or toilets occupied by children or young people when supervision is not required or appropriate

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • *Transporting a child or young person unaccompanied • Using toilet facilities allocated to children and young people • Undressing using facilities set aside for children and young people, or in their presence • (<i>*without the principal or delegate's authority</i>)
Targeting individual children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutoring (outside education sector's directions or knowledge) • Giving personal gifts or special favours • Singling the same children and young people out for special duties or responsibilities • Offering overnight/weekend/holiday care of children and young people as respite to parents (unless a family day care educator, or employed by a respite organisation and with the principal or delegate's knowledge)
Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopting an ongoing welfare role that is beyond the scope of their position or that is the responsibility of another staff member (eg a counsellor) or an external professional, and that occurs without the permission of senior staff • Photographing, audio recording or filming children or young people via any medium when not authorised by the principal or delegate to do so and without required parental consent • Using personal rather than school equipment for approved activities, unless authorised by the principal or delegate to do so
Possessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correspondence or communication (via any medium) to or from children and young people where a violation of professional boundaries is indicated and where the correspondence has not been provided to the principal or delegate by the staff member • Still/moving images or audio recordings of children and young people on personal equipment or kept in personal locations such as car or home that have not been authorised by the principal or delegate • Uploading or publishing still/moving images or audio recordings of children and young people to any location, without parental and principal or delegate's consent

Professional boundary violations by a staff member represent a breach of trust, a failure to meet a duty of care to children and young people, and a failure to follow conduct requirements of the employer. When staff violate boundaries they risk:

- harmful consequences for the child or young person
- seriously undermining the learning process
- seriously undermining their professional reputation and the confidence of the education or care community in their suitability to work with children and young people
- formal directions or other disciplinary action from their employer or registering/regulating authority.

Any concern a staff member has about whether a situation may compromise or breach a professional relationship should be discussed with the principal or delegate and an approved plan of action developed and followed.

[Guidance for staff in managing professional boundaries](#)

Working in country/local communities

Staff working in country or local communities face additional challenges in managing professional boundaries. They are more likely to have social relationships with the parents of the children and young people with whom they work and are, therefore, more likely to share social and sporting events or membership at various community clubs or associations.

This means they will have legitimate reasons, on occasions, to attend social events with the children and young people with whom they work, to visit their homes or to be visited by them in the company of their parents. These social engagements are an important part of community life and a positive contribution to the wellbeing of staff working in country and local communities. Following the advice below will assist staff to enjoy these social engagements without compromising their professional responsibilities.

The guiding principles in managing these situations are that:

- social contact should be generated via the relationship the staff member has with the parents of children and young people or by an event (such as a sporting event)
- staff should avoid being alone with children and young people in these situations
- staff should conduct themselves in a way that will not give others reason to question their suitability to work

with children and young people and that will not create discomfort for children and young people in their learning relationship with them. Consuming alcohol in these situations may lessen a staff member's capacity to judge when a professional boundary is at risk

- staff should politely refuse to discuss matters relating to the workplace and should not discuss children and young people's learning or social progress other than at times specifically set aside for that purpose
- any concern a staff member has about whether or not a situation may be compromising or breaching a professional relationship should be discussed with the principal or delegate and an approved plan of action followed. For example, a staff member may want advice about transporting a friend's child to and from the site or how to manage his/her own child's enrolment at the site.

Using social networking sites

Staff in education and care settings are expected to model responsible and respectful conduct to the children and young people with whom they work. Staff need to consider the electronic social environments they utilise as part of this community and employer expectation.

The internet does not provide the privacy or control assumed by many users. Staff must appreciate that no matter what protections they place around access to their personal sites their digital postings are still at risk of reaching an unintended audience and being used in ways that could complicate or threaten their employment. Staff should be aware of the following expectations in considering their use of social networking sites:

- they have considered the information and images of them available on their sites and are confident that these represent them in a light acceptable to their role in working with children and young people
- they do not have children or young people in their education community as 'friends' on their personal/private sites
- comments on their site about their workplace, work colleagues or children or young people, if published, would not cause hurt or embarrassment to others, risk claims of libel, or harm the reputation of the workplace, their colleagues or children and young people.

Working one-to-one with children and young people

The following summary of expectations applies to all situations where staff (teachers, support staff, professional service providers, counsellors, pastoral care providers, mentors, volunteers etc.) are providing one-to-one learning assistance or feedback, behaviour assistance/monitoring, counsel, testing or assessment.

Make it public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The more visible, public and busy the location the better eg. rooms with interior windows; blinds open, public area of the building where foot traffic is likely • Use the site's authorised IT systems. Do not use personal email or websites to communicate with children and young people. if it is essential to use email give the school's email address with your name tagged in the subject line
Make it authorised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents should be informed/ give consent whenever reasonable • Activity must be authorised by the principal or delegate
Make it timely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As far as possible, provide support during normal work hours, and do not conduct excessively long sessions

Managing privacy expectations

Counsellors, pastoral care coordinators, health providers and various professional service providers rely in different ways on being able to provide a degree of privacy for children and young people. This may be to protect the child or young person's dignity, to provide an environment conducive to the service/assessment being provided or to respect the child or young person's desire for confidentiality.

Children and young people will often assume a high level of confidentiality when disclosing serious issues of a personal nature or reporting harassment or bullying. For these reasons, schools need to find a careful balance between, on the one hand, respecting the sensitive and private nature of counselling or service provision and, on the other hand, the professional's duty of care obligations for the safety and wellbeing of the child or young person.

Good practice in managing these circumstances is the following:

- health/physical care should be provided with respect for the child or young person's dignity and in a manner approved by the child or young person and his/her parents
- counselling should be provided in unlocked rooms with part-glass doors (where possible) that are located near staff traffic areas
- avoid out of hours contact
- while parental consent is often not applicable in many counselling situations, best practice for schools is to provide all parents with written information about the school's counselling and pastoral care services which outlines confidentiality and privacy issues
- ensure student appointments and counselling notes are documented appropriately.

Staff responsibilities in responding to behaviour

Behaviour of staff towards children and young people

Suspected child abuse

Staff in education and care settings are mandated notifiers and are, therefore, required under the Children's Protection Act 1993 to report suspected child abuse to the Child Protection A report of suspected abuse must be made *irrespective of who is implicated*: a colleague, friend, senior staff member, volunteer, parent, visitor or other child or young person. The report should be made in consultation with the principal or delegate who signs the site's mandatory notification record and stores it securely. Working with the principal or delegate ensures that appropriate procedures can be followed within the site and Department of Education and Training. Such procedures are designed to ensure that children and young people's wellbeing is safeguarded and that staff members' rights are respected.

If the principal or delegate is the subject of the suspicion, observation or allegation, staff must report to the Regional Office.

The complexities of these situations are acknowledged. Nevertheless, staff must manage their sensitivities or discomforts because their duty of care to the child or young person remains their paramount legal, professional and moral responsibility.

Inappropriate behaviour

Staff may also observe behaviours in other adults that they view to be inappropriate rather than abusive or that sit on the border of violating a professional boundary. Staff must ensure, through their principal or delegate, that the adult concerned is made aware of the potential of his/her actions to impact negatively on children and young people, and on themselves. Professional advice of this kind may be particularly valuable to young or newly appointed staff. The principal or delegate should document what is discussed.

All staff must take action if children and young people disclose information about inappropriate behaviours of other adults on the site. It is not acceptable to minimise, ignore or delay responding to such information. For the wellbeing of all members of the education or care community, the principal or delegate must be informed as a matter of urgency and a report made to DHHS – Child protection, if appropriate.

Behaviour of children and young people towards staff

Should a child or young person engage in inappropriate behaviour of a sexual nature, then immediate respectful steps must be taken to discourage the child or young person. The matter should be reported and documented promptly with the principal or delegate and a plan of action developed to support the child or young person and relevant staff member. Depending on the age/developmental capacity of the child or young person and contextual information, this plan of support may involve:

- communication with parents
- referral to and liaison with specialist counselling
- formalised support within the site, which may include closer monitoring or supervision of the child or young person in his/her interactions with other children and young people
- referral to and liaison with an appropriate agency with disability-specific expertise. Sometimes, the inappropriate sexual behaviour of younger children towards staff can elicit a suspicion that the child in question has been sexually abused. In these situations, staff must:
 - make a mandatory notification to DHHS

- consider the safety of other children and young people with whom the child has contact
- discuss concerns with a member of the Principal Team
- maintain privacy and confidentiality

Some children and young people may actively seek a relationship with a staff member that would constitute an inappropriate relationship. In such circumstances, staff are advised to immediately report the information to the principal or delegate and seek assistance from a senior staff member, school counsellor or pastoral care coordinator to actively manage the situation in a way that *respects the emotional wellbeing of the child or young person and provides support to the staff member*.

Examples of behaviours that should be reported and addressed are:

- receiving gifts of an inappropriate nature or at inappropriate times (eg not as part of end of the year gift giving that some children and families follow)
- flirtatious gestures and comments
- inappropriate social invitations
- inappropriate touching or invasions of personal space
- inappropriate postings using any medium
- correspondence or communication that suggests or invites an inappropriate relationship.

The staff member and principal or delegate should document the incident that initially prompted the concern and the plan of action that has been established. Contact with parents is recommended unless there are reasonable grounds to believe that this will create serious risks for the child or young person. Sexual harassment—via any medium* at any time or place—or assault of a staff member by a child or young person should be dealt with following normal behaviour management protocols, with the involvement of parents and, where appropriate, police. Along with this response, consideration must also be given to the most appropriate counselling and support that can be provided to the child or young person and family. It is important to use these incidents as opportunities to organise meaningful interventions that address early sexual and other offending behaviours.

Detailed guidance on managing problem sexual behaviours in children and young people is available in the following documents:

- [Protect: identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian Schools](#) pp. 12-16
- [Responding to allegations of student sexual assault – procedures for Victorian Government Schools](#) (Department of Education Victoria 2007)
- Information in relation to appropriate sexual behaviour is available from: <http://www.secasa.com.au/pages/age-appropriate-sexual-behaviour-guide>

Working with children and young people with additional needs or disabilities

All sections of this document require careful interpretation when applied to children and young people with additional needs or disabilities. For example, children and young people with intellectual disabilities may engage in a much wider range of physical and overtly sexual behaviours towards staff and other children and young people as a result of their disability. Similarly, staff will need to engage more often in physical contact and touch with these children and young people as a means of meeting their duty of care to them.

In fact, touch itself may be an agreed form of communication between a child or young person, his/her parent and staff where the child or young person has a communication disability. Children and young people with disorders causing violent and unpredictable behaviours are likely to have formalised restraint procedures agreed to by staff and parents/carers. Toileting assistance or processes for changing clothes will be necessities for some children and young people.

Because of these differences, staff need to be more vigilant and thoughtful in their physical interactions with children and young people with additional needs or disabilities. Children and young people with disabilities are over-represented in the child protection system. Their vulnerabilities mean they have an increased reliance on the adults providing their care to protect them from harm. Immediately reporting any inappropriate behaviour towards children and young people from other adults is a critical obligation of staff and one that must not be delayed, minimised or delegated (see 'Staff responsibilities in responding to behaviour').

Education and care staff support children and young people with disabilities or special needs through various forms of individual plans. The common features of these plans are that they involve all people who deal with the child or young person on a regular basis, including other service providers, and they document the agreed strategies that are to be used in supporting the child or young person. These plans are particularly important when challenging behaviours, personal care and hygiene and special physical considerations are an issue at the site (eg toileting, transport within and beyond the site environment, situations where physical restraint is occasionally required). The possibility of restraint and the nature of that restraint for children and young people should be addressed in the individual plan as should alternative strategies for preventing harm to others. The plan process should involve the child or young person as far as possible. Staff likely to need to use physical restraint should access training specific to that requirement.

It is appropriate that different approaches are likely to be needed from staff in their interactions with children and young people with special needs or disabilities. For this reason, site behaviour codes or behaviour management policies need regular reviewing to ensure they reflect the needs of the children and young people accessing the site at any one time. Nevertheless, the basic principles outlined elsewhere in this document remain applicable to *all* children and young people. Staff have a duty of care to protect children and young people from physical and emotional harm and, while the ways of meeting the duty may differ for different groups, the duty itself remains unqualified. Staff are expected to meet this duty in a manner that respects the dignity of all children and young people as well as their vulnerabilities.

Cultural considerations

Different cultures have different attitudes and traditions surrounding the concept of appropriate touch. Staff have a responsibility to become as familiar as possible with the values of the various cultural groups enrolled in the school. Many culturally-based community organisations are very keen to address staff about the values of their culture so as to establish optimum understanding and respect between parents, their children and staff at the site. It is critical that staff appreciate culturally specific expectations regarding touch so that embarrassment or offence can be avoided for everyone, and particularly for children and young people.

Many children and young people attending Woodville Primary School are recently arrived in Australia. Some have backgrounds of severe trauma, ranging from the observation of extreme physical violence and abuse to being victims of such violence and abuse themselves. The needs of these children and young people and their families are acute and the issue of establishing what will be received as appropriate, helpful touch is, therefore, all the more essential. Staff need to employ considerable diplomacy, care and effort in their interactions with the children and young people and families that are known or suspected to have escaped traumatic circumstances.