

Croydon Community School & OPTIONS

STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE THE PARTICIPATION & EMPOWERMENT OF CHILDREN

(Standard 7)



It is acknowledged that a significant power imbalance exists between children and adults. Specific efforts must be taken to ensure the voices of children are heard. Enabling and promoting the participation of children has many benefits including:

- demonstrating a commitment to upholding the rights of children
- providing School Leadership with the opportunity to check that what the school is doing is actually what children want
- strengthening the commitment of children to the school
- building the communication and leadership skills of children
- building cultural understanding and respect
- enhancing the safety of children

Becoming a child safe organisation means developing strategies to communicate and engage with all children who are involved with the school. It is important to ask children when they feel safe, and when they feel unsafe – their comments may surprise.

Often children do not know what to do if they feel unsafe or are concerned about something. The concept of 'safety' is very broad and means different things to different people, especially children. It is much easier to understand the concept of 'physical' safety and the need for safe practices around hygiene, road and water safety, slippery surfaces, pool fencing, sign-in and sign-out procedures and staff supervision ratios. All of these contribute to the physical protection of children.

In a child safe organisation, we also want to promote 'psychological' safety. Even if the physical environment is as safe as we can make it, when children feel unsafe we need to understand why and respond to their needs. Psychological safety means children feel valued, respected and cared for. They know they can speak to people if they feel unsafe or unhappy, and that something will be done to address their concerns. Knowing this increases their self-esteem, which boosts their confidence and empowers them to speak up when necessary.

Children also contribute valuable insight and ideas towards the creation of a meaningful child safe organisation. Children may be able to identify strengths, weaknesses, risks and dangers in activities that may not be identified by other methods.

Children must be empowered to understand their rights, recognise what abuse is and understand it is not 'okay' and that they can do something about it.

IMPLEMENTATION

This policy is intended for School Leadership and all other staff.

The promotion of a child safe culture is the highest priority for Croydon Community School & OPTIONS.

At Croydon Community School & OPTIONS we nurture student voice and agency through a personalised learning program. Our young people exercise a great deal of choice and control over what and how they learn rather than being assigned to a series of subjects.

Class sizes are small to allow for the development of trusting student / teacher relationships and teachers at the school regularly seek feedback from their students to inform and develop their teaching. This responsiveness allows young people to collaborate with the adults in our school community.

Students are offered opportunities to develop their leadership skills in Respectful Relationship student action teams, forums and community projects.

Over a period of time, we will seek children’s views about their safety by:

- consulting directly with children about what they think makes the school safe for them
- giving children age-appropriate information about the standards of care they are entitled to, particularly about their rights
- teaching children how to raise concerns, make complaints or let someone know they feel unsafe
- regularly checking with parents/carers and children that they are aware of relevant child safe policies and procedures and that the child safety culture is visible

Croydon Community School & OPTIONS envisages that some of the strategies and possible outcomes will be:

Consulting & Talking with Children	Practical Suggestions	Possible Positive Outcomes
Establish what safety means to children Ask children when they feel safe and when they feel unsafe.	Ensure the physical environment is safe, warm and friendly for all children.	Children’s insight and responses will inform the development of the Child Safe Policy, Code of Conduct and complaints management process. The school will be alerted to any physical danger in the environment.
Educate children about their rights	Run informal education sessions on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Teach children that with every right they enjoy, they need to meet its corresponding responsibility. Undertake activities on rights versus wants.	The children will understand their basic human rights and also understand they need to meet their responsibilities. The children will know the difference between a ‘right’ and a ‘want’.
Include children in policy development	Explain what the school is attempting to do and ask the children for their ideas, opinions and suggestions. Run small discussion groups, and provide refreshments and activities. Give regular breaks.	The school will have a Child Safe Policy that children understand and which represents their suggestions. Practical suggestions will be contributing to a physically safe environment.
Encourage children to develop their own Code of Conduct	Ask children what is acceptable behaviour and what is unacceptable behaviour. This includes behaviour of adults towards children, of children	The school will have a child friendly Code of Conduct written by children for children. The school will have guidelines for staff and volunteers about their

Consulting & Talking with Children	Practical Suggestions	Possible Positive Outcomes
	towards adults and of children towards children. Formulate a code of conduct using 'DO' and 'DO NOT' or 'WE WILL' and 'WE WILL NOT' statements.	interactions, expected behaviour and relationships with children.

The school will utilise existing forums as well as providing other opportunities for input from children. Ideas from children will be sought formally by completion of the annual Student Attitude to School Survey, through informal discussions with small groups lead by the Child Safety Officer and conversations with class teachers.

The school will encourage the participation of Aboriginal children if applicable, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and children with a disability to participate in school forums.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Creating a Child Safe Organisation Guide p.46

Child Safe Standards Toolkit

Protect – Identifying All Forms of Child Abuse in Victorian Schools 11 April 2018

www.education.vic.gov.au/school/Principals/spag/safety/Pages/childsafestandards.aspx

www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/child safe

REVIEW CYCLE

This Standard, first developed in this format in March 2019, was endorsed/approved by the Croydon Community School & OPTIONS School Council on 3rd June, 2019 and *will be reviewed every two years as part of the VRQA requirements, if an incident occurs or if guidelines change* (latest PROTECT update 11 April 2018). It is scheduled for review in March 2021.