



AUSTRALIAN ★ JESUITS

**Creating a Safe Environment in Jesuit Schools:  
Principles, Protocols, Standards of Practice**

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## **Creating a Safe Environment in Jesuit Schools: Principles, Protocols, Standards of Practice**

Any human society is under an obligation to protect its more vulnerable members, and these include the children in our charge at Jesuit schools in Australia. As Christians we are called upon to care for our neighbour, and in a special way to protect the weak and innocent.

The relationship between teacher and child is a special one, and teachers must always be conscious of the trust that parents and the child him/herself have placed in them. The best type of relationship between teacher and child is one of mutual, trust, respect and affection.

We must regard as destructive of the life of a school anything that destroys trust or puts it in jeopardy. One's presumption should be that people will act well, and teachers are people who have committed their lives to the care of the young: such a positive presumption should characterise Jesuit schools. But it would be folly to ignore the possibility that people can and do offend against proper canons of conduct. Hence, children in our schools must be protected against abuse of authority. The school must govern itself to ensure that it is not a place destructive of young life, and abuse of any kind can sow seeds of destruction that a young person may carry long into adult life.

The policies that follow are intended not merely to prevent abuse but to create within Jesuit schools a safe environment where trust and growth may flourish. These policies are put in place in order to safeguard the emotional and physical wellbeing of children and young people by promoting in adults an enhanced understanding of relationship boundaries. They also provide avenues for seeking remedy and redress where abuse unhappily does occur.

The Australian Jesuit Province and institutions under its auspices, including Jesuit schools, subscribes to the principles, protocols and standards of practice embodied in the documents *Towards Healing* and *Integrity in Ministry*. What follows provides further specification of these principles, protocols and standards of practice for Jesuit institutions in Australia, and more particularly for Jesuit schools.

In addition, each Jesuit school has its own specific set of child protection guidelines. Such specific guidelines are supplementary to this Province-wide statement of policy: they take into account the particular circumstances of each school and especially of the relevant State legislative requirements.

The need for this document is supported by the following guiding principles of the *National Safe Schools Framework* (Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003).

*Australian schools*

- *ensure that roles and responsibilities of all members of the school community in promoting a safe and supportive environment are explicit, clearly understood and disseminated*
- *take action to protect children from all forms of abuse and neglect*
- *affirm the right of all school community members to feel safe at school.*

The guidelines set out below require a commitment from all staff:

- to ensure that student safety and wellbeing are paramount within our pre/schools
- to contribute to a culture of staff safety and wellbeing.

**Glossary**

For the purposes of this document the following definitions apply.

<b><i>Staff</i></b>	employees, paid workplace participants and volunteers
<b><i>Pre/school</i></b>	preschools, kindergartens, out of school hours care and vacation care services, junior primary, primary, secondary, senior secondary schools and any associated boarding facilities
<b><i>Students</i></b>	all children and young people enrolled at or attending the sites defined under <i>pre/school</i>

## Key duty of care requirements of staff in their relationships with students

### Duty of care

In the pre/school context, *Duty of Care* is a common law concept that refers to the responsibility of pre/school staff to provide students with an adequate level of protection against harm. It is usually expressed as a duty to take reasonable care to protect students from all reasonably foreseeable risk of injury. The question of what constitutes *reasonable care* in any given case will be determined objectively by a court and will depend on the individual circumstances of each case. The courts have found that the duty of care owed by teachers to students is extremely high. In their relationships with students, staff are required to ensure that the physical and emotional welfare of students is safeguarded, and that their own behaviour with students is always regulated by this duty of care both within and beyond the pre/school setting.

### Maintaining professional boundaries with students

Teaching and care professions are predicated on positive relationships and pre/schools are places where all staff can have significant influence in students' lives. The relationship of an adult staff member and student is characterised by differing roles and an imbalance of power based on a number of factors including age, authority and gender.

The staff member is responsible for maintaining a professional role with the student. This means establishing clear professional boundaries with students that serve to protect everyone from misunderstandings or a violation of the professional relationship.

The following examples will assist staff in establishing and maintaining appropriate boundaries.

Boundary	Example of violation
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inappropriate comments about a student's appearance including excessive flattering comments</li><li>• Inappropriate conversation or enquiries of a sexual nature (eg questions about a student's sexuality)</li><li>• Use of inappropriate pet names</li><li>• Vilification or humiliation</li><li>• Jokes or innuendo of a sexual nature</li><li>• Obscene gestures and language</li><li>• Facilitating access to pornographic or overtly sexual material</li><li>• Failing to stop sexual harassment between students</li><li>• Correspondence of a personal nature including letters, email, phone, SMS text (not including class postcards/ bereavement cards, etc)</li></ul>

(continued)

<b>Boundary</b>	<b>Example of violation</b>
<b>Personal disclosure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discussing personal details of lifestyle of self or others. It may be appropriate and necessary at times, however, to draw on relevant personal life experiences when teaching</li><li>• Sharing of personal information about other staff or students</li></ul>
<b>Physical contact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unwarranted, unwanted and/or inappropriate touching of a student personally or with objects (eg pencil or ruler)</li><li>• Initiating or permitting inappropriate physical contact by a student, eg massage, tickling games</li></ul>
<b>Place (without pre/school's authority)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inviting/allowing/encouraging students home</li><li>• Attending students' homes or social gatherings for personal reasons</li><li>• Being alone with a student outside of a staff member's responsibilities</li><li>• Watching students in a change room when not in a supervisory role</li><li>• Driving a student unaccompanied</li></ul>
<b>Targeting individual students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tutoring (outside education sectors' directives)</li><li>• Personal gifts and special favours</li><li>• Adopting a welfare role that is the responsibility of another staff member eg counsellor, or doing so without the knowledge of key staff members</li></ul>

Professional boundary violations by a staff member represent a breach of trust and a failure to meet a duty of care to students. When staff violate boundaries they risk:

- harmful consequences for the student
- seriously undermining the learning process
- seriously undermining the professional reputation of the staff member
- disciplinary action for the staff member.

Staff members may also fail to maintain professional boundaries by operating beyond the responsibilities of their role, and beyond their expertise. Students who raise significant personal problems with a staff member they trust need to be referred, preferably with their knowledge, to a person on staff with specialised skills, for example, a school counsellor or pastoral care co-ordinator. The staff member can continue to play a supportive role with the student in collaboration with specialist staff.

Staff must not, under any circumstances, engage in an intimate, overly familiar or sexual relationship with a student. Improper conduct of a sexual nature by a staff member against a student includes all forms of sexual activity, including kissing, and any other form of child abuse as well as but not limited to the following.

- Obscene language or gestures of a sexual nature.
- Suggestive remarks or actions.
- Jokes of a sexual nature.
- Unwarranted and inappropriate touching.
- Undressing in front of students.
- Correspondence (spoken or text) with students in respect of the staff member's sexual or personal feelings for the student.
- Deliberate exposure of students to sexual behaviour of others, other than in prescribed curriculum in which sexual and relationship themes are contextual.

### **Good practice in managing professional boundaries**

The following self-assessment questions may assist staff members in assessing their application of professional boundaries:

- Am I dealing in a different manner with a particular student than with others under the same circumstances?
- Is my dress/availability/language different from the normal with a particular student?
- Would I do or say this if a colleague were present?
- Would I condone my conduct if I observed it in another adult?
- Are the consequences of my actions likely to have negative outcomes for students?
- If I were a parent would I want an adult behaving this way towards my own children?

### **Responding to inappropriate/sexual behaviour of *staff towards students***

In addition to any report mandated by state legislation, the staff member must also notify the principal/director of their concerns about the colleague so that appropriate procedures can be followed within the pre/school. Such procedures are designed to ensure that students' wellbeing is safeguarded and that staff members' rights are respected.

If the principal/director is the subject of the suspicion, observation or allegation, staff must report to the principal's/director's line manager, employer or appropriate central office personnel.

The complexities of these situations are acknowledged. Nevertheless, staff must be supported in managing their sensitivities or discomforts because their duty of care to the student remains their paramount responsibility. Staff are encouraged to discuss these issues and procedures as part of their mandatory notification training.

Staff may also observe behaviours in colleagues 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 a senior staff member, that the adult concerned is made aware of the potential of their actions to impact negatively on students, and on themselves. Professional advice of this kind may be particularly valuable to young or newly appointed staff. The principal or senior staff member should document what is discussed.

All staff must take action if students 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 pre/school community the principal/director or senior staff member must be informed as a matter of urgency.

### **Responding to inappropriate/sexual behaviour of *students towards staff***

Should a student engage in inappropriate behaviour of a sexual nature then immediate respectful steps must be taken to discourage the student. The matter should be reported and documented promptly with appropriate personnel in the pre/school and a plan of action developed to support the student and relevant staff member. Depending on the age/ability of the student and contextual information this plan of support may involve:

- communication with parents
- referral to and liaison with specialist counselling
- formalised support within the pre/school which may include closer monitoring or supervision
- referral to and liaison with appropriate agency with disability specific expertise.

Inappropriate sexual behaviour towards staff, in younger children, can elicit a suspicion that a child has been sexually abused him/herself. In these situations staff must:

- make any mandatory report, as required by legislation in the particular state.
- consider the safety of other students with whom the student has contact
- develop and document a plan of action and communication with all relevant parties (including other agencies)
- seek advice, if required, from appropriate child protection services

It is recognised that at times students may actively seek a relationship with a staff member that would constitute an inappropriate relationship. In such circumstances, staff members are advised to immediately report the information to the principal/director 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 student 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, flirtatious gestures and comments, inappropriate social invitations, and correspondence that suggests or invites an inappropriate relationship. The staff member should document the incident that initially prompted their concern and the plan of action agreed to by the principal/director.

Serious sexual harassment or assault of a staff member by a student should be dealt with following normal behaviour management protocols with the involvement of parents and police. Along with this response, consideration must also be given to the most appropriate counselling and support that can be provided to the student and family. It is important to use these incidents as opportunities to organise meaningful interventions that address early sexual offending behaviours.

### **Managing boundaries for staff in specialist roles**

In some situations in performing their professional role with students, staff may be required to work in a one-to-one situation with a student. Examples are counselling, conducting educational/physical assessments, conducting home visits, providing health care, mentoring, coaching or tutoring. All work of this kind must occur as an authorised pre/school activity so that arrangements can be put in place that minimise risk. The main considerations to be made of one to one work are location, time and parental consent/knowledge.

- *Location:* The more visible, public and busy the location the better. Where home visiting cannot be avoided parents should be present, or staff should visit in pairs.
- *Time:* Using normal pre/school hours is preferable to out of pre/school hours. Length of one to one contact should not generally exceed an hour and a half.
- *Consent/knowledge:* Other than the areas discussed below, it is essential that parents be informed/consent to activities that involve their son/daughter in one to one unsupervised contact with staff.

*NB: Volunteers are subject to the supervision policies of the individual sector.*

### **Counsellors/pastoral care coordinators/health providers**

These school positions rely in different ways on providing privacy for students. Adolescents in particular will often seek as much privacy as possible when they access adult advice or intervention. Students reporting harassment or bullying or disclosing serious issues of a personal nature often expect and assume a high level of confidentiality. For these reasons schools need to find a careful balance between, on the one hand respecting the sensitive and private nature of counselling and, on the other hand, the counsellor's duty of care obligations for the safety and wellbeing of the student. Very generally, unlocked rooms with part-glass doors that are located near staff traffic areas will help minimise risk. Staff in these positions should avoid out of hours contact. While parental consent is not applicable in these situations, good practice for schools is to provide all parents with information about their counselling and pastoral care staff and the service they provide to students.

## **Appropriate physical contact, non-physical intervention and physical restraint**

### **Appropriate physical contact by a staff member to assist or encourage a student**

At times, staff members will be required to give practical assistance to a student who is hurt or needs particular assistance or encouragement. The following examples of physical contact that are acceptable are:

- administration of first aid
- helping a child who has fallen
- assisting with the toileting and personal care needs of a disabled student (NB An individual plan for students with these needs must have been negotiated with parents/carers.)
- non-intrusive gestures to comfort a student who is experiencing grief and loss
- non-intrusive touch, eg congratulating a student by shaking hands. Staff should remember the importance of accompanying such touch with positive and encouraging words.

### ***Good practice with school age children***

- Seeking students' permission to touch (keeping in mind that a highly distressed student may be incapable of expressing their wishes).
- Avoiding touching a student anywhere other than the hand, arm, shoulder, or upper back.
- Protective practices for staff in their interactions with students 11
- Avoiding being with a student in a one-on-one, out of sight situation, and never touching a student in such a situation.
- Not presuming that a hug or a touch is acceptable to a particular student. Even non-intrusive touch may be inappropriate if a student indicates they do not wish to be touched.
- Respecting and responding to signs that a student is uncomfortable with touch.
- Using verbal directions rather than touching, eg asking a student to turn this way, rather than physically placing the child in the required position. Using this approach for demonstrations in dance, sport, music and drama. Where touch is essential for safety reasons, eg with aquatic or gymnastic instruction, always telling the student that you need to hold them in a particular way and seeking their permission to do so.
- In some circumstances, staff may need to discourage younger children from unnecessary reliance on touching such as holding hands or wanting to have hugs or cuddles. This should be done gently and without embarrassment or offence to the child.

### ***Good practice with preschool children***

Staff working in preschools are often involved in toileting children, changing their clothes and comforting them for a range of distresses normal in the preschool age group. In providing such care staff should be aware of the following good practice:

- When children indicate they want comfort, ensure that it is provided in a public setting and that it is in keeping with the guidelines provided above.
- Signs of discomfort in children such as stiffening, pulling away or walking away must be respected. In these situations the child must continue to be observed/monitored until their distress is managed.
- Children must not be left in states of high distress for long periods. Parents need to be contacted under these circumstances.
- Staff should follow the preschool's toileting and changing policy.

### **Using non-physical intervention in a student management situation**

Non-physical intervention is the recognised means of managing student conduct. Where a problem with a student becomes apparent, non-physical interventions include:

- directing other students to move away from the situation
- talking with the individual student (asking the student to stop the behaviour, and telling the student what will happen if they do not stop)
- directing the student to a safe place
- directing other students to a safe place
- sending for assistance from other staff, or in extreme cases, the police.

Use of verbal directions is always preferred to physical intervention. It is not appropriate to make physical contact with a student (eg pushing, grabbing, poking, pulling, blocking etc) in order to ensure they comply with directions. Under no circumstances should staff engage in any form of conduct which might cause physical or emotional harm to students.

### **Using physical restraint where a student's safety is threatened**

Physical intervention can involve coming between children, blocking a child's path, leading a child by the hand or arm, shepherding a child away by placing a hand in the centre of the upper back, removing potentially dangerous objects, and in extreme circumstances, using more forceful restraint.

Staff may make legitimate use of physical restraint, if all non-physical interventions have been exhausted and a student is:

- attacking another student or staff member
- posing an immediate danger to themselves or others.

Staff are to use physical interventions only as a last resort. Maintaining good order is never a reasonable justification for using force or restraint.

*Physical restraint is not to be used as a response to:*

- property destruction
- pre/school disruption
- refusal to comply
- verbal threats
- leaving a classroom or the school,

*unless student safety is clearly threatened.*

Appropriate physical force may be permitted to ensure that the employer's duty of care to protect students and staff from foreseeable risks of injury is met. Common law defences such as self defence, and defence of others remain legitimate reasons for the use of physical contact. Everyone has the right to defend himself or herself against an attack provided they do not use a disproportionate degree of force to do so.

### ***Safe practice guidelines when using physical restraint***

The use of restraint with a student in situations where the safety of others is threatened is to prevent injury. The restraint must be reasonable in the particular circumstances, and must be in proportion to the circumstances of the incident. It must always be the minimum force needed to achieve the desired result, and take into account the age, stature, disability, understanding and gender of the student. For example, if restraining a near-adolescent or adolescent female, care should be taken to avoid contact with breasts.

It may be a valid decision for a staff member not to use physical force in a situation involving several students, or a physically larger student, where the staff member believes that doing so would increase the likelihood of injury to him/herself. In such cases, the staff member should remove other students who may be at risk and seek help from another staff member, or in extreme cases the police.

Parents should be informed at enrolment of the pre/school's policy on physical contact with students.

### ***Do***

- Continue talking with the student throughout the incident. Make clear that physical restraint will stop when it ceases to be necessary to protect the student or others.
- Grip clothing rather than the body, whenever possible.
- Document incidents promptly and keep these records with the principal/director. The record should include
  - the name of child/children involved

- location of incident
  - name of witnesses (staff and/or children)
  - incident outline (including child's behaviour, what was said, steps taken, degree of force applied, and how applied)
  - child's response and outcome
  - details of any injury or damage to property.
- Inform parents promptly and fully of any incident involving the physical restraint of their child and provide them with opportunity to discuss the matter at the time they are informed.
  - Ensure sector specific guidelines regarding other forms of documentation are followed, for example critical incident forms.
  - Provide/offer confidential debriefing, counselling support and OHSW documentation to all staff involved in incidents of restraint.

### ***Don't***

Use restraint that involves:

- force applied to the head or neck
- restrictions to breathing
- punching
- kicking
- holding by the hair or ear
- confining a student in a locked room or limited space without access to staff.

## **Working with students with special needs**

All sections of this document require careful interpretation when applied to students with special needs. For example, students with intellectual disabilities may engage in a much wider range of physical and overtly sexual behaviours towards staff and other students as a result of their disability. Similarly, staff will need to engage more often in physical contact and touch with these students as a means of meeting their duty of care to them. In fact touch itself may be an agreed form of communication between a student, their parent and staff members where the student has a communication disability. Students 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 students.

Because of these differences staff need to be more vigilant and thoughtful in their physical interactions with students with special needs. 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 students from other adults is a critical obligation of staff and one that must not be delayed, minimized or delegated. See section – ‘Responding to inappropriate/sexual behaviour of staff towards students’.

Pre/schools support students with disabilities through various forms of individual student plans. The common features of these plans are that they involve all people who deal with the student on a regular basis, including other service providers, and they document the agreed strategies that are to be used in supporting the student. These plans are particularly important when challenging behaviours, personal care and hygiene and special physical considerations are an issue at the pre/school (eg toileting, transport within and beyond the pre/school environment, situations where physical restraint is occasionally required etc). The possibility of restraint and the nature of that restraint for students with special needs should be addressed in the individual plan as should alternative strategies for preventing harm to others. The plan process should involve the student as far as possible.

It is appropriate that different approaches are likely to be needed from staff in their interactions with students with special needs. However, the basic principles outlined elsewhere in this document remain applicable to all students. Staff have a duty of care to protect students 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 a pre/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 the pre/school. It is critical that staff appreciate culturally specific expectations regarding touch so that embarrassment or offence can be avoided for everyone, and particularly for students.

Many children and young people attending our pre/schools 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 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 early interactions with the children and families that are known or suspected to have escaped traumatic circumstances.

## Reporting, Remedy and Redress

If anyone wishes to bring a complaint of abuse against any member of staff, present or past, of a Jesuit school, they may do so in any of the following ways:

1. Contact the Head of the relevant school
2. Contact the Jesuit Provincial's Assistant for Professional Standards (currently Fr Geoffrey King SJ) on 03 9341 5800
3. Contact the Jesuit Provincial (currently Fr Mark Raper SJ) on 03 9810 7300
4. Contact the office of the Professional Standards Resource Group (established jointly by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes at the appropriate number as listed below:

### Professional Standards Resource Groups

New South Wales	1300 369 977
Northern Territory	07 4789 1044
Queensland	1800 337 928
South Australia	08 8223 5890
Tasmania	1800 356 613
Victoria	1800 816 030
Western Australia	1800 072 390.

The Jesuit authorities will then proceed in accordance with the protocols of *Towards Healing* and/or the protocols established by the relevant Jesuit school.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to:

Catholic Education South Australia and the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia *Protective Practices for Staff in Their Interaction with Students: Guidelines for Schools, Preschools and Out of School Hours Care* (June 2005)

Catholic Education Office Diocese of Parramatta *Protective Practices for Staff in Their Relationships with Students* (2004)

St Ignatius College, Adelaide *Child Protection Policies and Protocol*.