



POLICY: Rangitikei College Board

# Child Protection Policy

## Rationale

- Student safety and wellbeing is paramount.
- This document is Rangitikei College's commitment to protect vulnerable children from abuse and neglect through its actions, activities, and staff.
- The college must ensure the safety of all students in its care and also adhere to the Vulnerable Children's Act (2014). It is intended to protect all children staff may encounter – including siblings, the children of adults accessing services and any other children encountered by staff
- These guidelines apply to all staff that have direct or indirect contact with our students. (See Appendix for full definition.)
- The school has a commitment to work to produce the best possible outcomes for the child and to work towards continuous improvement in child protection practices. Recognition of the culture of the family/whānau, its importance and the rights of family/whānau to participate in decision-making about their children, and the rights of the child to participate in decision making are key aspects.
- These Guidelines and Procedures are consistent with Oranga Tamariki and Police Guidelines and future revisions will be checked for consistency with these organisations and the relevant legislation.

## Guidelines

1. All staff will be made aware of this policy, associated procedures, and their obligations under the Vulnerable Children Act 2014. New staff induction will include information about these.
2. The college will provide training to all staff about child protection issues
3. All appointments (permanent, fixed term, contractor, casual or volunteer) to positions that have direct and/or frequent contact with children or young people will be made in accordance with the requirements of the Vulnerable Children Act 2014. These will include a safety check.
4. No new staff member will start work until the safety check has been completed and is satisfactory to the Principal.
5. The Principal will safety check all staff every three years (note that for registered teachers this check is undertaken by the Teaching Council of Aotearoa-New Zealand as a requirement for the issuing of a Practicing Certificate).
6. All volunteers who come into regular contact with students will need to be safety checked before they commence their roles.

7. Guests do not need to be safety checked as long as they are working under the supervision of a staff member.
8. No-one will have access to student information until they have been safety checked.
9. Any disclosures from children should be immediately referred to the Guidance Counsellor or, in their absence, to an appropriate member of the Senior Leadership Team. The Guidance Counsellor is the 'designated person' in terms of the Vulnerable Children Act 2014, and is responsible for providing support and advice to staff with concerns regarding the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person.
10. Any issues relating to suspected child abuse should be managed using the college's 'Procedures: Suspected Child Abuse'.
11. Historical allegations should be responded to in the same way as current ones, and with the same priority.
12. Any organisation that provides services to our students on a regular basis, or where the student might be in close contact with an individual on an irregular basis, must have a Child Protection policy
13. All personal information regarding students is to be treated as confidential.
14. Staff should always maintain appropriate professional boundaries and avoid behaviour which might be misinterpreted by others. Adults who work with children must therefore act in a way that is considered to be safe practice. This includes the use of digital technologies. Staff should ensure that all communications are transparent and open to scrutiny.
15. When physical contact is made with a student this should be in response to their needs at the time, of limited duration and appropriate to their age, stage of development, ethnicity, background and the situation. Staff should use their professional judgement at all times, take note of the student's reaction or feelings, and use a level of contact and/or form of communication which is situationally appropriate.

The college has Complaints Guidelines and Procedures which should be used if anyone suspects there is an inappropriate relationship existing between a staff member and a student.

Presiding Member:



Date:

28/6/23

Next review date: July 2026

**ASSOCIATED PROCEDURES:**

- Suspected Child Abuse Procedures
- Staff Code of Conduct

*(NB: Procedures are developed as part of school management. The Board will be informed of the development or revision of procedures derived from Board policies by the Principal. For some especially significant procedures, these will be presented to the Board in full)*



Relating to CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

# Suspected Child Abuse Procedures

## Definitions

For the purposes of these procedures:

- **Abuse** means the harming (whether physically, emotionally or sexually), ill-treatment, neglect or deprivation of any child.
  - **Physical abuse** – any acts that may result in the physical harm of a child or young person. It can be, but is not limited to: bruising, cutting, hitting, beating, biting, burning, causing abrasions, strangulation, suffocation, drowning, poisoning and fabricated or induced illness
  - **Sexual abuse** – any acts that involve forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not they are aware of what is happening. Sexual abuse can be, but is not limited to:
    - Contact abuse: touching breasts, genital/anal fondling, masturbation, oral sex, penetrative or non-penetrative contact with the anus or genitals, encouraging the child to perform such acts on the perpetrator or another, involvement of the child in activities for the purposes of pornography or prostitution.
    - Non-contact abuse: exhibitionism, voyeurism, exposure to pornographic or sexual imagery, inappropriate photography or depictions of sexual or suggestive behaviours or comments.
  - **Emotional abuse** – any act or omission that results in adverse or impaired psychological, social, intellectual and emotional functioning or development. This can include:
    - Patterns of isolation, degradation, constant criticism or negative comparison to others. Isolating, corrupting, exploiting or terrorising a child can also be emotional abuse.
    - Exposure to family/whānau or intimate partner violence
- **Neglect** means the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical, educational or psychological needs, leading to adverse or impaired physical or emotional functioning or development.
- **Child protection** means activities carried out to ensure that students are safe in cases where there is suspected abuse or neglect or the risk of abuse or neglect.
- **Designated person for child protection** is the person responsible for providing advice and support to staff where they have a concern about an individual child or who want advice about the child protection policy.
- **Disclosure** – information given to a staff member by the child, parent or caregiver or third party in relation to abuse or neglect
- **Staff** means people (paid or unpaid), working at Rangitikei College and includes employees, contractors, consultants, associates and volunteers whether working on a full time, part time, casual, or temporary basis who come into contact with students.
- **Student** means anyone enrolled at the college
- **Safer recruitment** means following good practice processes for pre-employment checking which help manage the risk of unsuitable persons entering the children's workforce.

- **Safety check** includes identity confirmation, obtaining references, conducting interviews, checking CVs and undertaking Police vetting
- **Workforce restriction** is a restriction on the employment or engagement of people with certain specified convictions under the Vulnerable Children Act 2014.

## Safety checking

- All staff employed by Rangitikei College will be safety checked by the Principal. The collection of information for this safety check may be delegated to an appropriate staff member (eg. Deputy Principal, Business Manager). Thereafter, checking will occur on a 3 yearly cycle. The responsibility for evaluating the safety check remains with the Principal.
- All staff need to be aware that under the terms of the Vulnerable Children Act 2014, the 'clean slate rule' does not apply and any historical information that comes to light in relation to child safety could have an impact on employment.
- The Principal will develop a Safety Check procedure checklist for all staff. Wherever possible a range of safety checking tools should be used (eg. police vetting, interview, reference checking).

## Guidance for identifying possible abuse or neglect

- While there are different definitions and categories of abuse, the important thing is for staff to consider overall wellbeing and the risk of harm to the child. It is not so important to be able to define or categorise the type of abuse or neglect.
- Staff should feel empowered to act on suspected abuse and neglect, even when the symptoms or patterns of symptoms are subtle, while avoiding adhering to stereotypes and making assumptions.
- It is normal for staff to feel uncertain. The important thing is that they can recognise when something is wrong, especially if they notice a pattern, or several signs that make them concerned.
- Staff also need to be aware of the indicators of potential neglect. The indicators may include:
  - Physical signs e.g., looking rough and uncared for, dirty, without appropriate clothing, underweight
  - Developmental delays e.g., small for their age, cognitive delays, falling behind in school, poor speech and social skills
  - Emotional abuse/neglect e.g., sleep problems, low self-esteem, obsessive behaviour, inability to cope in social situations, sadness/loneliness and evidence of self-harm
  - Behavioural concerns e.g., disengagement/ neediness, eating disorders/substance abuse, aggression
  - Neglectful supervision e.g., out and about unsupervised, left alone, no safe home to return to
  - Medical neglect e.g., skin disorders or other untreated medical issues
- Every situation is different and it's important to consider all available information about the child and their environment before reaching conclusions. For example, behavioural concerns may be the result of life events, such as divorce, accidental injury or bereavement. Staff should talk to the Guidance counsellor or SLT if they have concerns.

## **Guidance on responding to suspected abuse or neglect**

Once a referral has been made to the SLT or Guidance Counsellor, the following action should be taken:

- a. Responding to a child in immediate danger – referral to the Police and/or Oranga Tamariki.
- b. Responding to a child when the child discloses abuse or when there are concerns about abuse or neglect – a phone call to Oranga Tamariki to discuss appropriate next steps.
- c. Responding to more general concerns about the wellbeing of a child, where referral to the statutory agencies (Oranga Tamariki or the Police) is not appropriate – e.g., referral to a family/whānau support agency in the community, such as Te Kotuku Hauora or Whānau Ora is more appropriate.
- d. Responding to a child when the child discloses abuse:
  - Listen to the child. Disclosures by children are often subtle and need to be handled with particular care, including an awareness of the child's cultural identity and how that affects interpretation of their behaviour and language.
  - Reassure the child. Let the child know that they are not in trouble and have done the right thing.
  - Ask open ended prompts – e.g., “What happened next?” Do not interview the child (in other words, do not ask questions beyond open prompts for the child to continue). Do not make promises that can't be kept, e.g., “I will keep you safe now”.
  - If the child is visibly distressed, provide appropriate reassurance and re-engage in appropriate activities under supervision until they are able to participate in ordinary activities.
  - If the child is not in immediate danger, re-involve the child in ordinary activities and explain what you are going to do next
  - If the child is in immediate danger contact the Police immediately.
  - As soon as possible formally record the disclosure. Record word for word, what the child said as well as the date, time and who was present.
- e. Where a concern about a child doesn't amount to suspicion of abuse or neglect, it could be harmful to the wellbeing of the child and their family/whānau to make a notification to the statutory agencies. Instead try work to partner with other agencies the school knows and trusts to identify and address the needs of the child.

## **A complaint or allegation made against a worker**

1. The welfare of the student will be of paramount importance in all decision making.
2. An allegation against a staff member will be given the same level of concern and action as any other situation of suspected abuse.
3. The Principal will oversee any complaint or allegation against a staff member that may involve child abuse.
  - The Principal will be required to take advice from either the NZ School Trustees Association, or its own designated lawyer as soon as possible.

- The Presiding Member and school insurer should be informed at the earliest practical opportunity.
  - If the teacher is the subject of the allegation, a mandatory report should be made to the Teaching Council of Aotearoa-New Zealand.
  - Once an allegation has been made the Principal, and/or Presiding Member, must ensure safeguards are in place to prevent exposure to further vulnerability or risk during the investigation (eg. additional supervision, alternative non-child facing duties, suspension). This will be following appropriate legal advice. While such safeguards are not in any way a presumption that the allegations are justified, they must also be applied as if the allegations may well be upheld.
  - If the formal advice above is disputed, or not followed, the Presiding Member must be informed and make a decision whether this requires Board approval.
  - The Principal should commence an investigation as soon as is practicable. If, in the case of alleged or suspected child abuse or harm, this is referred to Oranga Tamariki or Police, their advice should be followed. This may mean that the school's own employment investigation must be put on hold while these agencies complete theirs.
  - The Principal will follow the advice of the NZ School Trustees Association or school's own lawyer or Police or Oranga Tamariki in terms of notifying other potentially affected parties (eg. whānau, other staff etc).
  - The Principal should actively record, monitor and review the investigation, and report to the Presiding Member accordingly.
  - Relevant Collective Agreements must be adhered to.
4. If the Principal is the subject of the allegation, the Presiding Member should be immediately informed and determine the appropriate course of action following advice from a lawyer or the NZ School Trustees Association. Unless advised otherwise, or has a potential conflict of interest, the Presiding Member shall take the lead in the ensuing investigation.
5. The school will not enter into any settlement agreement without the endorsement of the NZ School Trustees Association, or its own lawyer.
- Such a settlement must not contradict a culture of safeguarding child protection.
  - If there are any financial obligations, the school's insurer must be informed.
- 6.

## **Confidentiality and information sharing**

- The Privacy Act 1993 and the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 allow information to be shared to keep children safe when abuse or suspected abuse is reported or investigated.
- Under the Oranga Tamariki Act, any person who believes that a child has been, or is likely to be, harmed physically, emotionally or sexually, or ill-treated, abused, neglected or deprived may report

the matter to Oranga Tamariki or the Police and, provided the report is made in good faith, no civil, criminal or disciplinary proceedings may be brought against them.

## **Professional development and safe practice**

- a. Designated persons for child protection should have sufficient knowledge to provide guidance and expertise across the organisation.
- b. Frontline staff should have the skills necessary to recognise and respond to suspected abuse and neglect.
- c. Staff should be informed about the content of the Child Protection Policy and procedures and these Suspected Child Abuse Procedures as part of their orientation.
- d. Expectations for staff should promote professionalism in working with children, clearly establish roles and expectations of adult behaviour with children and encourage staff to keep their professional and personal lives separate.
- e. Good child-safe practices include:
  - Wherever possible an open door policy for all spaces should be used - excluding toilets
  - Monitoring all visitors to school
  - Ensure staff members are aware of appropriate procedures when giving assistance to students with special needs
  - Staff should avoid being alone when transporting a child, unless an emergency requires it