

Child Safety & Wellbeing Policy

Introduction

At Melbourne Academy of Performing Arts (MAPA), we are committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people. Our goal is to create a safe, nurturing, and inclusive environment where students can grow and thrive through dance and performing arts. This policy outlines our commitment to child safety and our approach to protecting children from harm, abuse, and neglect in alignment with the Victorian Child Safe Standards.

Purpose

The MAPA Child Safety & Wellbeing Policy:

- Demonstrates our commitment to upholding the Victorian Child Safe Standards.
- Provides clear guidelines for policies, procedures, and practices that promote safety and wellbeing for all students.
- Informs the MAPA community of their shared responsibility to act safely and appropriately towards children and young people.
- Establishes a framework for open discussion and proactive management of child safety issues.
- Ensures compliance with all relevant laws and regulations regarding child protection in Victoria.

Scope

The MAPA Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy applies to all individuals within the MAPA community, including:

- Staff members (teachers, administrators, and other employees)
- Volunteers and third-party contractors
- Parents, guardians, and visitors to MAPA
- External providers of services, programs, or events hosted by MAPA

This Policy applies across all MAPA settings, including but not limited to:

- On-site studio classes, events, and activities
- Off-site rehearsals, performances, competitions, and events
- Virtual and online learning environments
- Any other environments where MAPA students participate under the supervision of MAPA staff or contractors

Commitment to Child Safety

MAPA is dedicated to creating a safe and welcoming environment where children and young people are protected, supported, and empowered to actively participate in decisions that impact their lives. We have a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse and are committed to acting in the best interests of our students at all times. Every member of the MAPA community has a shared responsibility to understand their role in safeguarding children and to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all students remain at the heart of everything they do and every decision they make.

We are committed to:

- Providing an environment where children feel safe, respected, and valued.
- Protecting children from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.
- Supporting and empowering children to have a voice in decisions affecting them.
- Promoting equity and respect by valuing diversity and inclusivity.
- Continuously improving our child safety practices.

Cultural Safety

MAPA prioritises an inclusive and culturally safe environment that respects the strengths, values, and traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. We prioritise creating a culturally respectful space where every student can feel safe, valued, and supported to thrive.

Student Empowerment and Participation

We believe in creating an inclusive, child-centred organisation that encourages students and their families to contribute to our child safety practices. Students are given opportunities to share their perspectives and concerns, influencing their dance education and overall experience at MAPA.

Students are educated about their rights to safety, information, and participation, with a strong emphasis on peer support and friendships as essential elements of a safe and enriching environment.

We value and actively seek the voices of our students in decisions that impact them. Recognising that students bring unique perspectives to their learning and development, we provide opportunities for them to shape their own dance education, contribute to decision-making processes, and collectively influence outcomes by sharing their views, concerns, and ideas.

MAPA acknowledges that parents and carers hold the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of their children. We are committed to engaging families and relevant communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and others to ensure a collaborative approach to child safety.

Families are kept informed about MAPA's operations, policies, and procedures, including:

- The Child Safety & Wellbeing Policy
- Child Safety Codes of Conduct
- Reporting procedures and support services

Diversity and Equity

MAPA celebrates diversity and is committed to fostering an inclusive environment free from discriminatory practices. To uphold this commitment, we:

- Support the cultural safety, participation, and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families.
- Identify and address racism, ensuring that any instances are dealt with promptly and appropriately.
- Promote the cultural safety, participation, and empowerment of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and their families.
- Support students with disabilities or additional learning needs and their families, ensuring their full participation in our programs.
- Provide an inclusive and supportive environment for students and families of diverse sexuality and gender identities.
- Create a physical environment that celebrates diverse cultures and recognises cultural differences.
- Commit to ensuring that all our facilities are accessible and inclusive for students of all abilities.

These commitments extend across all aspects of MAPA's programs, ensuring that everyone feels welcomed, valued, and safe.

Child Safety and Human Resources

MAPA upholds the highest standards in recruiting and screening staff, volunteers, and contractors to ensure we engage individuals who are suitable to work with children and young people. Our practices include:

- Stating our commitment to child safety and wellbeing in recruitment materials.
- Implementing screening processes to assess the suitability of all applicants.
- Requiring valid Working with Children Checks (WWCC) or equivalent.
- Providing regular training on child safety and wellbeing.
- Conducting ongoing supervision and performance reviews.

Child Safety Training and Information

At MAPA, we are committed to creating a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for all students. As part of our induction process, all teachers, staff, relevant volunteers, and contractors are required to complete training on MAPA's child safety policies, practices, and procedures. Refresher and ongoing child safety training is provided annually to ensure our team is always equipped to prioritize the safety and wellbeing of our students.

Our child safety induction and training program includes:

- An overview of **MAPA's Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy**
- Guidance on **MAPA's Child Safety Code of Conduct**
- Recognising and responding to **child abuse, neglect, and harm** and identifying key indicators
- Procedures for **responding to and reporting child safety incidents or concerns**, including mandatory reporting, escalation to police, and compliance with reportable conduct obligations
- Policies on **information sharing and record keeping** related to child safety incidents and concerns
- Ensuring compliance with **Working with Children (WWC) clearances**

Additional training is provided to teachers and staff working closely with students in extended or unique circumstances, such as **theatre rehearsals, concerts, or off-site events**. This ensures that child safety remains the top priority even outside the studio environment.

We also provide casual volunteers and contractors with clear guidance on our **Child Safety Code of Conduct** and the process for reporting child safety concerns to MAPA management and, where applicable, external authorities.

Supervision and Support

Regular supervision and guidance are provided to staff, teachers and regular volunteers to ensure compliance with MAPA's child safety standards. Any inappropriate behaviour is addressed immediately according to MAPA's policies and legal obligations.

By working together and remaining vigilant, we can continue to provide a safe and nurturing environment for all students at MAPA.

Complaints and Reporting Processes

At MAPA, we encourage a culture where everyone in our studio community feels safe to raise concerns and complaints about child safety and wellbeing. Our processes for reporting concerns, and the procedures that all teachers, volunteers, and contractors must follow whenever they witness, suspect, or receive a complaint about a child safety incident or concern, are outlined below.

MAPA will take prompt and appropriate action in response to all child safety incidents or concerns, including complaints, allegations, or disclosures of abuse or harm. This applies to reports from staff, volunteers, contractors, students, parents/carers, or any other members of our community.

Our response to child safety concerns includes:

- Externally reporting all matters that meet the required thresholds to Child Protection Services (Mandatory Reports), the Police (Mandatory Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse), the CCYP (Reportable Conduct) and/or other relevant authorities, consistent with PROTECT Four Critical Actions.
- Cooperating fully with any investigation conducted by an external agency.
- Protecting students connected to the incident and providing ongoing support to affected individuals throughout and after the resolution of the matter.
- Taking specialised measures for students from diverse or vulnerable backgrounds, including Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students, students from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, students with disabilities, and students who identify as LGBTQIA+.
- Sharing and requesting information with external agencies as required under relevant Child Information Sharing Schemes to ensure the best outcomes for the child.
- Securing and retaining records of all reported child safety incidents or concerns and MAPA's responses to them.
- Taking broader preventative measures by conducting reviews and improving child safety practices across the studio.

Child Safety Risk Management

At MAPA, we recognise the importance of a proactive risk management approach to minimise the potential for child abuse or harm in all aspects of our activities and operations. This approach informs our policies, procedures, and activity planning.

We identify, assess, and manage risks to child safety in all studio environments, including:

- Risks associated with **studio activities, rehearsals, performances, and external events**.
- Risks present in **physical, virtual, and online environments**.
- The characteristics and needs of our **diverse student body**, ensuring inclusivity and safety for all.

Our management team monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of these actions and reviews our child safety policies and practices **at least annually** to ensure continuous improvement. This ongoing process ensures that MAPA provides a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment for all students.

Privacy and Information Sharing

MAPA complies with Australian privacy laws regarding the collection, use, and disclosure of personal information. Information about child safety may be shared with external agencies when necessary to protect students.

Child Safety Record Keeping

All internal and external reports of child safety incidents, concerns, and responses are documented using the **MAPA Child Protection Incident Report Form**. We ensure that these records remain confidential and that privacy is upheld for all students and families involved, in compliance with Australian privacy laws.

Child Safety Program and Practice Review

MAPA is dedicated to the continuous improvement of our **Child Safety Program** to ensure the safety and wellbeing of every student. Our program is reviewed regularly to maintain compliance with child safety laws, regulations, and standards, as well as to evaluate its overall effectiveness.

As part of these reviews, MAPA:

- Actively seeks and incorporates feedback from students, families, staff, volunteers, and contractors.
- Analyses of any complaints, incidents, or concerns related to child safety to identify areas for improvement.
- Communicates any learnings, adjustments, or changes to policies and practices across the studio community.

By fostering a collaborative and transparent approach to child safety, we aim to create a secure and supportive environment where all students can thrive.

Child Safety Procedures: Reporting Concerns

If you believe a child is in immediate danger, call **Triple Zero (000)** for urgent police assistance.

At MAPA, we encourage all staff, volunteers, contractors, parents/carers, and students to report any concerns about a child's wellbeing or safety. Anyone can report concerns about the safety or wellbeing of a child under the age of 17 to **Child Protection – West Division (DHHS)** by calling **1300 360 462**. Note: The division managing the case will be based on the child's residential address, not MAPA's location.

MAPA's **Child Safe Program** provides clear guidelines for staff and volunteers to:

- **Recognise** key risk indicators of child abuse.
- **Report** concerns to MAPA's designated Child Safety Officer.
- **Follow** proper procedures for reporting child abuse incidents to external authorities.

Students are provided with multiple pathways to raise concerns or report incidents, including:

- Formal and informal reporting channels.
- Anonymous reporting options.
- Support from external child advocacy or child safety organisations.

At MAPA, we understand that some individuals, particularly children, may have additional vulnerabilities that increase their risk of harm or create barriers to disclosing safety concerns.

All communications regarding child safety concerns will be handled confidentially on a “**need-to-know**” basis, ensuring the protection of all individuals involved.

If you suspect that a child may be experiencing abuse, neglect, or grooming, we encourage you to contact:

Sarah Ambrose, MAPA’s Director and Child Safety Officer

📞 **MAPA Office:** (03) 8560 4334

✉️ **Email:** sarah@mapa.com.au

You can also arrange a face-to-face meeting to discuss any concerns confidentially.

How to Report a Child Safety Incident or Concern

Students

Students at MAPA are encouraged to report any child safety incident, concern, or complaint about a staff member, volunteer, or contractor in a way that feels comfortable to them. We provide multiple child-focused reporting pathways, including an anonymous disclosure option. Students can speak to:

- A trusted teacher
- The MAPA administration team
- A designated Child Safety Officer

Parents/Carers, Family Members, and Community Members

Parents, carers, family members, and community members who have concerns about a student’s safety or wellbeing should follow the procedures outlined in this policy and contact our Senior Child Safety Officer. This policy is available on our website or can be requested from the MAPA office.

Staff, Volunteers, and Contractors

All staff, volunteers, and contractors at MAPA have a legal and ethical responsibility to report any child safety incidents or concerns involving students. They must:

- Report concerns to a MAPA Child Safety Officer.
- Follow the procedures outlined in our Child Safety Policies.
- Make any legally required reports to external authorities.

Consulting with a **Child Safety Officer** does not replace a staff member’s obligation to report directly to external authorities if required by law.

Online & Written Reporting

Anyone—students, parents, staff, volunteers, or community members—can submit a Child Safety Incident Report using one of the following methods:

- **Online:** Complete the **incident report form** via our website.
- **Printed Form:** Print and complete the Child Safety Incident Report and drop it into the locked letterbox located at the front of MAPA.

While providing **contact information** can help us follow up and offer support, individuals may choose to **remain anonymous**.

All reports and concerns will be handled **confidentially** on a **need-to-know basis**, ensuring the protection and privacy of all individuals involved.

Support for Students, Families, and Staff Following a Child Safety Incident or Disclosure

Child safety incidents or concerns can be deeply distressing and may significantly impact the mental health and wellbeing of students, as well as their families. In addition to reporting concerns to the relevant authorities, MAPA is committed to ensuring that students feel safe and supported within our studio environment.

MAPA provides tailored support depending on the specific circumstances of the student and their family. This may include:

- Working with the student and their family to develop a support plan.
- Offering referrals to external professionals, such as mental health specialists, child advocacy organisations, or other relevant support services.
- Assisting families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds by facilitating access to bi-cultural workers or translators, if needed.

MAPA also extends similar support to former students who may disclose historical child safety concerns related to their time at the studio.

Additionally, witnessing a child safety incident or receiving a disclosure can be distressing for staff, volunteers, and contractors. MAPA is committed to supporting those affected and can assist them in accessing appropriate professional support, including confidential counselling services. MAPA remains dedicated to fostering a safe, supportive, and caring environment for all members of our community.

Embedding a Culture of Child Safety: MAPA's Child Safe Program

At MAPA, we are committed to fostering a culture of child safety through our **Child Safe Program**, which establishes clear systems, policies, and procedures to create and maintain a safe environment for all students. This program ensures that child safety and wellbeing are prioritised across all aspects of our operations.

MAPA's **Child Safe Program** includes:

- **Child Safety Code of Conduct** outlining appropriate behaviour and expectations.
- **Clear information** on child abuse, harm, and key indicators of concern.
- **Defined procedures** for reporting child safety concerns to MAPA's Child Safety Officer and responding to incidents or allegations of harm.
- **Strategies to educate and empower** staff, volunteers, contractors, parents, and students to recognise, discuss, and report child safety concerns.
- **Screening and recruitment processes** for staff, volunteers, and contractors to ensure child-safe hiring practices.
- **Protocols for mandatory reporting** to external agencies, including Child Protection, the Police, and the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP).
- **Student wellbeing policies** designed to support and empower students.
- **Inclusive strategies** to encourage the participation and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and students with disabilities.
- **Ongoing child safety training** for all relevant personnel.
- **Guidance on responding to disclosures of abuse**, ensuring immediate protection and support for affected students.
- **Record-keeping and confidentiality protocols** to safeguard sensitive information.
- **Compliance with all relevant laws, regulations, and standards**, including the **Victorian Child Safe Standards and Ministerial Order 1359**.
- **A system for continuous review and improvement** to strengthen child safety measures over time.

By embedding these practices, MAPA ensures a safe, supportive, and protective environment where all students can thrive.

Responsibilities

At MAPA, **child safety is a shared responsibility**. Every staff member, teacher, volunteer, and parent/carer plays a crucial role in creating and maintaining a safe environment for all students.

Specific responsibilities for MAPA members are outlined as follows:

Directors and Management

- Ensure compliance with child safety laws and regulations.
- Foster a culture of child safety through training, policies, and leadership.
- Appoint a Child Safety Officer to oversee child safety initiatives.

Staff, teachers and Volunteers

- Act in accordance with the studio's Code of Conduct.
- Complete child safety induction training and understand mandatory reporting obligations.
- Take immediate action if they observe or suspect abuse.

Parents and Families

- Support our commitment to child safety.
- Engage positively with studio staff to support their children's safety and wellbeing.
- Raise concerns or provide feedback about child safety practices.

Children

- Are encouraged to share concerns and ask questions about their safety.
- Participate in activities that build confidence and awareness about staying safe.

Implementation and Communication

MAPA's Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy is publicly available on our website. It is provided to all new staff, teachers and regular volunteers and is included in MAPA's Welcome Handbook upon enrolment.

Breach of Child Safety & Wellbeing Policy

MAPA strictly enforces its **Child Safety & Wellbeing Policy** and **Child Safety Code of Conduct**. In cases of non-compliance, a review will be conducted, which may result in various actions depending on the severity of the breach, including:

- Remedial education
- Counselling
- Increased supervision
- Restriction of duties
- Suspension
- For serious breaches, termination of employment, contract, or engagement.

These measures ensure that MAPA maintains a safe and supportive environment for all students.

Related Documents

- Child Safe Code of Conduct
- Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy
- Child Safe Program
- Child Safety Incident Report Form

Document Details

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Approver: Sarah Ambrose

Policy Owner: Sarah Ambrose

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