

Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Australian College of Applied Animal Studies (ACAAS) is a small Registered Training Organisation (RTO) situated in the eastern outskirts of Melbourne. We deliver training to Veterinary Nursing and Companion Animal Students. Our Student cohort is predominantly students over 18 years, however, early school leavers over the age of 16, looking to pursue a career in Veterinary Nursing may choose to undertake the Certificate III in Companion Animal Course, prior to completion of the Veterinary Nursing Qualification. Training is delivered in a purpose built Veterinary Hospital, providing students with access to a real-working Veterinary facility for the duration of their training.

ACAAS Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Australian College of Applied Animal Studies acknowledges the Mayone Bulluk Bunurong/Boonwurrung People, the Traditional Owners of the land on which we operate. We acknowledge and respect their contributions, experience and knowledge as First Nations people. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present.

This Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy was approved by Management on 3 March 2023. It demonstrates the strong commitment of management, staff and volunteers to child safety and wellbeing, and how our organisation keeps children safe from harm, including child abuse.

Commitment to child safety

All students and children who enrol at ACAAS have a right to feel and be safe. The welfare of the students in our care will always be our first priority and we have a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse and harm. We aim to create a child safe and child-friendly environment where children feel safe and grow their skills in the companion animal and veterinary industries.

Purpose

This Policy outlines how ACAAS prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and what steps we will take to do this.

Scope

This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, Management, students and other individuals involved in our organisation. This policy applies to all classes and mentoring conducted by ACAAS.

Definitions

Management means the Directors of Training and CEO.

Child abuse means:

- a sexual offence committed against a child
- an offence committed against a child under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic), such as grooming
- physical violence against a child
- causing serious emotional or psychological harm to a child
- serious neglect of a child.

Harm is damage to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child or young person, including as a result of child abuse by adults or the conduct of other children. It includes physical, emotional, sexual and psychological harm. Harm can arise from a single act or event and can also be cumulative, that is, arising as a result of a series of acts or events over a period of time.

Child/Children means a person who is under the age of 18 years.

Concerns and complaints

A concern refers to any potential issue that could impact negatively on the safety and wellbeing of children.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction to ACAAS related to one or more of the following:

- our services or dealings with individuals
- allegations of abuse or misconduct by a staff member, a volunteer or another individual associated with ACAAS
- disclosures of abuse or harm made by a child or young person
- the conduct of a child or young person at ACAAS
- the inadequate handling of a prior concern
- general concerns about the safety for children or of an activity.

Student- Any student enrolled with ACAAS who may be over or under 18.

Role of Management

Management has the role of making sure our RTO prioritises students and children's safety and that action is taken when anyone raises concerns about students or children's safety.

Management will champion and model a child safe culture. We encourage anyone involved with the organisation to report a child safety concern. Management will work to create a positive culture around reporting so that people feel comfortable to raise concerns.

Everyone at ACAAS has a role in identifying and managing risks of child abuse and harm. Management will make sure risk assessments are undertaken and taking action to manage risks in accordance with this policy. Appropriate child safety training for staff and volunteers will be identified and completed.

Management will ensure regular review of effectiveness of processes related to child safety and wellbeing. The input of people involved with ACAAS will be sought as part of this review.

Children's empowerment and participation

ACAAS is an RTO, who provide opportunities to students who may be under 18 to learn with us. We actively seek to include all student views and ideas in the delivery of training and assessment services.

We want all students to develop connections whilst enrolled with us and encourage students to be supportive of each other. We do not tolerate bullying or abusive behaviour and will take action if this occurs.

We respect the rights of students, including children and provide them with information about their rights including the right to be safe at ACAAS. We will actively seek to understand what makes children feel safe in our organisation. We regularly communicate with children about what they can do if they feel unsafe.

ACAAS values the voices of all students and will act on safety concerns raised by students or their families. ACAAS supports all students participation in the following ways:

- Regular discussions with students, including student-led conversations on what makes them feel safe and unsafe.
- Student surveys, including opportunity to provide feedback on the training materials and environment.
- Consultation with students about any proposed significant changes to the training plans. Students views are collected by staff, provided to management and considered in the decision-making process.

Families and communities

ACAAS recognises the important role of families and involves parents and carers when making significant decisions about their child. Parents, families and communities are welcome to provide feedback at any time through our contact email address and are encouraged to raise any concerns they have with us.

ACAAS provides information to families and community about our child safe policies and practices including through:

- publishing this Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Code of Conduct on our website

- including information about our child safety approach and operations through the student enrolment book
- including articles and information on child safety and wellbeing around the college.

Creating culturally safe environments for all Aboriginal children and their families

ACAAS is committed to creating environments where Aboriginal culture is celebrated and Aboriginal students, families and community members are welcomed and included. Strategies to embed cultural safety for Aboriginal students and children include:

- an Acknowledgement of Country at all events, such as our biannual graduation ceremony
- consulting with families of the Aboriginal community to identify opportunities to promote Aboriginal culture and practices at ACAAS
- providing opportunities for students and children to share their cultural identity and express their culture
- providing training for staff and volunteers on the strengths of Aboriginal culture and its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children
- seeking feedback from Aboriginal students and children, particularly how safe they feel expressing their identity including their culture.

Valuing diversity

We value diversity and equity for all students and children. To achieve this, we:

- provide training for all staff on understanding diversity and how to support inclusion and cultural safety
- welcome and support participation of all students and children, including students and children with disability, from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those who are unable to live at home, LGBTQIA+ and Aboriginal children and their families
- offer students and families through our enrolment forms the opportunity to provide information about themselves, including any specific needs to participate fully in our programs
- have zero tolerance of racism and other forms of discrimination and take action when discrimination or exclusion is identified
- deliver programming that reflects the diversity of our students, their interests and cultures
- acknowledge and celebrate dates our students consider important in our classes
- ensure our learning environment actively celebrates diversity and provision of inclusion for students and children of all abilities

Code of Conduct

ACAAS has a Child Safe Code of Conduct. All staff must comply with the Code of Conduct at all times. Breaches of the Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action including termination of a person's involvement with the RTO.

Any contractors or secondary organisation assisting in the delivery of our courses are also expected to abide by the Child Safe Code of Conduct, and where they are engaging with children will have to sign an agreement to comply with the code, prior to delivering the services.

Recruiting staff

ACAAS considers student and child safety and wellbeing during the recruitment and screening processes for staff, as outlined in the staff recruitment procedure. We only recruit staff who are appropriate to engage with children.

We require a Working with Children Check, Police Checks and referee checks for all staff. We require staff to have appropriate qualifications for their roles and check to make sure these qualifications are valid.

Supporting staff and volunteers

ACAAS is committed to ensuring that all staff receive training to ensure they understand their responsibilities in relation to child safety and to support their engagement with students and children. ACAAS assists its staff to incorporate child safety considerations into decisions and to promote a safe environment where students and children are empowered to speak up about issues that affect them.

All ACAAS staff are required to complete annual child safety training. Staff training will be documented within staff files.

Issues or concerns about behaviour with children will be raised immediately and addressed in line with our Code of Conduct, complaint handling policy and disciplinary policy.

Complaints and reporting

All reports of child abuse and child safety concerns will be treated seriously, whether they are made by an adult or a child and whether they are about the conduct of an adult or a child. All complaints and child safety concerns will be responded to promptly and thoroughly.

ACAAS has a complaint handling policy that includes information for staff and students about how a complaint or child safety concern will be responded to.

If a complaint includes an allegation or incident of child abuse or harm, then staff at ACAAS must report it in accordance with the complaint handling policy. ACAAS staff are required to prioritise children's safety in any response and to report all potentially criminal conduct to Victoria Police. Under the complaint handling and disciplinary policies, staff and volunteers may be subject to actions to support child safety including:

- being stood down during an investigation or terminated following an investigation
- having their duties altered so they do not engage with children at ACAAS
- not allowing unsupervised contact with children at ACAAS
- removing their access to the ACAAS IT system and facilities.

Complaints can be emailed to lmarchant@acaas.vic.edu.au or you can speak with a Manager.

If there is concern for the immediate safety of a child, immediately call 000.

Record keeping

ACAAS is committed to making and keeping full and accurate records about all child-related complaints or safety concerns.

All child safety complaints, concerns, incidents and near misses will be recorded in the complaints and feedback system and/or incident report documentation, depending on the circumstance.

Records which may assist with the investigation of a complaint or safety concern will be identified and kept as part of the record of an investigation. Records will be kept even if an investigation does not substantiate a complaint.

We will record and keep the outcome of any investigations, and the resolution of any complaints. This includes findings made, reasons for decisions and actions taken.

Records will be stored securely and kept by ACAAS for 30 years.

Information sharing

ACAAS may share relevant information to promote the safety and wellbeing of children, where it is appropriate and in their best interests. ACAAS will keep information about complaints confidential, except where it is necessary to share information to respond properly to a complaint or to prioritise child safety. We may also need to share information about incidents or complaints with external authorities to comply with the law or to prioritise safety. More information is available in our complaint handling policy.

Risk management

We recognise the importance of identifying and managing risks of child harm and abuse in the training environment operated by ACAAS.

We conduct risk assessments and have a risk management plan to address the risk of child abuse and harm at ACAAS. The risk management plan will be developed in consultation with our staff, students, parent representatives and children. We will ensure that any risk controls put in place balance the need to manage harm with the benefits of participating at ACAAS. Management is responsible for approving the risk management plan.

Any contractors or other providers of services will always be supervised by a member of staff while working with us to ensure child safety. See also our Code of Conduct.

Non-compliance with this policy and the Code of Conduct

ACAAS will enforce this policy, the Code of Conduct and any other child safety and wellbeing policies (see list below). Potential breaches by anyone will be investigated and may result in restriction of duties, suspension or termination of employment or engagement or other corrective action.

Review

ACAAS will review all child safe practices and policies at least every two years. We also review relevant practices and policies in response to a child safety incident or 'near miss'. Findings from reviews will be reported to the people involved in our organisation and also inform our approach to continuous improvement of our child safety practices. Reviews are overseen by Management and will be informed in consultation with children, families, students and staff.

Supporting documents –ACAAS child safety and wellbeing system

The following policies and procedures work together to support child safety and wellbeing across all of our operations:

- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Complaint handling policy
- Staff recruitment procedure
- Student Enrolment book
- Risk management plan
- Child safe training.

Supporting legislation

- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)* (including Child Safe Standards)
- *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)* (including reporting to Child Protection)
- *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)* (including Failure to Protect and Failure to Disclose offences)
- *Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic)* (including Part XIII – Organisational liability for child abuse)