Protection of Children – Grooming Policy

Policy Name:	Protection of Children – Grooming Policy	
Id & version:	HSE: 51	
Purpose:	Outlines the steps that the College takes to ensure the safety of children and young people against sexual abuse. This policy is to be reviewed annually and updated in light of experience and relevant research.	
Implementers:	Principal	
Scope:	All Staff	
Owner:	Peter Stone	
Current Review:	February 2025	Authorised by:Peter Stone
		Date: 14/02/2025
Next Review:	February 2026	
Concurrent Policies:	Staff Code of Conduct, Mandatory Reporting, Protective Behaviours Policies	

1. **INTRODUCTION**

Protecting children and young people against sexual abuse is a community- wide responsibility. Hope Christian College has a moral and legal responsibility to ensure children and young people are safe in our care and to ensure that all forms of abusive behaviours towards children are prevented.

A grooming offence is committed if the offender communicates by words or conduct with a child under the age of 18 years of age, or the child's carer or supervisor, and intends to commit a sexual offence involving the child.

It is imperative to prevent, reduce and minimise child abuse and exploitation in all their forms.

2. **PURPOSE**

This policy informs the staff of their responsibilities, providing a definition for grooming and how it can occur. The specific behaviours and actions of an offender grooming a child/young person, and the impact it will have on these victims, need to be understood by the school staff. This policy acknowledges the particular duty Hope Christian College employees have towards young children/people in their care. It respects the dignity of children/young people and Hope Christian College employees and it outlines their rights and responsibilities.

3. **PRINCIPLES**

    a. A safe environment is required to protect children/young people from harm and to prevent staff from abusing their position of authority and trust.

    b. Grooming is a serious offence and staff are to be self-aware of their professional obligations and responsibilities.

    c. All children/young people have the right to a thorough and systematic education in personal safety, including safety in relationships.

    d. Abuse of children/young people by persons in positions of trust or authority is a serious matter. All allegations must receive a response and be dealt with promptly.

    e. After a disclosure, any ongoing harm to the child/young person and the employee is minimised by:

- Adherence to agreed procedures.
- Provision of appropriate social and emotional support and pastoral care.
- Appropriate confidentiality.

f. The child/young person's ongoing safety and wellbeing will be the primary focus of decision making.

4. DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this policy, the following definitions apply:

a. **Child or young person**: A child is legally defined as a person under the age of 18 years. A young person is any person who comes under or may come under the care, supervision or authority of the school.

b. **Confidential**: Being entrusted with private and restricted information that must be treated as such, both in written and verbal form.

c. **Grooming**: The term 'grooming' refers to actions deliberately undertaken with the aim of befriending and influencing a child/young person, and, in some circumstances, members of the child/young person's family, for the purpose of sexual activity with the child/young person. These actions are designed to establish an emotional connection in order to lower the child/young person's inhibitions and gain access to the intended victim. In this respect, grooming involves psychological manipulation that is usually very subtle, drawn out, calculated, controlling and premeditated. Grooming frequently occurs online.

d. **Grooming behaviours**: There is no one set of actions or behaviours that are used to groom a child. Grooming behaviours include but are not limited to:
   - Persuading a child/young person or group of children/ young people that they have a special relationship, for example by:

     Spending inappropriate special time with a child/young person

     Inappropriately giving gifts

     Inappropriately showing favours to one child/young person but not other children/young people

Inappropriately allowing the child to over- step the rules

Testing boundaries, for example, by undressing in front of the child/young person.

Being in contact with a child/young person on social media.

Grooming occurs both before the offence in order to access the child, and after the offence to maintain that access for future abuse and ensure the child's silence. Grooming also seeks the parent or carer's continued trust.

e. **Duty of care**: Staff or volunteers working at Hope Christian College have a duty of care to support and protect the children and young people with whom they are professionally involved. When staff members form a reasonable belief that a child or young person has been harmed or is at risk of harm, they are ethically bound to take action to protect the safety and wellbeing of that child or young person. For teachers this is legally mandated under Mandatory Reporting Laws.

Duty of care is breached if a person:

- Does something that a reasonable person in that person's position would not do in a particular situation.
- Fails to do something that a reasonable person in that person's position would do in the circumstances.
- Acts or fails to act in a way that causes harm to someone to whom the person owes a duty of care.
- Fails to report when mandated.

f. Reasonable belief: A reasonable belief, is not the same as having proof. A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds. For example, a 'reasonable belief' might be formed when:

- A child states that they have been sexually abused

- A child states that they know someone who has been sexually abused. [Sometimes the child may be talking about themselves]
- Someone who knows the child states that the child has been sexually abused
- Professional observations of the child's behaviour or development leads a mandated professional to form a belief that the child has been sexually abused.
- Signs of sexual abuse leads to a belief that the child has been sexually abused.
- Makes statements like 'this is our special secret and I should tell no one'
- When he/she visits he/she gives me special gifts and tells me not to inform parents
- He/she always comes into the bathroom when my parents aren't home

5. PROCEDURES

The successful implementation of this policy will include the following:

- Staff being fully conversant with this policy.
- In conjunction with the Protective Behaviours Curriculum, educating the children in personal safety and about grooming. Through the Protective Behaviours Program
- School staff being vigilant in identifying possible grooming behaviours.
- Taking action that is timely, respectful and coordinated, when a staff member forms a belief that a child/young person is at risk of being harmed through grooming. The matter should be reported to the Principal and the Police.
- If a mandated staff member, lodges a mandatory report. See Mandatory report Policy for flow chart on lodging a report. Unless otherwise advised by the Police.
- Ensure the child/young person and their family have access to appropriate services in order to reduce any long-term effects of the grooming abuse.
- Documenting all allegations and retaining records in a secure area, ensuring their confidentiality.

6. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

a. All staff at Hope Christian College are informed of the criminal intent in grooming behaviours and are expected to be self-aware of their professional obligations and responsibilities.

b. A thorough and systematic education in personal safety through the Protective Behaviours Programme will be provided for all children/young people.

c. All staff will attend a Mandatory Reporting Workshop with refresher courses at the beginning of each school year.

d. All allegations of grooming will receive a prompt response and be clearly documented.

7. RECORD KEEPING

A file is kept in the Principals office, detailing all breaches of this policy and breaches of the Staff Code of Conduct and actions taken due to the alleged breach/s.