

Child Protection Policy

St. Martini Pre-Primary School (RF) NPC
(hereinafter referred to as SMPPS)

1. Aims and Intent

In our aim to give children the very best start in life, SMPPS ensures the rights and safety of our children on our premises and, wherever possible, off-site as well.

The curriculum that SMPPS uses covers many of the dangers and the children are taught, in a non-frightening way, about 'stranger danger' and body safety. Most importantly we give the children tools that can help them alert the people around them and, possibly, get away.

SMPPS actively promotes a culture of safety. We are very aware of child abuse and are committed to preventing incidents of any form of abuse in our school. In the unlikely event that an incident takes place at school, we will respond promptly and appropriately, and cooperate with the police, Department of Social Development and Social Welfare.

We are very aware of child abuse and watch our children very carefully. However, we try to remain balanced and do not look for signs where there are none.

2. Culture of Safety

SMPPS is committed to building a culture of safety in which children are protected from abuse and harm.

- a. The safety coordinators for child protection issues are the group teachers.
- b. The designated management, who oversees the safety coordinator, is the operations team (principal, campus supervisor, vice principal)
- c. All staff are trained to understand our safety policies and procedures and guardian are made aware of them too.

2.1 Staff

2.1.1 As per the Department of Social Development's (DSD) recommendations, SMPPS adheres to the following ratio:

- a. 19 months to 36 months: DSD 1:15, at SMPPS 1:8 (or 2:15)
- b. 3 years to 6 years: DSD 1:25, at SMPPS 1:12
- c. After school centre: DSD 1:35, at SMPPS 1:20

2.1.2 The adequate numbers of staff, each with the appropriate qualifications, help us to ensure that:

- a. Children are never left unsupervised by a SMPPS staff member.
- b. Younger children are accompanied to the toilets, children from the age of 4 years may go to the bathroom on their own (refer to Toilet Routine Policy).
- c. Students doing their practical's and/or volunteers are never left alone with the children.
- d. Children are never left when maintenance is being carried out at school.

- 2.1.3 Comprehensive personal records for every staff member are kept by management. The records include all contact details and their ID number.
- 2.1.4 Before employment commences at SMPPS all potential staff members are checked against the South African Crimes Database and Sexual Offenders Database. They are rechecked as part of the onboarding process at SMPPS, after that at least every 3 years in rotation, more frequent checks might be done if necessary.

2.2 Arrivals and Departures

- 2.2.1 On arrival the child will be signed in from a SMPPS staff member. Each child's attendance is checked again by the teacher when class starts. Children attending aftercare will be checked on the aftercare attendance list. On departure a SMPPS staff member or guardian signs out the child with time and name of the collecting adult.
- 2.2.2 Guardian must notify the Kindergarten office should their child not attend school.
- 2.2.3 Guardian must notify the Kindergarten should their child be collected by somebody else than the Guardian (play date list).
- 2.2.4 We have procedures in place that ensure that no unauthorised person has unsupervised access to the children, e.g., visitors register.

2.3 Facebook and other social media

- 2.3.1 Guardian sign a release form before we post their child's picture on our website or social media.
- 2.3.2 SMPPS does not post images of social media in which any child's face is identifiable unless with guardians' consent (refer to POPIA Act).

2.4 Incidents and Concerns

SMPPS is committed to responding promptly to all incidents or concerns of abuse that may be/are brought to our attention.

- 2.4.1 We acknowledge that abuse of children can take different forms - physical, emotional, and sexual, as well as neglect.
- 2.4.2 When children are suffering from abuse, this may be demonstrated through:
 - a. Significant changes in their behaviour.
 - b. Deterioration in their general well-being.
 - c. Their comments which may give cause for concern, or the things they say (direct or indirect disclosure).
 - d. Changes in their appearance, their behaviour, or their play.
 - e. Unexplained bruising, marks or signs of possible abuse or neglect.
- 2.4.3 If the child was abused in any way at home, the guardian are encouraged to tell the preschool management about it so that we can provide the support that the child needs in these trying times.

3. What we do if we suspect, or know, that a child is being abused

SMPPS is committed to responding promptly and appropriately to all incidents or concerns of abuse that may occur. We are also committed to working with the relevant agency when the abuse is investigated.

3.1 Responding to suspicions of abuse

- 3.1.1 We are aware of other factors that affect children's vulnerability such as, abuse of disabled children, fabricated or induced illness, sexual exploitation, and internet abuse, amongst others.
- 3.1.2 We are also aware that some children are affected by gang activity or may be victims of child trafficking. While this may be less likely to affect the children in our care, we may become aware of any of these factors affecting older children/young people who we may encounter.
- 3.1.3 When we believe that a child in our care is being abused in any form, we follow the procedures below:
- a. Where the evidence is clear:**
 - i. The child's key caregiver at school writes a dated record of the details of the concern and discussed what to do about it with the safety coordinator and senior management.
 - ii. The records and details of the discussion is stored in the child's personal file.
 - iii. SMPPS will refer the matter to the South African police, Department of Social Development, Department of Health, and Social Welfare.
 - iv. Care is taken not to influence the outcome either through the way we speak to the child or by asking suggestive questions.
 - v. If the guardians are suspected, care must be taken not to alert them (less they start hiding the abuse), before referring the matter to the departments as have been listed in this policy.
 - b. Where the evidence is unclear:**
 - i. The matter will be discussed at school between the child's teacher, the safety coordinator and senior management.
 - ii. If the above group of people cannot reach consensus, they will decide to talk to the guardian and/or the departments of Social Welfare and/or Social Development and/or Health.

3.2. Recording and handling of disclosures

When a child makes comments to a staff member that give cause to concern (disclosure), or a member of staff notices another member of staff being abusive to a child, or a member of staff observes signs or signals that give cause to concern, such as significant changes in behaviour, deterioration in general well-being, unexplained bruising, marks or signs of possible abuse or neglect, that member of staff:

- 3.2.1. Listens to the child, offers comfort, and gives assurance that she or he will act.
- 3.2.2. Does not question the child.
- 3.2.3. Writes a report that forms an objective record of the observation or disclosure. The report must include:
 - a. The date and time of the observation or the disclosure.
 - b. The exact words spoken by the child as far as possible.
 - c. The name of the person to whom the concern was reported, with the date and time.

- d. The names of any other person present at the time.
- 3.2.4 These records are signed and dated and kept in the child's personal file, which is kept securely and confidentially.
- 3.2.5 The safety coordinator is informed of the issue at the earliest opportunity.

3.3 Informing Guardians

- 3.3.1 Guardians are normally the first point of contact. We discuss concerns with guardians to gain their view of events, unless we feel that the guardian is the perpetrator of the abuse and that informing them may put the child in greater danger.
- 3.3.2 We make a note of any discussion we have with the guardian regarding a concern and the notes are stored in the child's personal file.
- 3.3.3 If a suspicion of abuse warrants referral to the SAPS, DSD or Welfare, guardians are informed that the abuse has been reported.
- 3.3.4 If the guardian is the possible abuser, management takes advice from DSD, Welfare, or the school's attorney regarding when to inform the guardians.

3.4 Information from Guardians

- 3.4.1 Incident Register:
 - a. When a child gets a new cut or bruise the teacher will inform the Guardian accordingly. Please refer to the medical policy for more detail on how we handle injuries.
 - b. The incident folder is kept in the office.
- 3.4.2 If a Guardian ever feels that SMPPS is not operating in a safe manner, or that their child is unsafe at school, they are encouraged to bring the matter to management's attention immediately.

3.5 Reporting the abuse to the departments

- 3.5.1 SMPPS works with all the child protection agencies in our local municipality, as well as nationwide.

3.6 Allegations against staff

- 3.6.1 All the guardians at SMPPS are aware of the complaint's procedure about the behaviour or actions of staff, which may include an allegation of abuse.
- 3.6.2 We respond firmly and decisively to any inappropriate behaviour displayed by members of staff or any other person working with the children, which includes:
 - a. Inappropriate sexual comments
 - b. Excessive one-on-one attention beyond the requirements of their usual role and responsibilities
 - c. Inappropriate sharing of images
 - d. Excessive shouting in class or on the playground
 - e. Excessive anger / irritation by any member of staff
 - f. Neglect (i.e., children being left unattended)
 - g. Allowing a child to leave the school premises with an unauthorised person
 - h. Hitting or smacking a child or any other form of hurting or humiliating a child

- i. Excessive punishment
- 3.6.3 When a complaint of any abuse is received about a member of staff, we respond by first recording the details of the alleged incident.
- 3.6.4 Senior management and the safety coordinator will hold a meeting with the member of staff and his/her version is recorded and filed.
- 3.6.5 We refer the complaint to the local authorities (as listed previously in this document).
- 3.6.6 Management may suspend the member of staff (on full pay) until the investigation is complete. This is not an admission of guilt or that the alleged incident did take place, but is to protect the staff, as well as children and families throughout the investigation.
- 3.6.7 SMPPS cooperates to its fullest extent with the authorities investigating the event.
- 3.6.8 Disciplinary action:
 - a. After the investigation, if the member of staff is found to be guilty:
 - b. SMPPS will see to it that the member of staff is charged by the police in accordance with South African law.
 - c. An emergency disciplinary hearing will take place and the employee will be summarily dismissed.
 - d. If the employee was taken into custody before the disciplinary hearing could be conducted, the hearing is held 'in absentia' and the employee's dismissal letter will be forwarded to the employee's attorney.
- 3.6.9 SMPPS will take legal advice from our labour consultant on this dismissal.

4. Awareness of child abuse issues

SMPPS is committed to promoting the awareness of child abuse issues through:

4.1 Training

- 4.1.1 We seek out training opportunities for all adults involved in the school, thus ensuring that they can recognise the signs and signals of possible physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect and that they are aware of the reporting procedure.
- 4.1.2 The safety coordinator receives training in recognising all forms of child abuse and how to handle it professionally.
- 4.1.3 After the training, the safety coordinator shares his/her knowledge with the rest of the staff.
- 4.1.4 SMPPS ensures that all staff and guardian know the procedures for reporting and recording any concerns they may have about child abuse.

4.2 Supervision

- 4.2.1 The classrooms and playgrounds at SMPPS are laid out in a way that allows for constant supervision.
- 4.2.2 The children use established toileting routines.
- 4.2.3 When a child needs the toilet outside of the routine times, they may go to the bathroom alone depending on age and confidence (refer to Toilet Routine Policy).

4.3 Curriculum

- 4.3.1 SMPPS introduces the elements of keeping children safe into our programme to promote personal, social, and emotional development in children, so that they may grow to be strong, resilient, and listened to. They also develop an understanding of how to keep safe.
- 4.3.2 We have created a culture of value and respect for individuals, having positive regard for children's heritage arising from their colour, ethnicity, languages spoken at home, cultural and social background.
- 4.3.3 We ensure that this is carried out in a way that is developmentally appropriate for the children.

4.4 Confidentiality

- 4.4.1 All suspicions and investigations are kept confidential and shared only with those who need to know.

4.5 Support to families

- 4.5.1 SMPPS has built trusting and supportive relationships with our families, staff, and the community in general.
- 4.5.2 Through all our policy documents we have made it clear to guardian our role and responsibilities in relation to child protection, such a reporting of concerns, information sharing and monitoring the child. In addition, we will always liaise with the agencies involved in the case.
- 4.5.3 SMPPS will continue to welcome the child and the family whilst the investigations are being made regarding any alleged abuse.
- 4.5.4 Confidential records kept on a child are shared with the child's guardian.