

Policy

Child Safety and Wellbeing

Purpose and Scope

The Centre is committed to the care and safety of children in its care. This policy applies to all aspects of The Centre's operations and departments. This policy is to empower children and their families to feel safe, as they are vital and active participants in our organisation. We involve them when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say and take their feedback into account in decision-making. It is the responsibility of all staff and volunteers to ensure that the organisation has a culture of child safety at all levels.

Policy

1 Commitment to Child Safety

The Centre is committed to child safety in all its operations. As an organisation we:

- want children to be safe, and feel empowered
- respect all children as well as our staff and volunteers
- have a zero tolerance to child abuse
- are committed to the safety, participation, and empowerment of all children
- follow all legal and moral obligations to contact relevant authorities when it is suspected that children are not safe
- prevent child abuse by identifying and mitigating risk within our organisation and removing these risks
- we empower our staff and volunteers to uphold these commitments through rigorous screening of potential staff and supporting our staff with related processes to ensure children are safe
- we train our staff to identify and respond to suspected abuse and to raise concerns when it is identified that children are not safe
- take allegations extremely seriously and investigate and inform families of the actions we have taken
- are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability.

If a member of staff or volunteer believe a child is in immediate risk of abuse - **phone 000**

Child safety and wellbeing is included as a standing item in the agenda for the Board of Governance, Leadership, and relevant department meetings to ensure that the culture of child safety is imbedded across all levels of our organisation.

TOID: 4172	Child Safety and Wellbeing	HR 006-1	V 2.1	Approval Date 09-2022	Page 1 of 6
-------------------	----------------------------	-------------	-------	--------------------------	-------------

Policy

2 Children in Our Care

We promote diversity and tolerance in our organisation, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome. We:

- promote the cultural safety, participation, and empowerment of Aboriginal children
- promote the cultural safety, participation, and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate equally.

3 Our Staff and Volunteers

This policy guides our staff and volunteers on how to behave with children in our organisation. All our staff and volunteers must agree to abide by our code of conduct which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. All staff and volunteers, as well as children and their families, are given the opportunity to contribute to the development of the code of conduct and this policy.

4 Training and Supervision

Training and education are important to ensure that everyone in our organisation understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility.

Our organisational culture aims for all staff and volunteers to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. We train our staff and volunteers to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

We also support our staff and volunteers through ongoing supervision to:

- develop their skills to protect children from abuse
- promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children
- the cultural safety of children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds
- ensure the safety of children with a disability.

New staff and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand our organisation's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse, as well as checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate (please refer to the Staff Code of Conduct to understand appropriate behaviour further). Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported appropriately, including to the Department of Health, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

5 Recruitment

We take all reasonable steps to employ appropriately skilled people to work with children. We develop selection criteria and advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities. Our organisation understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

We actively encourage applications from Aboriginal peoples, people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability.

TOID: 4172	Child Safety and Wellbeing	HR 006-1	V 2.1	Approval Date 09-2022	Page 2 of 6
-------------------	----------------------------	-------------	-------	--------------------------	-------------

Policy

All people engaged in child-related work, including volunteers, are required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this Check. Please see the Working with Children Check website <www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au> for further information.

We carry out reference checks and police record checks to ensure that we are recruiting the right people. Police record checks are used only for the purposes of recruitment and are discarded after the recruitment process is complete. We do retain our own records (but not the actual criminal record) if an applicant's criminal history affected our decision-making process.

If during the recruitment process a person's records indicate a criminal history, then the person will be given the opportunity to provide further information and context. This will be taken into account in decision-making, along with The Centre's Childsafe-related requirements.

6 Allegations and Procedural Fairness

Allegations are taken very seriously and should be reported to us as per the requirements of the Complaints and Appeals Policy. All allegations are investigated in accordance with the Investigations Procedure. Procedural fairness is important to ensure that all parties are protected in the process to understand the events and nature of reported allegations.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form, including investigation updates. All records are securely stored to maintain confidentiality.

If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to children and families on progress and any actions we as an organisation take.

If an allegation involves the conduct of a staff member or volunteer by their act or omission, we will inform the Commission for Children and Young People as per the requirements of the Reportable Conduct Scheme.

7 Privacy

All personal information or disclosures considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be staff, volunteers, parents, or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. We have safeguards and practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected. Any person whose personal data is retained by The Centre (including children and families, learners and clients) are advised how this information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will have access to it.

8 Legislative Responsibilities

Our organisation takes its legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- Failure to disclose: Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to the police.
- Failure to protect: People of authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.
- Any staff or volunteers who are mandatory reporters must comply with their duties.

TOID: 4172	Child Safety and Wellbeing	HR 006-1	V 2.1	Approval Date 09-2022	Page 3 of 6
-------------------	----------------------------	-------------	-------	--------------------------	-------------

Policy

It is the responsibility of all staff and volunteers to report suspected child abuse. This is completed through utilising the Reporting of Suspected Child Abuse Procedure. Staff can seek the support of their manager, the appointed Child Safety Officer or a member of the Executive when making reports. Staff and volunteers are expected to complete a reporting form for each report that they make.

Staff undertake annual training to ensure they are aware of their requirements under the law to report child abuse when they have formed the reasonable belief that a child is at risk of abuse.

9 Risk Management

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified (see information about failure to protect in section 8). In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to children.

We have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks, which include risks posed by physical, and online environments.

10 Regular Review

This policy will be reviewed annually and following significant incidents if they occur. We will ensure that families and children can contribute. Where possible, we work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

11 Complaints

Our organisation takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our staff and volunteers are trained to deal appropriately with allegations.

We work to ensure all children, families, staff, and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour.

We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place.

Definitions

Staff

For the purpose of this policy staff refers to permanent, full-time or part-time employees, casual staff, volunteers (including Board of Governance), trainers and tutors. Contractors are also covered by this policy.

Child

For the purpose of the relevant parts of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic), a child is any person 17 years of age or younger

Reasonable Belief

A reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection is more likely formed in circumstances where:

- a child states that they have been physically injured or sexually abused (self-disclosure)
- a child states that they know someone who has been physically injured or sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about him or herself)
- a relative, friend, acquaintance or sibling of the child states that the child has been physically injured or sexually abused

TOID: 4172	Child Safety and Wellbeing	HR 006-1	V 2.1	Approval Date 09-2022	Page 4 of 6
-------------------	----------------------------	-------------	-------	--------------------------	-------------

Policy

- professional observations of the child’s behaviour or development lead the mandated professional to form a belief that the child has been physically injured or sexually abused or neglected
- signs of physical injury or sexual abuse have led to a belief that the child has been abused.

Child Safety Officer

A member of staff who has an in-depth knowledge and understanding of child safety, who is a point of contact for other staff, parents, families, learners and clients who have questions or concerns, or who suspect or want to report an allegation of child abuse.

Abuse

Child abuse is an act by parents or caregivers which endangers a child or young person's physical or emotional health or development. Child abuse can be a single incident, but usually takes place over time.

In Victoria, under the Children Youth and Families Act 2005 a child or young person is a person under eighteen years of age.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse occurs when a child suffers or is likely to suffer significant harm from an injury inflicted by a child's parent or caregiver. The injury may be inflicted intentionally or may be the inadvertent consequence of physical punishment or physically aggressive treatment of a child. The injury may take the form of bruises, cuts, burns or fractures.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when a person uses power or authority over a child to involve the child in sexual activity and the child's parent or caregiver has not protected the child. Physical force is sometimes involved. Child sexual abuse involves a wide range of sexual activity. It includes fondling of the child's genitals, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or other object, or exposure of the child to pornography.

Emotional abuse

Emotional Abuse occurs when a child's parent or caregiver repeatedly rejects the child or uses threats to frighten the child. This may involve name calling, put downs or continual coldness from the parent or caregiver to the extent that it significantly damages the child's physical, social, intellectual or emotional development.

Neglect

Neglect is the failure to provide the child with the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter, medical attention or supervision, to the extent that the child's health and development is, or is likely to be, significantly harmed.

Source: <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/children,-families-and-young-people/child-protection/about-child-abuse/what-is-child-abuse>

Reportable conduct

There are five types of ‘reportable conduct’ listed in the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005:

- sexual offences (against, with or in the presence of, a child)
- sexual misconduct (against, with or in the presence of, a child)
- physical violence (against, with or in the presence of, a child)

TOID: 4172	Child Safety and Wellbeing	HR 006-1	V 2.1	Approval Date 09-2022	Page 5 of 6
-------------------	----------------------------	-------------	-------	--------------------------	-------------

Policy

- behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm
- significant neglect.

Version Control

Procedure Operative From	01-2017	Date and Current Version	V2.1 09-2022
Responsible Officer	CEO	Policy Approved By	Leadership

References

Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment (Child Safe Standards) Bill 2015	https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/childrens-rights/projects/child-safe-organisations
Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (CYFA)	https://www.pmc.gov.au/domestic-policy/national-office-child-safety
Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005	

Related Policy

Information Privacy and Data Security	Information Technology Acceptable Usage
Complaints and Appeals	Quality Training and Assessment
Social Media	
IT Fair and Safe Use	Equal Opportunity and Anti-Discrimination
Human Resources	

Related Procedures

Reporting of Suspected Child Abuse	
Recruitment of Staff	Privacy Impact Statement Procedure
Record Keeping Guidelines	Investigations
Complaints and Appeals	

Related Document, Forms or Guidelines

Complaints and Appeals Process	Data Breach Management Process
Incident Report Form – Child Safety	Investigations Report Template
Investigations Process	Learner Code of Conduct
Staff Code of Conduct	

TOID: 4172	Child Safety and Wellbeing	HR 006-1	V 2.1	Approval Date 09-2022	Page 6 of 6
-------------------	----------------------------	-------------	-------	--------------------------	-------------