

Child safe (Vic)

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Introduction

The protection of children and young people is a cornerstone in safeguarding and improving the lives of children and young people with a disability. While providing supports and services under the NDIS, workers are uniquely placed to identify and respond to the needs and vulnerabilities of children or young people with a disability. Everyone has a responsibility to protect the wellbeing and safety of children or young people whom they have contact, and report any case a child or young person is suspected to be at risk of significant harm.

Our organisation is committed to ensuring our practice is compliant with all relevant **Victorian legislation, including the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic), the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic), and the 11 Victorian Child Safe Standards**, as well as national legislation and regulations, including the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.

Policy objective

This policy aims to ensure that the organisation provides supports and services in a child-safe environment and that concerns about the welfare or safety of children and young people are responded to appropriately. The purpose of this policy is to:

- adhere to the Child Safe Organisations National Principles
- set out appropriate standards of behaviour and practices for people working and volunteering with children and young people in a Child safe code of conduct
- provide standards by which the organisation can be held accountable to workers, volunteers, parents, guardians, carers, children and young people that are involved with the organisation
- increase worker awareness of factors that create a risk of harm to children and young people and the strategies in place to minimise risks
- build worker knowledge of how to identify if a child or young person is, or may be, at risk of harm and how to respond appropriately to allegations, concerns or instances of harm
- ensure that all workers understand reporting requirements and processes to be followed when making a report
- encourage organisational leaders to promote sharing good practice and learnings about child safety and wellbeing
- ensure cultural safety for all children, including Aboriginal children and young people, and support each child's right to express their culture
- promote equity and inclusion for children with diverse needs, including children with disability, LGBTIQ+ children, and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

When

- applies to all sites and services.

Who

- applies to all representatives including key management personnel, directors, full time workers, part time workers, casual workers, contractors and volunteers.

Our commitment to child safety

We are committed to supporting an environment that promotes the safety and wellbeing of children and young people as our priority. This policy has been developed to ensure that our organisation is a safe and welcoming place for children and young people, and one where children and young people are equally valued, respected and encouraged to participate. This commitment extends to all children and young people regardless of their abilities, sex, gender, or background. We are particularly committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children and young people, and to creating inclusive environments for all children

National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

The National Principle for Child Safe Organisations this policy is based on are as follows:

1. Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.
2. Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.
3. Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.
4. Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.
5. People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.
6. Processes to respond to complaints and concerns are child focused.
7. Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.
8. Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.
9. Implementation of the national child safe principles is regularly reviewed and improved.
10. Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people.

Victorian Child Safe Standards

This policy is fully aligned with the 11 Victorian Child Safe Standards, which include:

1. Cultural safety for Aboriginal children.
2. Child safety embedded in leadership, governance and culture.
3. Children are empowered about their rights and participation.
4. Families and communities are informed and involved.
5. Equity upheld and diverse needs respected.
6. People working with children are suitable and supported.
7. Child-focused complaints processes.
8. Staff and volunteers are equipped with knowledge and skills.
9. Safe physical and online environments.
10. Continuous improvement.
11. Policies and procedures support child safety.

When is a child or young person at risk?

A child or young person is at risk when they have suffered, or there is a likelihood they will suffer, harm. The relevant harm may be physical, emotional or psychological. A child or young person is also at risk where the parent or guardian is unable or unwilling to care for the person.

Reporting concerns about children and young people at risk

We are committed to providing a supportive and safe environment for staff and volunteers who disclose harm or risk to children and young people. All suspicions that a child or young person is at risk must be reported to key management and to the appropriate state/territory child protection hotline.

All concerns that do not meet the threshold of child at risk, but which involve a concern about the welfare or safety of a child are to be reported to key management.

We ensure that all staff and volunteers understand their legal obligations under the Victorian 'failure to disclose' and 'failure to protect' offences.

What is a child safe environment?

Child safe environments are safe and friendly settings where children and young people are protected and feel respected, valued and encouraged to reach their full potential. To provide an environment safe for children and young people, we will:

- take a preventative, proactive and participatory approach on child wellbeing and safety issues
- seek out and embrace the opinions and views of children and young people on issues relating to our services that they consider important or impact them
- take action to protect children and young people from harm
- create culturally safe environments for Aboriginal children and young people.
- ensure physical and online environments are safe and inclusive.

Working with children and young people

The standards and requirements identified below in our commitment to child safety identify the professional boundaries, ethical behaviours that are accepted and behaviours that are unacceptable. All staff are required to abide by and follow these standards and requirements.

Cultural rights

To promote the cultural expression of children and young people, we will:

- encourage and actively support Aboriginal children to express their culture and enjoy their cultural rights in all organisational activities
- implement strategies that equip staff, volunteers, and leaders to acknowledge and appreciate the strengths of Aboriginal culture and understand its importance to child safety and wellbeing
- adopt measures to identify, confront, and eliminate racism within the organisation. Any instance of racism will be addressed promptly with appropriate consequences
- actively support and facilitate the participation and inclusion of Aboriginal children, young people, and their families in organisational programs and decision-making
- ensure all policies, procedures, systems, and processes collectively create a culturally safe and inclusive environment that meets the needs of Aboriginal children and families.
- identify and address instances of racism consistently
- provide training for staff and volunteers on Aboriginal cultural awareness and child safety
- celebrate Aboriginal culture and achievements within organisational activities
- review and update policies annually to ensure ongoing compliance and cultural relevance.

Strategies for cultural safety and Inclusion

To ensure compliance with Child Safe Standard 1, our organisation implements the following strategies:

- Encouraging cultural expression
 - Provide spaces and opportunities for Aboriginal children to share stories, language, and traditions during programs and activities.
 - Incorporate Aboriginal art, music, and cultural practices into organisational events and learning materials.
 - Offer flexible program options that respect cultural obligations, such as community events or ceremonies.
- Building cultural awareness
 - Deliver mandatory cultural competency training for all staff, volunteers, and leaders, focusing on the strengths of Aboriginal culture and its importance to child wellbeing.
 - Include Aboriginal perspectives in organisational planning and decision-making through consultation with Aboriginal community representatives.
 - Celebrate significant Aboriginal dates (e.g., NAIDOC Week) and achievements within organisational communications and events.
- Addressing racism
 - Maintain a zero-tolerance policy for racism, clearly outlined in the Code of Conduct.
 - Establish a confidential reporting process for incidents of racism, ensuring timely investigation and appropriate consequences.
 - Conduct regular audits of organisational practices to identify and eliminate systemic bias.
- Facilitating participation and inclusion
 - Engage Aboriginal families in program design and feedback processes to ensure services meet cultural needs.
 - Provide culturally appropriate resources and communication materials, including language support where required.
 - Create advisory roles or committees that include Aboriginal representatives to guide organisational decisions.
- Embedded cultural safety in systems
 - Review all policies and procedures annually to ensure they reflect cultural safety principles.
 - Integrate cultural safety objectives into performance reviews and organisational KPIs.
 - Allocate dedicated resources (budget and personnel) to support cultural safety initiatives.

Child safe leadership

Our organisation is committed to creating an environment where child safety and wellbeing are prioritised at all levels. We recognise that a child safe culture requires leadership, accountability, and active participation from every member of the organisation.

- A clear statement of commitment to child safety is published on our website and displayed in all organisational premises.
- All communications, including recruitment materials and program information, reinforce our commitment to child safety.
- Leaders model child safe behaviours and set expectations for staff and volunteers.
- Staff and volunteers are encouraged to speak up about child safety concerns and are supported through a culture of reporting.
- Child safety is embedded in everyday practice, including planning, decision-making, and service delivery.
- This policy is implemented across all levels of the organisation.
- Senior leaders review child safety performance quarterly and report outcomes to the governing body.
- Governance structures ensure oversight of risk management and compliance with child safety standards.
- A Code of Conduct outlines behavioural standards for staff and volunteers, including:
 - Appropriate interactions with children.
 - Responsibilities for promoting child safety.
 - Zero tolerance for breaches of child safety principles.
- The Code of Conduct is communicated during induction and reinforced through regular training.
- Risk assessments are conducted for all programs and activities involving children.
- Strategies focus on preventing, identifying, and mitigating risks of child abuse and harm.
- Risk management plans are reviewed annually and updated as needed.

- Staff and volunteers receive training on legal and organisational obligations for information sharing.
- Secure systems are in place for maintaining accurate records of child safety incidents, reports, and actions taken.
- Confidentiality and privacy are maintained in accordance with relevant legislation.

Decision-making and participation

Our organisation values the voices of children and young people and recognises their right to safety, information, and participation. We commit to creating an environment where they feel respected, supported, and confident to express their views. To achieve this, we will:

- Provide age-appropriate resources (print and digital) explaining children's rights to safety, participation, and information.
- Display child-friendly posters in all service areas outlining rights and complaint processes.
- Conduct regular sessions with children to explain how adults should behave and how to raise concerns.
- Facilitate group activities that encourage positive peer relationships and reduce isolation.
- Implement anti-bullying programs and peer support initiatives.
- Train staff to recognise and respond to behaviours that may isolate children.
- Where relevant, provide age-appropriate sexual abuse prevention education and resources.
- Ensure materials are culturally sensitive and accessible for children with diverse needs.
- Offer information about external support services for children and families.
- Train staff and volunteers to recognise signs of harm and respond appropriately.
- Establish multiple child-friendly channels for raising concerns (e.g., suggestion boxes, online forms, face-to-face conversations).
- Encourage children to participate in decisions about programs and activities.
- Embed child participation principles in organisational policies and practices.
- Regularly review programs with input from children and young people.
- Identify and address practices that disempower children.
- Create advisory groups or forums for children to share ideas and feedback.
- Act on children's suggestions and communicate how their input influenced decisions.

Family participation

Our organisation recognises that families and communities play a vital role in keeping children safe. We commit to open communication, transparency, and meaningful involvement of families in decisions that affect their children. We will ensure that:

- Consult and involve in decisions impacting their child's safety and wellbeing.
- Communication methods are inclusive and accessible, considering cultural, linguistic, and individual needs.
- Meetings and forums are scheduled at times that accommodate family availability.
- Provide clear, accessible information about child safety policies, complaint processes, and risk management strategies.
- Share updates through multiple channels (website, newsletters, community meetings) to ensure transparency.
- Maintain confidentiality and privacy while keeping families informed about matters affecting their child.
- Invite families and community members to participate in policy reviews and provide feedback.
- Conduct surveys and focus groups to gather input on child safety practices.
- Incorporate feedback into policy updates and communicate changes to families.
- Publish information about organisational governance, leadership responsibilities, and child safety oversight.
- Provide families with details on how complaints are handled and disciplinary actions managed.
- Ensure governance reports on child safety performance are available to families and communities.

Child safe code of conduct

As part of our commitment to child safety, all workers and volunteers in the organisation will:

- Act in accordance with child safety and wellbeing policies and procedures at all times.
- Behave respectfully, courteously and ethically towards children and their families and towards other staff.
- Listen and respond to the views and concerns of children, particularly if they communicate (verbally or non-verbally) that they do not feel safe or well.
- Promote the human rights, safety and wellbeing of all children in the organisation.
- Demonstrate appropriate personal and professional boundaries.
- Consider and respect the diverse backgrounds and needs of children.
- Create an environment that promotes and enables children's participation and is welcoming, culturally safe and inclusive for all children and their families.
- Involve children in making decisions about activities, policies and processes that concern them wherever possible.
- Contribute, where appropriate, to policies, discussions, learning and reviews about child safety and wellbeing.
- Identify and mitigate risks to children's safety and wellbeing as identified by risk assessments and Risk management policies and processes.
- Respond to any concerns or complaints of child harm or abuse promptly and in line with the Complaint management policy and Manage complaint process.
- Report all suspected or disclosed child harm or abuse as required by relevant state and federal legislation and the Report incident process.
- Comply with protocols on communicating with children.
- Comply with relevant state and federal legislation and policies and procedures on record keeping and information sharing.

All workers and volunteers in the organisation will not:

- Engage in any unlawful activity with or in relation to a child.
- Engage in any activity that is likely to physically, sexually or emotionally harm a child.
- Unlawfully discriminate against any child or their family members.
- Be alone with a child unnecessarily.
- Arrange personal contact, including online contact, with child participants for a purpose unrelated to work activities.
- Disclose personal or sensitive information about a child, including images of a child, unless the child and their parent or legal guardian consent or as a result of reporting requirements.
- Use inappropriate language in the presence of children, or show or provide children with access to inappropriate images or material.
- Work with children while under the influence of alcohol or prohibited drugs.
- Ignore or disregard any suspected or disclosed child harm or abuse.

Recruitment and worker screening

Recruitment and worker screening

The organisation will comply with and carry out Working With Children Checks in accordance with state/territory requirements of the National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013 (Cth).

All WWCC will be validated online and verified by management prior to a new worker or board member commencing in a child-related role.

Any existing worker who cannot renew their WWCC must notify key management as soon as possible, and any worker or volunteer with a WWCC bar or interim bar will be removed from child-related employment immediately in line with the standards outlined in the National Principles for Child Safety.

Our recruitment practices will take account of risks and other factors that impact on children and young people, and worker selection, referee checks and background checks will reflect our commitment to ensuring child safety and wellbeing. We will review our recruitment and human resources management practices regularly to make sure that we are aligned with best practice approaches for the protection of children and young people.

Any third party contractors engaged in providing supports to children will have appropriate measures in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

All recruitment, advertising, and onboarding processes will emphasise our commitment to child safety.

Position descriptions will include child safety responsibilities.

Induction will include training on the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy, Code of Conduct, and reporting obligations.

Staff training

All staff will be made aware of their responsibilities to children and young people as part of their induction and ongoing training and development and will be required to acknowledge this policy alongside their record keeping, information sharing and reporting responsibilities.

All staff will receive regular training on:

- Recognising signs of child abuse and harm.
- Responding to disclosures and concerns.
- Creating culturally safe environments.
- Understanding the rights of children and young people.

Training will be trauma-informed, regularly reviewed, and tailored to the needs of children with disability.

Staff supervision and management will support employees to maintain a focus on child safety and wellbeing and to draw attention to breaches of the Code of Conduct within the organisation. We will provide a safe and supportive environment for workers to identify and disclose risk of harm to children and young people. Ongoing supervision and performance management will include child safety responsibilities.

Online and social media safety

Online spaces provide additional challenges to maintaining the safety of children and protecting them from harm.

Social media also poses a variety of risks to children. The [Online Safety Amendment \(Social Media Minimum Age\) Bill 2024](#) stipulates that children under the age of 16 do NOT create or maintain social media accounts. We understand that this legislation mainly places responsibilities of compliance on technology companies and platform providers, rather than individuals. Nevertheless, our organisation will continue to work to keep children safe online through education, monitoring, and collaborative efforts with parents, carers, and support networks. Workers will be trained to maintain age restrictions ensure children are not accessing age-inappropriate platforms or engaging with online spaces designed for older users.

Even if they do not use social media, children may still be at risk when they access virtual spaces (such as private messaging apps and video games). As such, we acknowledge the importance of maintaining robust risk management systems to protect children.

Each child's risk management plan will include risks relating to online activity. These risks include:

- exposure to inappropriate content
- overfamiliar relationships between children and people in positions of power (e.g. children interacting with teachers on social media)
- cyber bullying
- the sharing of inappropriate images
- physical health challenges, such as headaches
- mental health challenges, such as depression and social isolation
- data breaches and data misuse

- grooming.

Our risk management plans will include an overview of each risk, as well as mitigation and management strategies. In addition, our risk management plans and strategies will be developed in conjunction with workers, the child, other professionals and advocates, as well as the child's support network. This will help ensure that all relevant parties are empowered to provide early help if online incidents occur.

Workers, parents and carers are responsible for teaching children online safety. Key principles of online safety include:

- only sharing information the child would be happy for their grandparents, parents and teachers to see
- understanding that people online can lie about their identities
- remembering that any post, once published online, cannot always be taken back; even if a post has been removed, it may have already been saved and shared
- adults ensuring that children do not access any age-inappropriate social media platforms
- understanding the importance of secure passwords
- blocking people that exhibit negative behaviours, such as cyberbullying
- considering that content can always be shared, even if it is sent in a private message
- online safety is embedded in risk management plans
- staff are trained to support children's safe use of digital platforms.
- we ensure that online environments are used in accordance with our Code of Conduct and Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

In addition to the above, it is vital to have appropriate online privacy settings and child safety filters in place and discuss with the child the reasons these are in place.

All staff at our organisation will be trained to:

- support compliance with age restrictions on social media platforms and to advocate for the safe use of online spaces
- support children to engage with online spaces in a safe manner
- be engaged, open and supportive in relation to online activities
- understand the devices and platforms children are using
- set reasonable rules around social media use
- understand the needs and preferences of each child in relation to online activities
- understand and manage the risks and legal frameworks associated with children being online
- respond to the misuse of digital devices and to unacceptable online behaviours in line with disciplinary policies
- maintain clear processes for reporting online safety issues or breaches of acceptable use in line with incident reporting requirements
- manage complaints and incidents in a compliant manner.

Complaint management

To ensure effective handling of complaints we will:

- Maintain a complaint handling policy that is easy to understand, culturally safe, and available in multiple formats (print, online, visual aids).
- Clearly outline roles and responsibilities of leadership, staff, and volunteers in managing complaints.
- Include guidance on handling different types of complaints, breaches of policies or the Code of Conduct, and obligations to act and report.
- Provide child-friendly materials explaining how to make a complaint and what to expect.
- Ensure families and communities are consulted when designing and reviewing complaint processes.
- Offer interpreters and accessible communication options for diverse needs.
- All complaints are acknowledged immediately and investigated promptly.
- Risks to children are assessed and managed during investigations.

- Support is provided to all parties involved in the complaint process.
- Policies outline when and how complaints must be reported to relevant authorities, including police and child protection agencies.
- Staff and volunteers receive training on mandatory reporting obligations and cooperation with law enforcement.
- Ensure complaint handling processes comply with privacy and employment law.
- Maintain secure records of all complaints, actions taken, and outcomes.
- Regularly review policies to ensure ongoing compliance with legal requirements.

Continuous improvement

Our organisation is dedicated to continuous improvement in child safety and wellbeing. We systematically review policies, procedures, and practices, analyse incidents and complaints, and share findings with stakeholders to strengthen our child safe culture. We achieve this by ensuring:

- All child safety policies and procedures include a scheduled review period (at least annually).
- Reviews consider compliance with all Child Safe Standards, feedback from staff, volunteers, children, families, and communities.
- Improvements are documented and implemented promptly.
- Maintain detailed records of complaints, concerns, allegations, and actions taken.
- Analyse complaints and safety incidents to identify root causes and systemic issues.
- Use findings to update policies, training, and risk management strategies to prevent recurrence.
- Prepare reports summarising review findings, identified improvements, and actions taken.
- Share reports with staff, volunteers, families, communities, and children in accessible formats.
- Communicate changes clearly and explain how feedback and incident analysis informed improvements.

Communication and review of children and young people protection policy and systems

All new workers, including volunteers and contractors, will be trained on the requirements of this policy.

This policy will be made available to all participants and their families, along with any other additional information required.

We consult with children, families, and communities in the development and review of this policy.

Breach of child safe policy

Breach of this policy or the Child Safe Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action and/or referral to the appropriate government authority.