



CHILD SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY (Victoria)

Our Service is committed to the safety, wellbeing and support of all children and young people.

Management, staff and volunteers take every reasonable precaution to protect children in our care and treat all children with the utmost respect and understanding at all times. To protect children from abuse, our Service embeds strategies to ensure a culture of child safety by providing a safe environment for the children in our care. We acknowledge that staff within an early childhood service are in a unique position to monitor behavioural and emotional changes, physical injuries, and the general wellbeing of a child due to the development of safe environments and trusting relationships with children and families. Our staff are trained to identify signs and behaviours that may indicate child abuse and thoroughly understand their obligations and responsibilities to respond to incidents, disclosures or suspicions of child abuse as mandated reporters.

We are dedicated in promoting cultural safety for Aboriginal children, cultural safety for children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability. Our Service takes every reasonable effort to accommodate the diversity of all children in implementing the Child Safe Standards.

Our Service takes a 'zero' tolerance approach to child abuse and is committed to raising awareness about the importance of child safety in our environment and the community.

'Keeping children safe is everyone's responsibility.'

Victoria State Government- Education and Training (2019).

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD (NQS)

QUALITY AREA 2: CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY		
2.2	Safety	Each child is respected
2.2.1	Supervision	At all times, reasonable precautions and adequate supervision ensure children are protected from harm and hazard.

2.2.2	Incident and emergency management	Plans to effectively manage incidents and emergencies are developed in consultation with relevant authorities, practiced and implemented.
2.2.3	Child Protection	Management, educators and staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities to identify and respond to every child at risk of abuse or neglect.

QUALITY AREA 5: RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN

5.1.1	Positive educator to child interactions	Responsive and meaningful interactions build trusting relationships which engage and support each child to feel secure, confident and included.
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QUALITY AREA 7: GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

7.1	Governance	Governance supports the operation of a quality service
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EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES NATIONAL REGULATIONS and NATIONAL LAW

84	Awareness of child protection law
155	Interactions with children
168	Education and care service must have policies and procedures
S162(A)	Persons in day to day charge and nominated supervisors to have child protection training
358	Working with children check to be read

OTHER RELEVANT LAWS

Education and Training Reform Act 2006- Child safe standards- Managing the risk of child abuse in schools. Ministerial Order No. 870
The Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012
Failure to Disclose 2014
Failure to Protect 2015
The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)
Working with Children Act 2005 (Vic)
Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)

Family Law Act 1975
Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment (Child Safe Standards) Act 2015
Children Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)

RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES RELATED TO CHILD SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Interactions with children Policy Dealing with complaints Policy Physical Environment Policy	Human Resources Policy Code of Conduct Policy Governance Policy
Child Safe Environment Procedures	Child Safe Environment Definitions

PURPOSE

The Child Safe Environment policy requires all staff within our Service to create and maintain a child safe organisation where children are safe and feel safe. Our policy framework incorporates the seven Child Safe Standards and Reportable Conduct Scheme.

We are committed to identifying possible and significant risks of harm to children and young people within our Service. We understand our duty of care to protect children from all types of abuse and adhere to our legislative obligations at all times.

We aim to implement effective strategies to assist in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all children. Our Service will act in the best interest of the child, assisting them to develop to their full potential in a secure and safe environment.

SCOPE

This policy applies to families, staff, management and visitors of the Service.

OUR COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

Our Service is committed to safety and wellbeing of all children and young people. We understand our responsibilities and statutory duty of care to comply with both the Child Safe Standards and the Reportable Conduct Scheme to build our capacity as an organisation to prevent and respond to allegations of child abuse.

In our planning, development and implementation of our Child Safe Environment Policy we will:

- create and maintain a child safe environment and comply with the Ministerial Order No. 870- Child Safe Standards and Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment (Child Safe Standards) Act 2015
- complete a self-audit to assess our progress in meeting the requirements of the Child Safe Standards
- develop a Child Safety Code of Conduct specific to our Service
- include child safety as a regular agenda item at staff meetings
- adhere to a zero tolerance for child abuse
- value the input of and communicate regularly with families and carers regarding our Child Safe policy
- embed the seven Child Safety Standards into our policy and procedures
- promote the safety of children at all times
- foster a culture of openness and respect where children and adults feel safe to disclose risk of harm to children
- listen to and act decisively on any child safety concerns or allegations of abuse that are made
- recognise, respect and foster children's rights where their voices and views are listened to and valued
- assess and manage the risk of abuse to children as part of our daily practice
- recognise the vulnerability of particular groups of children including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with a disability, children in out of home care (OOHC) and children from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse background
- ensure effective processes are in place to respond to and report allegations of child abuse to the appropriate authorities
- read and ensure that the approved provider or nominated supervisor, or person in day-to-day charge of the service has read a person's Working with Children Check before the person is engaged as an educator, volunteer or staff member at the Service.
- the approved provider has read a person's Working with Children Check before nominating that person as a nominated supervisor or person in day-to-day charge of the service. (This does not apply to a person who is a registered teacher under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 and has current registration).
- ensure visitors to our Service implementing professional development are suitable and approved to work with children.

IMPLEMENTATION

Our Service strongly opposes any type of abuse against a child and endorses high quality practices in relation to protecting children. All staff understand their roles and responsibilities in protecting children from abuse and neglect and maintain up-to-date knowledge of child protection law (Reg 84). Staff will

undertake child protection awareness training every 12 months, and whenever significant changes are made to the child protection law or reporting requirements. Staff will comply with our Code of Conduct at all times.

Reportable Conduct Scheme

The Reportable Conduct Scheme seeks to improve organisation's responses to allegations of child abuse and neglect by their employees and volunteers. The Approved Provider must notify the Commission for Children and Young People (the Commission) about any allegations of misconduct involving a child.

Reportable conduct applies to all employees, volunteers, students (over the age of 18) and contractors at our Service.

The Approved Provider is obligated to implement the requirements of the Reportable Conduct Scheme which include:

- ensuring our Service has systems in place to prevent reportable conduct from being committed by a staff member or volunteer within the course of their employment
- enable any person to notify the Approved Provider of a reportable allegation
- respond to a reportable allegation made against a worker or volunteer from our Service by ensuring that allegations are appropriately investigated
- report allegations which may involve criminal conduct to the police
- notify the Commission for Children and Young People within **3 business days** of becoming aware of a reportable allegation <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/reportable-conduct-scheme/notify-and-update/>
- investigate an allegation (subject to police clearance on criminal matters or matters involving family violence)
- advise the Commission who is undertaking the investigation
- manage risks to children
- provide the Commission with detailed information about the reportable allegation and any action that has taken place within **30 calendar days**
- notify the Commission of the investigation findings and any disciplinary action the head of entity has taken (or the reasons no action was taken).

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

A reportable allegation is made where a person makes an allegation, based on a *reasonable belief* that an employee, volunteer or contractor has committed reportable conduct or misconduct that may involve reportable conduct.

A person is likely to have a reasonable belief if they:

- observed the conduct themselves
- heard directly from a child that the conduct occurred or
- received information from another credible source (including another witness).

(Commission for Children and Young People)

Child Safe Standards

[Standard 1: Governance and leadership](#)

[Standard 2: Clear commitment to child safety](#)

[Standard 3: Code of conduct](#)

[Standard 4: Human resource practices](#)

[Standard 5: Responding and reporting](#)

[Standard 6: Risk management and mitigation](#)

[Standard 7: Empowering children](#)

Child Protection

All educators, staff and volunteers are committed to identifying possible risk and significant risk of harm to children and young people at the Service. We comprehend our duty of care and responsibilities to protect children from all types of abuse and neglect.

Nominated Supervisor will ensure that:

- staff have completed approved child protection training
- they have read each person's Working with Children Check before engaging educators, staff or volunteers in the Service

- all staff members at the Service maintain up-to-date knowledge of child protection law and any obligations that they may have under that law
- all staff members and volunteers are familiar with the Reportable Conduct Scheme and the types of reportable conduct
- human resource procedures within our Service ensure all employees and volunteers recruited display the right personal qualities, skills and experience to provide high quality supervision and care to children in addition to holding a validated Working with Children Check (WWCC)
- all staff members who work with children:
 - understand and are confident implementing our Child Safe Environment Policy
 - know how to identify, assess and minimise risks of child abuse
 - are aware of their role as mandated reporters to immediately report cases where they believe a child is at risk of significant harm
 - promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and safety for children with a disability
- educators understand the reporting procedures and professional standards to safeguard children and protect the integrity of educators, staff and volunteers.
- access to relevant acts, regulations, standards and other resources are provided to help educators, staff and volunteers meet their obligations
- **Child Protection** is contacted as soon as practicable of any incident reasonably believed that physical and/or sexual abuse of a child has occurred or is occurring while the child is being educated and cared for by the Service.
- **Child Protection** is notified as soon as practicable of any allegation that sexual or physical abuse of a child has occurred or is occurring while the child is being educated and cared for by the Service.
- the Quality Assessment and Regulation Division (QARD) are notified of any serious incidents or concerns about the wellbeing of a child within our Service
- clear and comprehensive documentation related to actions taken in response to incidents, disclosures and allegations of child abuse are kept securely and confidentially in line with our Privacy and Confidentiality policy.

Educators will:

- comprehend their legal obligation as mandated reporters under the legislation (effective March 2019)

- report any situation where they believe on reasonable grounds a child is at risk of significant harm to Child Protection and/or local Child Protection office (see end of policy for contact details) as appropriate.
- contact the Victorian Police on 000 if there is an immediate danger to a child and intervene instantly if it is safe to do so.
- understand their duty of care to take reasonable steps to protect children at all times
- be able to recognise indicators of abuse
- be aware of the **Four Critical Actions** for responding to Incidents, Disclosures and suspicions of child abuse
https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/protect/EarlyChildhood_FourCriticalActions.pdf
- respect a child's disclosure, taking it seriously and respond to their disclosure immediately
- document any incident, disclosure or suspicion that a child has been, or is at risk of being abused using the PROTECT template
https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/protect/PROTECT_Responding_TemplateSchools.pdf
- understand that allegations of abuse or suspected abuse against them are treated in the same way as allegations of abuse against other people
- associate families with referral agencies where concerns of harm do not meet the threshold of significant harm. These services may be located through Child FIRST. Family consent will be sought before making referrals.

Mandatory Reporting is the legislative requirement for selected classes of people to report suspected child abuse and neglect to government authorities. In Victoria, mandatory reporting is regulated by the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic) ss. 162, 182, 184 (CYFA). Effective from March 1, 2019 all early childhood educators and other persons employed or engaged in an education and care service or a children's service are mandatory reporters. This also includes all proprietors, nominees of a children's service, approved providers and nominated supervisors of an education and care service.

According to the CYFA, mandated reporters must respond to an emergency **immediately** if the child is at immediate risk of harm or has just been abused. Mandated reporters must respond to an incident, disclosure or suspicion of child abuse as soon as they witness or form a belief based on *reasonable grounds* that a child is in need of protection because:

- the child's basic physical or psychological needs are not being met or are at risk of not being met

- the parents or other caregivers have not arranged and are unable or unwilling to arrange for the child to receive necessary medical care
- the parents or other caregivers have not arranged and are unable or unwilling to arrange for a school age child to receive an education
- the child has been or is at risk of being physically or sexually abused or ill-treated
- the child is living in a household where there have been incidents of domestic violence and they are at risk of serious physical or psychological harm
- the parent's or other caregiver's behaviour means the child has suffered or is at risk of suffering serious psychological harm
- the child has stated they have been abused
- the child has evidence of abuse

To form a belief on reasonable grounds, the reporter may have witnessed behaviour, have a suspicion or received a disclosure of child abuse.

Responding to a parent, carer or guardian of a child

If a parent, carer or guardian says their child has been abused in our Service or raises concern we will:

- ensure all abuse allegations are taken very seriously
- explain our procedures as mandatory reporters
- allow the parent, carer or guardian to talk through the incident in their own words
- ask about the safety and wellbeing of the child
- explain that an educator will be taking notes during the discussion to capture all details.
- provide them with any incident reports
- explain our Service's reporting processes which include informing Victoria Police, Child Protection office
- report and provide ongoing support as per our procedure of child abuse allegations

DEFINITIONS

Maltreatment refers to non-accidental behaviour towards another person, which is outside the norms of conduct and entails a substantial risk of causing physical or emotional harm. Behaviours may be intentional or unintentional and include acts of omission and commission. Specifically *abuse* refers to acts of commission while *neglect* refers to acts of omission. Note that in practice the terms child abuse and child neglect are used more frequently than the term child maltreatment.

Significant Harm refers to circumstances causing concern for the safety, welfare and wellbeing a child or young person present to a significant extent. This means it is sufficiently serious to warrant a response by a statutory authority irrespective of the family's consent.

What is significant is not minor or trivial and may reasonably be expected to produce a substantial and demonstrably adverse impact on the child's or young person's safety, welfare, or wellbeing. In the case of an unborn child, what is significant is not minor or trivial and may reasonably be expected to produce a substantial and demonstrably adverse impact on the child.

Reasonable grounds refer to the need to have an objective basis for suspecting that a child may be at risk of abuse and neglect based on:

- first hand observation of the child or family
- what the child, parent, or other person has disclosed
- what can reasonably be inferred based on observation, professional training and/or experience that causes the mandated reporter to believe the child has been abused or is likely to be abused or,
- signs of physical or sexual abuse leading to the belief that the child has been abused.

Failure to disclose refers to the failure of a mandated reporter who has reasonable belief that a child under 16 has had a sexual offence committed to them by an adult to make a report to the police.

Failure to protect refers to a person of authority in the organisation who has the power or responsibility, but who negligently fails to reduce or remove the threat of substantial risk of child sexual abuse.

POLICY EVALUATION AND REVIEW

To ensure ongoing relevance and continuous improvement, this policy will be reviewed as part of our cycle of self-evaluation each year. Our Service welcomes input from staff, children, families/carers and community.

RELEVANT AUTHORITIES	CONTACT DETAILS
Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)	Child Protection Crisis Line (after hours) Ph. 13 12 78
Victoria Police Sexual offences and child abuse Investigation Team	000
National Child Abuse Helpline:	1800 99 10 99 (9am-5pm AEST)
DET Quality Assessment and Regulation Division (QARD)	1300 307 415

JURISDICTIONAL CONTACTS	CONTACT DETAILS Business hours 8.45-5.00pm (Monday-Friday)
North Division Banyule, Buloke, Darebin, Campaspe, Central Goldfield, Gannawarra, Greater Bendigo, Hume, Loddon, Macedon Ranges, Mildura, Moreland, Mount Alexander, Nillumbik, Swan Hill, Whittlesea, Yarra.	1300 664 977
South Division Bass Coast, Baw Baw, Bayside, Cardinia, Casey, East Gippsland, Frankston, Glen Eira, Greater Dandenong, Kingston, Latrobe, Mornington Peninsula, Port Phillip, South Gippsland, Stonnington, Wellington.	1300 655 795
East Division Alpine, Benalla, Boroondara, Greater Shepparton, Indigo, Knox, Manningham, Mansfield, Maroondah, Mitchell, Moira, Monash, Murrindindi, Strathbogie, Towong, Wangaratta, Whitehorse, Wodonga, Yarra Ranges.	1300 360 391
West Division - Rural and regional only Ararat, Ballarat, Colac-Otway, Corangamite, Glenelg, Golden Plains, Greater Geelong, Hepburn, Hindmarsh, Horsham, Moorabool, Moyne, Northern Grampians, Pyrenees, Queenscliffe, Southern Grampians, Surf Coast, Warrnambool West Wimmera, Yarriambiack.	1800 075 599
West Division – Metropolitan only Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Melton, Moonee Valley, Wyndham.	1300 664 977

Source

Australian Children’s Education & Care Quality Authority. (2014).

Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia. (2009).

Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012

Child safe standards page of the Department of Health and Human Services' Service Providers:

<http://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards>

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)

Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998

Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (as amended 2014) (Vic)

Commission for children and young people *Being a child safe organisation* <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safety/being-a-child-safe-organisation/>

Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference. (2005). Creating safe environments for children: Organisations, employees and volunteers: National framework.

Creating child safe organisations page of the Department of Health and Human Services' Service Providers:

<http://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/creating-child-safe-organisations>

Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics. (2016).

Education and Care Services National Regulations. (2011).

Failure to Disclose 2014

Failure to Protect 2015

Family Law Act 1975

Guide to the Education and Care Services National Law and the Education and Care Services National Regulations. (2017).

Mandatory Reporting: <https://aifs.gov.au/publications/families-policy-and-law/14-mandatory-reporting-laws>

National Comparison of Child Protection Systems: <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/national-comparison-child-protection-systems>

Reporting abuse and neglect: <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/reporting-abuse-and-neglect>

Revised National Quality Standard. (2018).

State of Victoria (Department of Education and Training). (2017). Early childhood guidance: Identifying signs of child abuse: www.education.vic.gov.au

The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)

The Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998

The Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012

Working with Children Act 2005 (Vic)

FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Child Care Centre Desktop- Quality Area 2- Child Safe Environment (Victorian based services)

- Introduction and Guide- Child Safe Environment
- Definitions- Child Safe Environment Child Safe Standards
- Child Safe Environment Procedures
- Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

JURISDICTIONAL CONTACTS	LINK
Child Safe Standards toolkit: Resource 1A Self-Audit tool	https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/resource-1a-self-audit-tool-child-safe-standards-word
Commission for children and young people	https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safety/being-a-child-safe-organisation/
PROTECT guidance:	https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/health/childprotection/Pages/ecguidance.aspx
An Overview to the Victorian child safe standards, has information to help organisations understand the requirements of each of the child safe standards, including examples of measures organisations can put in place, a self-audit tool and a glossary of key terms:	http://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards
Cultural safety of Aboriginal children	https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/resources/tipsheet-cultural-safety-aboriginal-children.pdf
Cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds:	https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/resources/tipsheet-safety-children-cult-ling-diverse.pdf
Safety of children with a disability:	https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/resources/tipsheet-safety-children-disability.pdf

REVIEW

POLICY REVIEWED	February 2020	NEXT REVIEW DATE	February 2021
MODIFICATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion new regulations for working with children check • Inclusion of compliance to develop a Child Safety Code of Conduct • Child Safe Standards links added 		
POLICY REVIEWED	PREVIOUS MODIFICATIONS	NEXT REVIEW DATE	
November 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of NQS and National Law • Inclusion of related procedure and definitions • Mandatory reporter information updated 	February 2020	
July 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to mandated requirements • Re-structure of policy • Inclusion of Victorian Government resources and training 	February 2020	
February 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sources/references corrected, updated, and alphabetised • Points added • Sources checked for currency • New sources added 	July 2019	
January 2018	New policy draft	February 2019	

Disclaimer

Childcare Centre Desktop does not guarantee that the examples provided within this policy are sufficient for early childhood services' compliance with the Child Safe Standards.