Child Safety Policy

Our organisation is committed to child safety.

We want children to be safe, happy and empowered.

We are committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all children.

We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently as per appropriate policies and procedures. We have legal and moral obligation to contact authorities when we are worried about a child’s safety, we are committed to rigorously upholding this responsibility.

Our organisation is committed to preventing child abuse; by identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks. Appointed roles in our organisational structure require regular training, education and consultation opportunities to ensure appropriate measures are in place.

We support and respect all children, as well as our members and those with appointed roles within our organisation. We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability.

Our Children

The policy is intended to empower children who 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. We promote diversity and tolerance in our organisation, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome. In particular we:

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

Our Committee and Musical Directors

This policy guides our Committee and our Musical Directors on how to behave with children in our organisation. Our organisational structure requires the appointment of both male and female ‘Child Safety Officers’. They will facilitate consultation with and empowerment of children, keep abreast of legislative requirements and best practise and help guide policy development in our organisation.

We require all committee members to hold a current Working With Children Check and for all our members to maintain an appropriate standard of conduct especially when working with children. This standard is monitored and reviewed by members of our Committee. All members, including children and families, are given the opportunity to contribute to policy formation and the development of our code of conduct.

Training and supervision

Training and education is 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 (in addition to parents/carers and children) to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. Where required we ensure training is undertaken to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

We support our ‘Child Safety Officers’ to undergo training to: develop their skills to protect children from abuse; promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children and children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds, and ensure the safety of children with a disability. We also facilitate this knowledge being relayed to relayed to all members.

New members 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 (as per our code of conduct). Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

Recruitment

Our organisation understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations. We actively encourage membership from people of all cultures, having regard to no matter other than the content of a potential members’ character.

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](http://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au) for further information.

We reserve the right to request 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.

Fair procedures for personnel

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. Being fair and just to all members is also important to us. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using an incident reporting form[[1]](#footnote-1), including investigation updates. All records are securely stored.

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.

Privacy

All personal information 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. Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will have access to it.

Legislative responsibilities

Our organisation takes our 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.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**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.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Any personnel who are **mandatory reporters** must comply with their duties.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Risk management

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified (see information about failure to protect above). In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our 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 environments (for example, any doors that can lock), and online environments (maintaining appropriate social media interactions).

Regular review

This policy will be reviewed every two years and following significant incidents if they occur. We will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute. Where possible we do our best to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

Allegations, concerns and complaints

Our organisation takes all allegations seriously and will ensure a timely and appropriate investigation and response to all matters of concern.

We work to ensure all members, children, and families 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 (see information about failure to disclose above).

If an adult has a reasonable belief that an incident has occurred then they must report the incident. Factors contributing to reasonable belief may be:

* a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves)
* behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed[[5]](#footnote-5)
* someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it observing suspicious behaviour.

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| To get more information about child safety in Victoria email childsafestandards@dhhs.vic.gov.au Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.© State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services, December 2015.Where the term ‘Aboriginal’ is used it refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Indigenous is retained when it is part of the title of a report, program or quotation. Throughout this paper we refer to ‘Aboriginal peoples’ rather than ‘Aboriginal people’ to reflect the plurality and diversity of Victorian Aboriginal communities.Available at: [www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies,-guidelines-and-legislation/child-safe-standards](file:///Users/dean.mulholland/Documents%20and%20Settings/vste2210/Local%20Settings/Temp/notes9493C6/www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies%2C-guidelines-and-legislation/child-safe-standards) |

1. See resource seven in child safe toolkit. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A person will not commit this offence if they have a reasonable excuse for not disclosing the information, including a fear for their safety or where the information has already been disclosed.

Further information about the failure to disclose offence is available on the [Department of Justice and Regulation website](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer%2Bcommunities/protecting%2Bchildren%2Band%2Bfamilies/failure%2Bto%2Bdisclose%2Boffence) <www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Further information about the failure to protect offence is available on the [Department of Justice and Regulation website](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer%2Bcommunities/protecting%2Bchildren%2Band%2Bfamilies/failure%2Bto%2Bprotect%2Boffence) <www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Mandatory reporters (doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers (including early childhood teachers), principals and police) must report to child protection if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse.

See the Department of Health and Human Services website for information about [how to make a report to child protection](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/guide-to-making-a-report-to-child-protection-or-child-first) <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/guide-to-making-a-report-to-child-protection-or-child-first>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For example behaviour, please see [**An Overview of the Victorian child safe standards**](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/word_doc/0005/955598/Child-safe-standards_overview.doc)**:** <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/\_\_data/assets/word\_doc/0005/955598/Child-safe-standards\_overview.doc> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)