

Child Safe Policy

NQS

QA2	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.
-----	-------	--

National Regulations

Regs	84	Awareness of child protection law
------	----	-----------------------------------

1. Aim

It is important that children are able to learn and develop in a safe and supportive environment. The safety, health and wellbeing of children is our number one priority. We have zero tolerance for child abuse and are committed to acting in children’s best interests. We will ensure our environment and practices are always safe, consistent with best practice and legislative requirements including the **Child Safe Standards** and the **Child Information Sharing Scheme**.

2. Related Policies

- Additional Needs Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Educator and Management Policy
- Family Violence Safety Policy
- Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness Policy
- Record Keeping and Retention Policy
- Social media Policy
- Staffing Arrangements Policy
- Technology Usage Policy

3. Implementation

Child Safe Standards

1. Our Service commits to an environment and practices which are consistent with the Child Safe Standards as follows:
2. Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements
3. A child safe policy
4. A code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children
5. Screening, supervision, training and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel
6. Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse
7. Strategies to identify and reduce or remove the risk of abuse
8. Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children

Many of the practices and procedures which support these standards are embedded in our existing policies which are referenced below with additional comment where relevant.

1. Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements

Under our *Educator and Management Policy*, the Nominated Supervisor embeds a culture of child safety in several ways including:

- ensuring staff are appropriately qualified and ratios are met
- ensuring all staff understand their responsibilities under the National Law and Regulations, National Quality Standard (NQS) and the My Time Our Place Learning Framework (MTOF)
- ensuring all staff, visitors and volunteers are aware of and comply with our Code of Conduct
- organising appropriate information, instruction, training or supervision to staff

Our *Child Protection Policy* outlines our Child Protection Risk Management Strategy:

- a) Code of Conduct
- b) Recruitment, Selection and Training Procedures which include child protection principles (also Standard 4)
- c) Procedures for Reporting and Documenting Abuse or Neglect (also Standard 5)
- d) Procedures for Managing Breaches
- e) Risk Management for High Risk Activity
- f) Information for Families

Under the NQS, children's culture and heritage must be regularly embedded in our learning programs. For example:

NQS 1.1.1 Approved learning framework - Curriculum decision-making contributes to each child's learning and development outcomes in relation to their identity, connection with community, wellbeing, confidence as learners and effectiveness as communicators.

NQS 1.1.2 Child-centred - Each child's current knowledge, strengths, ideas, culture, abilities and interests are the foundation of the program.

Additionally educators integrate MTOP Principles and Practices like 'respect for diversity', 'cultural competence' and 'high expectations and equity' into the curriculum to ensure children achieve the learning outcomes related to their identity, connection to their world and sense of wellbeing.

Educators do this in numerous ways including:

- providing resources and information that promote Indigenous and other cultures
- establishing links with local Indigenous and cultural groups
- inviting families and community members to visit the service and complete activities and experiences with the children
- through intentional teaching strategies promoting Indigenous customs, stories, traditions, history and that of other cultures
- working with other professionals to assist children with additional needs
- ensuring all children can participate in learning activities

Records which enable staff to monitor and review incidents, and implement continuous improvement practices, are maintained as required under the National Law and our *Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness Policy*.

2. A child safe policy

This policy is available to all families in our policy folder, as part of our regular policy review program.

3. A code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children

The *Code of Conduct in our Educator and Management Policy* sets out clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children. For example, all staff and volunteers will:

- implement activities and experiences that are age appropriate, culturally sensitive and inclusive
- comply with all service policies, including those which protect children from harm, abuse and neglect
- refrain from developing close personal relationships with children outside work
- refrain from using abusive, derogatory or offensive language
- not favour any particular child.

The Code also provides the following examples of appropriate interactions with children

- use of YouTube, social media and technology to support age appropriate curriculum
- physical contact to soothe children, build trusting relationships, demonstrate learning and skills and assist children with additional needs
- families and visitors will not have physical contact with children at the service that are not their own unless a staff member is present.

Our Relationships with Children Policy also contains clear guidelines on appropriate behaviour with children as discussed under Standard 6.

All families must declare they have read and understand our policies and Code of Conduct and will comply with them when signing our enrolment form.

4. Screening, supervision, training and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel

Our Educator and Management Policy details our commitment to the professional development and performance management of all staff. It explains, for example, that the Nominated Supervisor will complete an annual performance appraisal for all staff, as well as for new staff after 3 months service. Appraisals are used to ensure staff are aware of their duties and responsibilities and to identify training needs which include child safety practices. The Nominated Supervisor will ensure funds are set aside for training in the annual budget.

Child protection training may cover the definition of abuse, how to identify abuse and reduce risks, including for children with disabilities, inappropriate behaviour between children and inappropriate behaviour between children and adults. Training may occur through a recognised face to face or on-line training course, mentoring and at staff meetings.

This Policy also outlines orientation practices to ensure new or returning staff are aware of current service policies and procedures, and relevant legislative requirements including their child protection obligations. Training is undertaken where required.

Our Child Protection Policy contains recruitment and selection procedures which reduce the risk of child abuse by staff. The procedures cover position descriptions, advertising, interviews, and selection of candidates. For example:

- position descriptions will clearly describe the expectations for staff to provide a safe and supportive environment for children (also Standard 1)
- job advertisements will state applicants need to have a clear Working With Children Check
- applicants will be questioned on their understanding of child safety and child protection, and permission is obtained to contact referees

Our *Staffing Arrangements Policy* sets out the required ratios of staff to children, staff qualifications and the requirement for the Nominated Supervisor to read a person's Working With Children Check before the person is employed or works as a volunteer at the service (unless exemptions apply).

Other procedures in this Policy that reduce the risk of abuse include:

- always supervising students and volunteers
- educators positioning themselves (outdoors) so they see as much as possible

5. Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse

Our *Child Protection Policy* contains clear procedures for responding to and reporting suspected abuse and neglect, including allegations of abuse made against staff members. Where staff members are involved, the Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor must review the person's duties, and if they continue to interact with children while the allegation is investigated, ensure they are appropriately supervised at all times.

The Policy outlines appropriate interactions and behaviour if staff receive a disclosure of abuse from a child or adult, and contains information for families about the way staff teach children about protective behaviour.

Our response to cases of abuse will be culturally sensitive. For example we will engage with families and/or community members to improve our understanding of cultural behaviours and inform our responses.

Our *Educator and Management Policy* outlines our commitment to training, including training in child safe practices to meet staff needs and obligations (see Standard 4).

6. Strategies to identify and reduce or remove the risk of abuse

Our *Relationships with Children Policy* contains extensive guidelines and examples about positive interactions with children to promote their self esteem, and positive behaviour guidance. The Policy also clearly states that staff will not isolate, intimidate or subject children to corporal punishment to guide behaviour. Instead staff may take actions which include:

- ignoring negative behaviour and praising positive behaviour
- using key words with signing and visuals to help children with communication difficulties
- using minimal steps in directions and allowing time for children to understand
- using terminology that children understand
- providing opportunities for exercise which can calm anxious or agitated children

- intentionally teaching behaviours
- putting themselves in the child's position to try and understand where the behaviour came from

Our *Educator and Management Policy* sets out the practices which will be followed for visitors to the service:

- visitors will never be left alone with children and will always supervised by staff
- visitors must have or obtain a child protection clearance (unless exempt) before being allowed into the service
- specialists or professionals engaged to support a child will only be allowed to visit and engage with the child if written authorisation has first been obtained from the child's parents

This policy also outlines our commitment to training, including in child safe practices, to meet staff needs and obligations (see Standard 4).

Our *Technology Usage Policy* requires technology only be used to support children's learning, that only age appropriate websites will be accessed and that staff will directly supervise children when they are on-line. Children will view 'G' rated videos only.

Our *Social Media Policy* contains a number of measures designed to ensure children's privacy and wellbeing. For example:

- staff will not post any information or photos from the service on personal social media accounts
- staff will not use their personal camera or phones to take photos or video while at the service
- the Nominated Supervisor must obtain authorisation from a child's parents before posting any photos of their child on a service social media account or website

Comments made under Standard 4 also apply.

7. Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children

The National Quality Standard (NQS) promotes children's agency and participation in many ways.

We are required to meet the following NQS Elements for example:

1.1.2 Child-centred - Each child's current knowledge, strengths, ideas, culture, abilities and interests are the foundation of the program

1.1.3 Program learning opportunities - All aspects of the program, including routines, are organised in ways that maximise opportunities for each child's learning

1.2.3 Child directed learning - Each child's agency is promoted, enabling them to make choices and decisions that influence events and their world

3.2.1 Inclusive environment - Outdoor and indoor spaces are organised and adapted to support every child's participation and to engage every child in quality experiences in both built and natural environments

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.

Together with MTOP, the NQS requires educators be responsive to children's ideas, interests and needs. For example MTOP principle 'Partnerships with Families' and MTOP Practice 'Responsiveness to Children' promote respectful and reciprocal relationships with children based on deep understanding of their interests, community and culture. Educators view children as active participants and decision makers. These types of relationships empower children to voice their views, ideas and concerns.

Staff will regularly discuss children's rights with children, including their right to make decisions about their body and privacy, that they have a right to feel safe at all times, to recognise signs that they do not feel safe, and that staff are available for them if they have any concerns (discussed further in our *Child Protection Policy*)

Our *Relationships with Children Policy* contains extensive guidelines on the inclusion and agency of all children. For example staff will:

- allow children to be as independent as possible, try things for themselves and experience the consequences of their choices while considering the risk and benefit to others
- ensure curriculum is generated mainly from children's ideas and interests
- promote and value cultural diversity and equity for all children, families and colleagues

Our *Additional Needs Policy* indicates we welcome children with additional needs (including children from diverse cultural backgrounds) and will design or adapt the environment to ensure every child can participate and achieve meaningful learning outcomes. We will work with professionals, families and children to ensure that learning environments are suitable and implement plans or instructions.

Any questions about child safety or this Policy may be directed to the Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor or Person in day to day charge of the service. If employees, volunteers and families have concerns about the Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor's ability to provide or maintain a child safe environment they should first discuss their concerns with another Responsible Person (Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, Person in Day to Day Charge) who will investigate the concerns and if substantiated contact the Child Protection Hotline on 131 278, the Department of Education and Training (Children's Services) on 1300 307 415, the Police on 000 or the Commission for Children and Young People on 1300 78 29 78 for advice. Employees, volunteers and families may contact these organisations directly if they believe the Responsible Person has not taken appropriate action.

Child Information Sharing Scheme

The Child information Sharing Scheme (the Scheme) helps professionals and organisations to promote the wellbeing and safety of children by clarifying and expanding the circumstances when prescribed organisations can share information. This Scheme and the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme complement each other.

The Approved Provider and Nominated Supervisor are responsible for ensuring compliance with the Scheme. They are protected from liability if they share information in good faith and with reasonable care. If in doubt about their obligations or Scheme requirements, they will refer to the Child Information Sharing Scheme Guidelines. They will never use information obtained under the Scheme to prevent a child enrolling or continuing at the service.

As our Service is an 'Information Sharing Entity (ISE) under the Scheme, the Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor will voluntarily share any personal information with other ISEs, or respond in a timely way to requests from ISEs to share information, if the information sharing meets the legal requirements of the Scheme. They may also request information from another ISE to promote the safety or wellbeing of a child.

The Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor will use their professional judgement and work with other ISEs as required to determine whether the *threshold for sharing information* is met ie:

1. information is requested or shared for the purpose of promoting the safety or wellbeing of a child
2. if sharing information they reasonably believe this may help the receiving ISE to manage any risk to a child (eg through an assessment, plan, investigation or service provision to a child)
3. information is not excluded (includes information that might endanger a person's life or result in physical injury, prejudice legal proceedings or police investigation, contravene a court order, or is subject to legal professional privilege.)

If this threshold is met, consent is not required from any person to share information with other ISEs. However, the Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor will inform the child and/or family members of the information collected, who it will be shared with, how it might be used, how they might access it, and consider their views, *if it's safe, appropriate and reasonable to do so*. They will also advise the information sharing is allowed under the Scheme, and that complaints about the sharing of personal information may be made to the Victorian Information Commissioner. The Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor may refuse to give a person access to their confidential information if they reasonably believe doing so would increase the risk to a child's safety.

The Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor will confirm a person or organisation requesting information is an ISE before sharing, for example by asking for an official work email or calling an organisation's switchboard. They will also be aware of local service providers and professionals who can support children and their families.

The Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor may share information with a child (where appropriate) or with their parent/guardian where this will help manage a risk to the child's safety. They will consider the nature and significance of the risk, whether the information will help manage the risk and whether the information is excluded. (Information will never be shared with a perpetrator or alleged perpetrator of family violence or other offences against a child.) However, where there is not an immediate threat to the child's safety, the Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor may refer the child/family member to an ISE with expertise in this area, including expertise from a culturally sensitive perspective.

Record Keeping

The Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor will ensure appropriate records are kept securely and confidentially when information is requested and shared including where relevant:

- if the service received a request for information, who this was from, what was requested and the date of the request
- if the service disclosed information voluntarily, who the information was shared with, what was disclosed and the date disclosed
- if the service requested information, who this was made to and the date, what was requested
- how a disclosure of information met the threshold for sharing
- reasons any information sharing request is declined (these will also be provided to the ISE)
- whether the views of the child and/or family member were sought and obtained in relation to information sharing, what those views were, if they were advised the information would be shared or why their views were not considered
- copies of any family violence risk assessment and/or safety plan
- details of any complaint received including what it's about, date made, action taken to resolve the complaint and prevent similar complaints and time taken to resolve.

Any questions about child safety or this Policy may be directed to the Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor or Person in day to day charge of the service. If employees, volunteers and families have concerns about the Approved Provider or Nominated Supervisor's ability to provide or maintain a child safe environment they should first discuss their concerns with another Responsible Person (Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, Person in Day to Day Charge) who will investigate the concerns and if substantiated contact the Child Protection Hotline on 131 278, the Department of Education and Training (Children's Services) on 1300 307 415, the Police on 000 or the Commission for Children and Young People on 1300 78 29 78 for advice. Employees, volunteers and families may

contact these organisations directly if they believe the Responsible Person has not taken appropriate action.

Source

Education and Care Services National Regulations
National Quality Standard
Early Years Learning Framework
Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (includes Part 6 Child Safe Standards and Part 6A Child Information Sharing Scheme)
Child Wellbeing and Safety (Information Sharing) Regulations 2018
Child Information Sharing Scheme Ministerial Guidelines (includes Appendix 2 ISEs): VIC Govt
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Source

Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
National Quality Standard
My Time Our Place
Victorian Child Safe Standards
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
An overview of the Victorian child safe standards Department of Health and Human Services

Review

The policy will be reviewed annually by:

- Management
- Employees
- Families
- Interested Parties

Last reviewed: 1st May 2022 Date for next review: 1st May 2023