

Child Safety Policy

March 2025

1. Introduction

This Child Safety Policy is prepared to ensure children are safe at all Werribee River Association (WRA) events and activities and to provide guidance to staff, volunteers and board members about the standards and procedures that they must follow.

The policy conforms to the requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards issued by the Commission for Children and Young People that came into force on 1 July 2022. It is based on a template prepared by the Department of Health and Human Services. Among the organisations explicitly required to adhere to the Child Safe Standards are charities and not-for-profit organisations. WRA falls into this category.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all employees, volunteers, board members and other individuals involved with our organisation. This policy applies to all activities that impact on children and young people conducted by WRA.

3. Our commitment to child safety

WRA is committed to child safety. We believe all children have the right to feel and be safe and that keeping children safe is everyone's responsibility. WRA is committed to providing a child safe environment where children are safe and feel safe, and where their voices are heard about the decisions that affect their lives.

WRA seeks to actively promote diversity and tolerance, we respect and listen to the views of all the children and vulnerable people we support. We have zero tolerance for any form of inappropriate behaviour or abuse and any incidents will be treated seriously and consistently through our policies and procedures.

We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are concerned about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously. Our aim is to prevent child abuse through identifying risks, and, as soon as possible, taking steps to remove and reduce those risks.

We have robust human resources and recruitment practices in place to reduce the risk of child abuse by board members, staff and volunteers. To support board members, staff and volunteers to meet these commitments, we have specific policies and procedures in place and we provide regular training and education to reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing board members, staff and volunteers.

We are committed to ensuring the cultural safety of First Nations children and children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability.

If you believe a child is at immediate risk, call 000.

4. Definitions

A child is defined by the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (VIC) as a person who is under the age of 18 years.

Child abuse is defined in section 3 of the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (VIC) as including:

- any act committed against a child involving a sexual offence or a grooming offence under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958 (VIC);
- the infliction of physical violence or serious emotional or psychological harm; and
- the serious neglect of a child.

Child abuse describes an act or omission which results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. This can be a single event or a series of traumatic events. Most instances of child abuse fall under the definition of cumulative harm (repeated acts of harm) and multidimensional harm (multiple types of child abuse). Child abuse can be perpetrated by parents, caregivers, other adults, and/or other children and young people. Where sexual abuse is perpetrated by children or young people, it is usually referred to as, 'sexually harmful behaviour'.

Child abuse, including child harm and neglect, are commonly divided into the following sub-categories:

- physical abuse;
- emotional abuse;
- neglect;
- sexual abuse;
- grooming; and
- exposure to family violence

Harm is damage to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child or young person, including as a result of child abuse by adults or the conduct of other children. It includes physical, emotional, sexual and psychological harm. Harm can arise from a single act or event and can also be cumulative, that is, arising as a result of a series of acts or events over a period of time.

5. Our children

This policy empowers children, who are vital and active participants in our work and community education programs. We listen to children, seek their views and involve them when making decisions that affect them.

We promote inclusion and diversity, and welcome children and families from all backgrounds. In particular, we:

- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of First Nations children;
- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds; and
- ensure that children with disability are safe and included.

6. Our staff and volunteers

This policy guides our staff and volunteers on how to behave with children at WRA.

All staff, board members 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 continuing development and update of the Code of Conduct.

All staff and Board members, contractors and volunteers working directly with children need to have, and to provide of copy of, a current Working With Children Check and to sign the WRA Code of Conduct.

Children are welcome at our Friends' events provided they are supervised by parent or guardian.

7. Training and supervision

Training and education are important to ensure that everyone at WRA understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility.

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

We also support our board members, staff and volunteers through ongoing supervision to develop their skills to protect children from abuse and promote the cultural safety of First Nations children, the cultural safety of children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds, and the safety of children with a disability.

New board members, staff and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand our commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse. This will include checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate. Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

8. Recruitment

We take all reasonable steps to employ 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 legal responsibilities. We understand that when recruiting board members, staff and volunteers, we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

We carry out reference checks and police record checks to ensure that we are recruiting the right people. 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.

9. Fair procedures for staff and volunteers

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and reasonable to all staff and volunteers. 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 our incident reporting form. 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 actions we as an organisation take.

10. Privacy

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be staff, volunteers, families or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it and who will have access to it. This is intended to protect reporters and to ensure that all members of WRA are comfortable to disclose any allegations or concerns in relation to child safety without repercussions.

11. Legislative responsibilities

WRA takes its legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- Failure to disclose: 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 Victoria Police.
- Mandatory reporting: Any board/committee members, staff or volunteers who are mandatory reporters (doctors, nurses, midwives, teacher, principals and police officers) must comply with their duties.
- 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.
- Reportable conduct: The General Manager, WRA must be made aware of any allegations of physical and sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, significant emotional or psychological harm or significant neglect by an employee or volunteer towards a child. We are also legally required to notify the Commission for Children and Young People of the allegation.
- Duty of care: If a child is abused by an individual associated with our organisation, our organisation is presumed to have breached its duty of care unless it can prove that it took 'reasonable precautions' to prevent the abuse in question.

12. Allegations, concerns and complaints

We take all allegations seriously and have practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our board members, staff and volunteers are trained to deal with allegations appropriately.

We work to ensure all children, families, board members, 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. If an adult has a reasonable belief that an incident has occurred, then they must report the incident.

Factors contributing to reasonable belief may include:

- 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;
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it;
- observing suspicious behaviour.

13. 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 will do our best to work with local First Nations communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.