

Human resources practices for child safe organisations

Child safe standards toolkit: resource four

The child safe standards require organisations that provide services for children¹ to have screening, supervision, training and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse² by new and existing personnel. You may already have existing practices. You can use this resource to inform good human resources practices in your organisation.

Overview

It is important for organisations to have strong human resources practices to help protect children from abuse.

Your organisation should foster a culture of openness and inclusiveness, as well as be aware that people who may wish to harm children could target specific organisations. Robust human resources practices are a good way of reducing these risks. Human resources practices include the recruitment, training and supervision of all personnel.

To achieve this, your organisation needs to provide opportunities for employees and volunteers to develop and maintain skills to ensure child safety. This will support staff and volunteers to understand the importance of child safety and wellbeing, and enable them to consistently follow child safety policies and procedures.

You should reinforce your organisation's commitment to child safety by recognising the good work and practices of employees and volunteers in keeping children safe and protected.

Child safety officer

Employees and volunteers could be supported through the appointment of an individual child safety officer with specified 'child-safe' duties in their job description, including being the designated person to hear or be informed about all allegations or concerns, and providing support to other personnel. This will assist your organisation in ensuring that child safety is prioritised, and that any allegations of abuse or safety concerns are recorded and responded to consistently and in line with your organisation's legal requirements and policies and procedures.

A designated child safety officer also provides a single contact for children, parents and employees/volunteers to seek advice and support regarding the safety and wellbeing of children associated with your organisation.

¹ For a [list of the organisations in scope](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies,-guidelines-and-legislation/in-scope-organisations-for-child-safe-standards) for the child safe standards, please see the Department of Health and Human Services website: <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies,-guidelines-and-legislation/in-scope-organisations-for-child-safe-standards>.

² The child safe standards aim to protect children from abuse in organisations, including physical violence, sexual offences, serious emotional or psychological abuse and serious neglect. For further explanation of the different types of child abuse, please see 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>.

Training and induction

Training and education is an important tool to help people understand that child safety is everyone's responsibility. Employees and volunteers (in addition to parents/guardians and children) need to be supported to discuss child protection issues and to detect signs of potential child abuse.

Staff should receive induction and ongoing training. New staff will need support and information when they begin their new role, and existing staff might need to develop new skills and knowledge to meet the requirements of their positions and expand their career options.

Training and support also promotes an awareness of the appropriate standards of care required to be met by employees and volunteers to ensure that the organisation meets its duty of care when providing services to children.

It is essential that your staff commit to promoting the safety and wellbeing of children, for example by signing your organisation's code of conduct. Training should enhance the skills and knowledge of your employees and volunteers, and reduce exposure to risks.

Employees and volunteers working with children need to receive training in the following areas:

- identifying, assessing and reducing or removing child abuse risks
- your organisation's policies and procedures (including the code of conduct and child safe policy)
- legislative requirements, such as obligations to report child abuse³, reduce and remove known risks of child abuse⁴, and to hold Working with Children Checks⁵ where required
- how to handle a disclosure or suspicion of abuse, including your organisation's reporting guidelines
- cultural awareness training.

Training can be formal such as:

- higher education training and accreditation
- training offered by external organisations
- training developed and delivered internally
- on-the-job training meeting key objectives.

Training can also be informal such as:

- inviting other professionals to speak at meetings or functions
- inviting local Aboriginal Elders, Aboriginal community controlled organisations and community members to speak at meetings and events
- inviting local culturally and/or linguistically diverse community members to speak at meetings and events
- internal mentoring and coaching.

³ The failure to disclose criminal offence requires adults in Victoria to report to police a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed against a child (unless they have a reasonable excuse for not doing so). More information about [failure to disclose](#) is available on the Department of Justice and Regulation website

<www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence>.

Failure to disclose does not change mandatory reporting obligations. Certain professionals are mandatory reporters, meaning they are required to report to the Department of Health and Human Services if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical and sexual abuse. More information about [mandatory reporting](#) is available in the *Child protection manual* <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/cpmanual/intake/overview-of-intake-of-reports-under-the-children,-youth-and-families-act/1122-mandatory-and-other-required-reporting>.

⁴ The failure to protect criminal offence applies to people within organisations who knew of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse by someone in the organisation and had the authority to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently failed to do so. More information about [failure to protect](#) is available on the Department of Justice and Regulation website <www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence>.

⁵ For more information about [Working with Children checks](#) visit the working with children website <www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au>.

Supervision

Supervision of employees and volunteers should be managed in a way that protects children from abuse and improves accountability and performance, without being onerous or heavy-handed. For instance, where practical, two staff members should be present during activities with children. In particular, children with a disability may require additional supervision.

As a matter of good practice, new employees and volunteers should be supervised regularly to ensure they understand their role and learn skills, as well as to check that their behaviour towards children is appropriate. Any warning signs should be reported through appropriate channels, including your organisation's internal reporting procedures (such as your child safety officer and leadership), the Department of Health and Human Services (child protection), or police if a child is believed to be at imminent risk.

Performance and development review

A proactive performance development strategy should be used to improve employees and volunteers skills and knowledge on child safety. This is also an opportunity to improve knowledge and skills in working with children, as well as recognising and responding to suspected abuse.

Performance should be measured against the organisation's standards of conduct and care to ensure that employees and volunteers meet expected outcomes. These standards must align with those of the code of conduct and child safe policy so everyone can be aware of the expectations of your organisation and appropriate behaviour.

Code of conduct and disciplinary procedures

This toolkit provides an example code of conduct which organisations that provide services for children can use. The sample code of conduct outlines expected standards of appropriate behaviour with and in the company of children.

Disciplinary procedures should be accessible and transparent, and clearly demonstrate the consequences of breaches of the code of conduct. These procedures should be used if an allegation of child abuse is made, or a breach of the code of conduct is known or suspected.

Employees and volunteers should be aware of reporting and disciplinary procedures and how to communicate concerns regarding the improper behaviour of any person within the organisation. Members of your organisation should also be aware of their duty to raise concerns about the behaviour of any person who may present a risk of child abuse, without fear of repercussions.

Your code of conduct should be publicly available. Children and their families should be encouraged to raise any concerns about the behaviour of any person, and can expect to be listened to and supported.

Your organisation's disciplinary procedures should clearly outline what employees or volunteers should do if they are concerned that their actions or words have been misunderstood, or they believe their concerns are not investigated in a timely manner.

Further information

Further information on [child safe standards](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/plans,-programs-and-projects/projects-and-initiatives/children,-youth-and-family-services/creating-child-safe-organisations) can be found on the Department of Health and Human Services' website <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/plans,-programs-and-projects/projects-and-initiatives/children,-youth-and-family-services/creating-child-safe-organisations>.

Additional resources for organisations in the child safe standards toolkit can be found on the [Department of Health and Human Services website](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies,-guidelines-and-legislation/child-safe-standards): <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies,-guidelines-and-legislation/child-safe-standards>. In particular, [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: <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/___data/assets/word_doc/0005/955598/Child-safe-standards_overview.doc>

Note for registered schools: a forthcoming Ministerial Order under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* will contain the minimum actions that schools must take to meet each of the child safe standards. There will be a lead in time before regulation will commence to allow schools time to prepare. The Department of Education and Training and the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority will provide information and materials specifically for schools to assist with capacity building and compliance.

Registered schools can contact the Department of Education and Training: child.safe.schools@edumail.vic.gov.au

Early childhood services operating under the *National Quality Framework* or *Children's Services Act 1996* should contact: licensed.childrens.services@edumail.vic.gov.au

Licensed children's services enquiry line: 1300 307 415

Disclaimer

This document provides general guidance only on the child safe standards. The Department of Health and Human Services does not guarantee that the examples provided in the document are sufficient for the purposes of an organisation's compliance with existing regulatory or government funding requirements.

To receive this publication in an accessible format email childsafestandards@dhhs.vic.gov.au

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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