

Recruitment practices for child safe organisations

Child safe standards toolkit: resource five

The child safe standards require organisations that provide services for children¹ to have recruitment and screening practices that reduce the risk of child abuse.² You may already have existing practices. You can use this resource to develop or review your organisation's recruitment practices to help protect children from abuse.

Recruitment checklist for child safe organisations

Robust recruitment processes help ensure the best applicants are employed. From advertising through to conducting interviews and checking the background of applicants, it is important that each step is done consistently and thoroughly.

This checklist will guide your organisation through critical steps in the recruitment process. It includes objectives and examples for:

- selection criteria in job descriptions
- advertising
- face-to-face interviews including behavioural-based questions and questions about motives for wanting to work with children
- [Working with Children Checks](http://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au) <www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au>
- [police record checks and identity checks](http://www.police.vic.gov.au) <www.police.vic.gov.au> (including international police record checks where necessary)
- reference checks over the telephone with recent line managers
- probation periods.

Your organisation may decide to adopt this checklist entirely, or to use relevant components alongside existing recruitment procedures.

Selection criteria

Developing appropriate selection criteria for the position is a valuable first step to reducing the risk of appointing someone who poses a child safety risk. It will also ensure that applicants have the specific knowledge and skills required for the position.

¹ For a [list of the organisations in scope](#) 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](#): <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/word_doc/0005/955598/Child-safe-standards_overview.doc>.

Examples of appropriate selection criteria may include:

‘Must have experience working with children.’

‘Must be able to demonstrate an understanding of appropriate behaviours when engaging with children.’

Does your selection criteria clearly state the experience, qualifications, qualities and attributes expected from the successful applicant?	
Does your selection criteria outline the supervision and accountability processes in place which support child safety?	

Remember to ensure your selection criteria provides for the safety of all children. Your applicants should have the opportunity to indicate their understanding of, or any experience they have in working with children with diverse needs and/or backgrounds.

Does your selection criteria include a demonstration of the needs of children with a disability?	
Does your selection criteria include a demonstration of Aboriginal cultural safety and awareness?	
Does your selection criteria include a demonstration of cultural safety for children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds? ³	

Advertising

Planning your advertisement and its placement provides a good opportunity to demonstrate your commitment to safeguarding children and deter would-be offenders.

Does your advertisement include a message about your organisation’s commitment to child safety?	
Does your advertisement include reference to your code of conduct and child safe policy?	
Does your advertisement inform applicants that appropriate rigorous reference and background checking will be undertaken, including a Working with Children Check and police record and identity check?	

It is imperative that your organisation promotes the safety, participation and empowerment of all children, including those with a disability. A suggested approach may be:

‘This organisation promotes the safety, wellbeing and inclusion of all children, including those with a disability. Applicants are welcome to elaborate on experience they may have working with children with a disability.’

Has your job advertisement included a statement about your organisation’s commitment to the safety, participation and empowerment of all children, including those with a disability?	
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It is important that your organisation be culturally safe for Aboriginal children, and encourage participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children. A suggested approach may be:

³ For definitions of key terms, 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>

'This organisation promotes the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children, and encourages applications from Aboriginal peoples.'

'Applicants are welcome to elaborate on experience they may have working with Aboriginal children and/or communities.'

Has your job advertisement included a statement about your organisation's commitment to cultural safety, inclusion and empowerment of Aboriginal children, their families and communities?	
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It is important that your organisation promote the safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds. A suggested approach may be:

'This organisation promotes the safety and wellbeing of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and encourages applications from people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse background.'

'Applicants are welcome to elaborate on experience they may have working with children from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse background.'

Has your job advertisement included a statement about your organisation's commitment to the safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds?	
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Interviews

The interview process is a very important step in selecting the right people for your organisation and in identifying any people who may pose a risk to children. Give yourself sufficient time to plan and prepare for the interview process, and form an interview panel with the right mix of experience and skills to carry out the interview, ensuring that all panel members are clear on what the position requires. You may want to consider including Aboriginal peoples, people from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse background and people with a disability on the interview panel.

An open-ended style of behavioural-based questioning will give you insight into the applicant's values, attitudes and understanding of professional boundaries and accountability. Some useful questions may include:

'Tell us about why you want to work with children?'

'Describe a time when you had to manage a child whose behaviour you found challenging?'

'Tell us about a time when you had to comfort a distressed child?'

Have you prepared a list of open-ended questions which will determine how the interviewee will behave in certain situations?	
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Take notice of your own thoughts and feelings when interacting with the applicant. Ask for more information if the applicant does not provide sufficient information in his or her responses.

Did you notice any warning signs such as:

• Unexplained lengthy gaps in employment history	
• The applicant says they do not value or 'need' supervision	
• The applicant is evasive or inconsistent in his or her answers	

Pre-employment screening

Screening applicants (including for paid and volunteer positions) is a good tool for helping to prevent people who may abuse children from entering your organisation.

Police checks

It is important to be upfront and ask the applicant if they have any criminal convictions, formal disciplinary action taken against them, or any finding of improper or unprofessional conduct. This could involve the applicant signing a declaration as part of an application form.

You could also cover this in a face-to-face interview. This may be challenging for the interview panel, particularly if the person is already known to you, but the applicant's response should demonstrate a sufficient level of professionalism as well as an understanding of your obligations. To help introduce this difficult topic, you could say to the applicant that you have some specific questions about child safety because your organisation takes child safety seriously.

Have you included a question about whether the applicant has any criminal convictions, cautions, other legal or pending cases, including formal disciplinary action, which may affect their suitability to work with children?	
If addressed during a face-to-face interview, did you take notice of how the applicant responds to questions with regard to his or her words and body language?	
Have you undertaken a police record check (which includes identity check)?	

Working with Children Check

Under the *Working with Children Act 2005*, people who are doing child-related work, and who are not exempt⁴, need a Working with Children Check. This applies to both paid and volunteer workers. Full details of the [Working with Children Check process](#) can be found on the Working with Children website <www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au>.

Does the applicant hold a valid Working with Children Check, if required? Have you checked the validity of their Working with Children Check < online.justice.vic.gov.au/wwccu/checkstatus.doj >?. OR If the applicant does not hold a valid Working with Children Check, and it is required, has the applicant provided evidence that they have applied for a Working with Children Check, and does your organisation have processes to follow up pending applications?	
Has the applicant provided you with evidence of their Working with Children Check, or evidence of their application for a Working with Children Check?	

Referee checks

You should always talk to at least two referees as this can provide insight into the applicant's character and skills. Line managers, particularly the most recent, are likely to provide you with the most accurate reference. Where possible, referees that can provide insights into the applicant's experience working with children should be contacted.

Do the referees provided by the applicant include line managers who can be objective, rather than colleagues or friends?	
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⁴ For example, teachers and police officers are exempt because they undergo other thorough background checking.

Has the applicant provided their most recent line manager as a referee? If not, have they provided you with a satisfactory reason?	
Have you spoken to at least two of the referees by telephone? Did you confirm with them their name and position provided to you by the applicant?	

When speaking with the referees, you should seek to establish the referee's relationship with the applicant, including:

- how long the applicant and referee worked together
- the specifics of the position
- the applicant's perceived strengths and weaknesses
- whether the referee would hire the person again, particularly in a role working with children, and whether they have any concerns about the applicant working with children.

You should ask referees directly about any concerns they may have about the applicant working with children. To help introduce this difficult topic, you could say you have some specific questions about child safety because your organisation takes child safety seriously.

Take note of any pauses or gaps in the referee's responses.

Ask behaviour-based questions like:

• 'What did the applicant do when...[for example, they had to comfort a distressed child]?'	
• 'Do you have any concerns about the applicant's attitude towards Aboriginal peoples / people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds / people with a disability?'	
• 'Do you have any concerns about the applicant working with children?'	
• 'Would you employ this person again?'	

Additional checks

Additional checks will confirm the identity of the applicant and that their responses have been truthful.

Have you checked the identity of the applicant (for example, that their driver's licence/passport has the same name they have provided you)?	
Did you see a certified copy of the applicant's qualifications (if required)?	

Probation periods

Probation periods can help you assess a new staff member's performance and suitability for the job before confirming their permanent employment. If you have any concerns about the person working with children, you should seriously consider whether you want them to remain in the job and your organisation.

The length of probation periods can vary and are usually between three and six months.

You should consider whether the person should receive closer supervision and additional training throughout the probation period. A probation period can offer an opportunity to set goals with new staff members and identify training, supervision and other support needs.

Further information

Further information on [child safe standards](#) 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](#): <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