



Port Phillip EcoCentre Inc.

Child Safe Policy

October 2017

Child Safe Policy	CSP - 1	Version	November 2017
Drafted by	Louise Kyle	Approved by Committee on	Drafts submitted to Committee July 2016 and August 2017
Responsible person	Executive Officer	Scheduled review date	December 2021

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Section 1 Introduction

Victoria has introduced compulsory minimum child safe standards that apply to organisations that provide services to children from 1st January 2017. Mandatory reporting now applies to all adults in Victoria.

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.

This policy is our response to the requirement to:

- Set out processes for reporting and responding to concerns and allegations (or clearly refer people to where these processes can be found)
- Prepare a code of conduct which provides specific guidelines on appropriate behaviour with children
- Have a statement of commitment to child safety clearly stating that the EcoCentre has zero tolerance for child abuse, is committed to acting in children's best interests and, in keeping them safe, that we actively work to empower children.

Section 2 Purpose

This document:

- Is based on an overarching set of principles and presents our policy and procedures in order to further the protection of children from abuse
- Sets out processes for reporting and responding to concerns and allegations (or clearly refers people to where these processes can be found)
- Refers to the Code of Conduct which provides specific guidelines on appropriate behavior with children and contains a Statement of Commitment to Child Safety.

Section 3 Responsibilities

The organisation as a whole is focussed on driving cultural change and to embedding child protection policy into everyday thinking, practice and procedure.

Responsibilities fall on each member of staff, volunteers and the Committee of Management.

Staff and volunteers¹

- All of our staff and volunteers, where necessary, must agree to abide by our code of conduct (Appendix 1) 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 development of the code of conduct.

Management Committee

The Committee of Management members have a responsibility to be aware of the content of the Port Phillip EcoCentre's Child Safety Policy and thus the organisation's responsibilities.

Duty of Care

EcoCentre programs vary in Duty of Care delineation, for example during excursions the teachers maintain Duty of Care for students. However, Child Safety protection includes obligations to take all reasonable steps protecting the health and safety of all children we come into contact with while providing our services.

¹ Our volunteers rarely work with children. Our volunteer inductions will include an introduction to the child safety policy but regular supervision and inclusion in policy review etc will only be necessary for those volunteers involved in our services to children.

Section 4 Child Safe Policy

Statement of Commitment

We are committed to:

- The safety, participation and empowerment of all children
- Preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks
- Having appropriate human resources and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers to implement this policy
- Regularly training and educating staff and volunteers on child abuse risks
- The cultural safety of Aboriginal children
- The cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- To providing a safe environment for children with a disability.

We understand that child abuse includes physical violence, sexual offences, serious emotional or psychological abuse and serious neglect and that we have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety and we will act on these accordingly.

We have policies, procedures and training in place that supports our staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.

We want children to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers.

We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated seriously and consistently.

The children

An element of our policy seeks to empower children who are engaged with our organisation. We endeavour to involve these children 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 from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Work to ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate equally.

Training and supervision

The Port Phillip EcoCentre considers that 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.

We train our staff and volunteers to identify, assess and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

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

New employees and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand our organisation's commitment to child safety and also that each person has a role to play in protecting children from abuse, as well as checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate (Code of Conduct Appendix 1).

Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including Victoria Police (000) or the Department of Health and Human Services (24 hour Child Protection Crisis Line 131278 or child protection contacts in the City of Port Phillip area (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 take all reasonable steps to employ appropriately 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 legislative responsibilities.

We actively encourage applications from Aboriginal peoples, people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability.

All people engaged in child-related work, including volunteers, are required to hold a current Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this Check.

We carry out 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.

Fair procedures for personnel

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern.

We are also fair and just to personnel. 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 (Section 6), 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 on any actions we, as an organization, 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

Relevant legislation:

- *Crimes Act 1958*
- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*
- *Child Youth and Families Services Act 2005*

Our organisation takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including our awareness of the following:

- **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 police²
- **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 so³
- Any personnel who are **mandatory reporters** must comply with their duties.⁴

At the EcoCentre this includes VIT registered teacher and Early Childhood Educators.

Risk management

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified (see legislative responsibilities above). In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to the children with whom children we work.

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 (for example, no staff or volunteer is to have online contact with a child or their family unless directly related to Port Phillip EcoCentre roles such as provision of a newsletter).

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](#).

³ Further information about the failure to protect offence is available on the [Department of Justice and Regulation website](#).

[1] Our staff who are registered teachers are “mandatory reporters” under s 182 (1) (c) of the *Children Youth and Families Services Act 2005*) and must report to child protection (to police or the Department of Health and Human Services) if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse.

⁴ See the Department of Health and Human Services website for information [about how to make a report to child protection](#).

Allegations, concerns and complaints

Our organisation takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our staff and volunteers are trained to deal appropriately with allegations.

We work to ensure all children, families, 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 (see legislative responsibilities 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
- Someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- Observing suspicious behaviour.

MANAGING SUSPICIONS AND/OR BREACHES

The Port Phillip EcoCentre is committed to supporting all children or young people who make complaints no matter the nature of the complaint.

Any investigation or decision making function relating to allegations of a serious or criminal nature involving children and young people will be referred to the relevant law enforcement (i.e. Victoria Police) or child protection agency (i.e. Department of Health and Human Services).

The Port Phillip EcoCentre will then take any appropriate steps to mitigate the risk to children until the relevant agency is able to provide further advice as to the substance of the allegations and the necessary actions the Port Phillip EcoCentre must take to protect children.

⁵ For example behaviour, please see [An Overview of the Victorian child safe standards](#)

Section 5 Process

This section sets out the process for managing suspicions and/or disclosures of child abuse or harm.

5.1 REASONABLE GROUNDS TO SUSPECT HARM

Port Phillip EcoCentre employees/contractors/ volunteers may have **reasonable grounds** to suspect harm if:

- A child or young person informs Port Phillip EcoCentre employee/contractors/ volunteers that they have been harmed
- Someone else, for example, another child or young person, a parent, or a staff member, tells Port Phillip EcoCentre employees/contractors/ volunteers that harm has occurred or is likely to occur
- A child or young person informs Port Phillip EcoCentre employees/contractors/ volunteers they know someone who has been harmed. (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves)
- Port Phillip EcoCentre employees/contractors/ volunteers are concerned at significant changes in the behaviour of a child or young person, or the presence of new unexplained and suspicious injuries, and/or Port Phillip EcoCentre employees/contractors/ volunteers witness the harm occurring. If this is the case, intervene immediately, provided it is safe to do so. If it is unsafe, call the police for assistance on 000.

Examples of a disclosure of harm

A disclosure of harm may sound like:

“I think I saw...”

“Somebody told me that...”

“I just think you should know...”

“I’m not sure what you can do, but...”

5.2 RESPONDING TO A SUSPICION AND/OR DISCLOSURE OF HARM

All incidents or disclosures of harm or suspicions of harm are to be taken seriously and actioned immediately, regardless of whom perpetrated the harm, in an efficient and effective way.

Port Phillip EcoCentre employees/contractors/ volunteers should:

- Not react in a shocked or in a critical way or with disbelief to a disclosure
- Find a private place to talk to ensure confidentiality (preferably in sight of another adult and not in a closed office) and to make the child or young person making the disclosure more comfortable and less concerned
- Not give an assurance to the child or young person that the information provided will be kept secret
- Port Phillip EcoCentre employees/contractors/ volunteers are encouraged to advise the child or young person that they have done the right thing in making the disclosure but the disclosure must be reported so that someone can help keep them safe
- Not attempt to conduct their own investigation or mediate an outcome between the parties
- Only ask enough questions to confirm the need to report the matter
- Port Phillip EcoCentre employees/contractors/ volunteers should avoid asking probing questions as this could cause distress, confusion and interfere with any later enquiries. For instance, Port Phillip EcoCentre employees/contractors/ volunteers should ask non-leading questions such as
 - “What happened then?” or “Can you tell me about that? as opposed to leading questions such as
 - “Did X touch you?”
- Act on the basis that the information the person is providing is true
- Ensure the child or young person in question is safe
- Maintain the safety of other children and young people, and/or inform the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services Liaison Officer
- Any disclosure of harm is important and must be acted upon, regardless of whether the harm to a child or young person has been caused by a person from within or outside the organisation
- Documenting disclosure suspicion and/or disclosure of harm.

Port Phillip EcoCentre employees/contractors/ volunteers must immediately document a disclosure/suspicion of harm recording the following information:

- Date and time that record is made
- The name, age and address of child or young person
- Time, date and location of incident
- The complainant (if not the child or young person)
- Who is present (i.e. the complainant, receiver of the complaint and any other person)
- Reason for suspecting abuse or harm (for example observation, injury, information)
- Exactly what the person disclosing said, using “I said..”, “they said”
- The questions asked by the Port Phillip EcoCentre employee/contractor/ volunteers
- Any comments the Port Phillip EcoCentre employee/contractor/ volunteers made, and the actions the Port Phillip EcoCentre employee/contractor/ volunteers took following disclosure, including arrangements for the immediate protection of the child or young person.

The Port Phillip EcoCentre employee/contractor/ volunteers must complete their record as soon as possible.

5.3 REPORTING DISCLOSURE/SUSPICION OF HARM

Port Phillip EcoCentre employees/contractors/ volunteers must immediately contact the Port Phillip EcoCentre Executive Officer who will report the suspicion/disclosure to the relevant agency, i.e. Victoria Police Service and Department of Health and Human Services.

Reporting actual harm where a Port Phillip EcoCentre employee/contractor / volunteers observes actual harm towards a child or young person, the employee/contractor/ volunteers must intervene immediately, provided it is safe to do so, and as soon as possible inform the police. If it is unsafe to intervene, immediately call the police for assistance on 000.

Actions following a disclosure or suspicion of harm support and counselling will be offered to all parties involved, including other children and young people.

Details of the person who made the report are to be kept completely confidential and will not be made available to the family of the child or young person, or the person against whom the allegation has been made.

If the person who is alleged to have harmed a child or young person is a member of the Port Phillip EcoCentre their duties must be reviewed. If they continue to interact/work with children and young people, ensure that they are appropriately supervised at all times.

The Port Phillip EcoCentre Executive Officer will seek legal advice as to the extent to which that person can carry out duties in the organisation.

5.4 Regular review

This policy will be reviewed every three years and following any critical incidents or child safety concerns if they occur.

We will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute.

Where possible we do our best to also work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

AUTHORISATION

Pam O'Neil

President

1 Sept 2016

Section 6 Incident Report Form

Part One – Details of EcoCentre employee/ contractor/ volunteer

Name

Title

Contact details:

Email

Mobile

Part Two - Incident details

Date

Time

If you did not see the incident when did you first hear about it?

Date

Time

Address /location of incident

Incident type

Assault etc

Part Three - Who was involved?

Name

Age

Contact details

(Note whether participant, witness, victim and whether injured or not)

Staff member involved

Name

Contact details

Note whether participant or witness etc

Part Four - What happened?

Describe the incident and the immediate response of staff

- Brief factual account, who was involved, how, where and when the incident occurred, who did what and nature and extent of any injuries (if applicable).

Signature of person reporting

Part Five – Executive Officer's Report

Name

Contact details

Brief summary of incident (200 words)

What actions have been taken and what follow up actions have been arranged?

Others informed

eg. Police, Dept. of Health and Human Services

Signature of Executive Officer

Appendix 1 Code of Conduct

The code of conduct is to be:

- Included in induction training for new staff and relevant volunteers
- Part of refresher training for existing staff and relevant volunteers
- Used to inform parents/carers and other persons associated with the organisation what behaviour they can expect from the organisation's staff and volunteers
- Support and inform organisational protocols and reporting procedures should breaches of the code be suspected or identified
- Referred to in employment advertisements and contracts to ensure compliance.

Code of Conduct

All staff and volunteers of the Port Phillip EcoCentre are required to observe child safe principles and expectations for appropriate behaviour towards and in the company of children, as noted below.

All staff and relevant volunteers will be required to sign this code of conduct.

All personnel of the Port Phillip EcoCentre are responsible for supporting the safety, participation, wellbeing and empowerment of children by:

- Adhering to and upholding the Port Phillip EcoCentre Child Safe Policy at all times
- Taking all reasonable steps to protect children from abuse
- Treating everyone with respect
- Listening and responding to the views and concerns of children, particularly if they are telling you that they or another child has been abused and/or are worried about their safety or the safety of another
- Promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children (for example, by never questioning an Aboriginal child's self-identification; understanding the significance of extended family etc.)
- Promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children with culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds (for example, by having a zero tolerance of discrimination; being aware of and open to learning about cultural differences etc.)
- Promoting the safety, participation and empowerment of children with a disability (for example, during personal care activities; understanding appropriate ways to physically and emotionally assist a child with a disability etc.)
- Ensuring as far as practicable that adults are not left alone with a child
- Reporting any allegations of child abuse to **the Port Phillip EcoCentre's** Executive Officer, and ensure any allegation is reported to the police or child protection

- Reporting any child safety concerns to **the Port Phillip EcoCentre's** Executive Officer
- If an allegation of child abuse is made, ensure as quickly as possible that the child(ren) is (are) safe
 - Encouraging children to 'have a say' and participate in all relevant organisational activities where possible, especially on issues that are important to them.

Staff and volunteers must not:

- Develop any 'special' relationships with children that could be seen as favouritism (for example, the offering of gifts or special treatment for specific children)
- Exhibit behaviours with children which may be construed as unnecessarily physical (for example inappropriate sitting on laps. Sitting on laps could be appropriate sometime, for example while reading a storybook to a small child in an open plan area or when a child is injured and needs comforting)
- Put children at risk of abuse (for example, by locking doors)
- Do things of a personal nature that a child can do for themselves, such as toileting or changing clothes
- Engage in open discussions of a mature or adult nature in the presence of children (for example, personal social activities)
- Use inappropriate language in the presence of children
- Express personal views on cultures, race or sexuality in the presence of children
- Discriminate against any child, including because of culture, race, ethnicity or disability
- Have contact with a child or their family outside of our organisation without our Executive Officer's knowledge and/or consent (for example, no babysitting)
Accidental contact, such as seeing people in the street, is appropriate)
- Have any online contact with a child or their family (unless necessary, for example providing families with e-newsletters)
- Ignore or disregard any suspected or disclosed child abuse.

By observing these standards you acknowledge your responsibility to immediately report any breach of this code to the Port Phillip EcoCentre 's Executive Officer.

If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse phone 000.

I agree to adhere to this Code of Conduct:

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Appendix 2 Pointers



DO ...

- Behave as a positive role model to children and young people
- Treat all children with respect without showing favouritism
- Use positive and affirming language toward children and young people
- Intervene when children or young people are engaging in inappropriate bullying behaviour towards others or acting in a humiliating or vilifying way.
- Help provide an open, family-friendly environment for children to interact, and socialise within where children have a voice in an age appropriate way
- Alert someone if you see an apparent breach of this code
- Report suspicions of child abuse or neglect to the Executive Officer or to Victoria Police and Department of Health and Human Services
- Seek advice about suspicions and disclosures of child abuse or neglect by contacting Department of Health and Human Services and reporting apparent alleged criminal conduct to Victoria Police.



DO NOT ...

- Engage in inappropriately rough physical play with a child or young person (not your own)
- Use physical means or corporal punishment to discipline or control a child, other than reasonable restraint such as by holding a child to mitigate injury
- Hold, kiss, cuddle or touch a child (not your own) in an age/culturally inappropriate manner OR in a manner considered inappropriate by reason of the nature of the occasion/program/activity/event, except for appropriate touch (for example to comfort distress)
- Assist a child (not your own) do things of a personal nature that they can do for themselves
- Spend time alone or remain in a confined or secluded space with a child or young person (not your own) on EcoCentre property or other venues
- Make sexually suggestive comments to a child or young person
- Make offensive or inappropriate comments to a child/ren regarding their appearance, abilities, or sexuality
- Give personal gifts or favours that target a particular child (not your own)
- Cultivate online and social media 'friendships' with children and young people (not your own) without parental/guardian permission for communication and parents/guardians/leaders being included on messaging lists. Any private messaging to a child or young person should be sent/returned during pre-approved times
- Show or share sexually suggestive material to a child in any form such as e-mail, text, movie, sound, or picture file
- Use profane language near or around children
- Take a child or young person (besides your own) to your home/residence, or encourage private meetings outside of EcoCentre-sponsored activities, unless authorized to do so and suitable guidelines are in place

- Take unauthorised photos, movies or recordings of a child on EcoCentre property, or at EcoCentre activities, without EcoCentre authorisation and the parental/guardian consent
- Publish unauthorised photos, movies or recordings of a child or young person, including online, without parental/guardian consent, nor post online unauthorised private information about a child or young person that may identify them such as their: full name; age; e-mail address; telephone number; residence; school; or details of a club or group they may attend.