

Child Safety and Wellbeing policy

Our Commitment to Child Safety

- VICSEG New Futures is committed to promoting and protecting the safety, wellbeing and interests of children and young people and acting in the best interest of children.
- The welfare of children and young people will always be our first priority. We want children to experience safety, happiness, and empowerment.
- We have zero tolerance for child abuse. All children, regardless of their gender, race, religious beliefs, age, disability, sexual orientation, or family or social background, have equal rights to protection from abuse. Everyone working for VICSEG New Futures is responsible for the care and protection of children and for reporting information about child abuse. Under the Child Protection Act 1999, there is a legal responsibility of mandatory reporting for everyone. You must make a report if you reasonably believe a child has been harmed or exploited, or that a child is likely to be harmed or exploited. You are safeguarded under the law from legal or professional liability if you make a report in good faith.
- VICSEG New Futures has an unequivocal commitment to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

Purpose:

VICSEG New Futures is committed to being a Child Safe Organisation and to protect children from all forms of exploitation and abuse, and to uphold children and young people's right to access culturally safe services.

Other aims of this policy are to:

- ✓ protect children from exploitation and abuse;
- ✓ work towards embedding an organisational culture of child safety;
- ✓ ensure that all parties are aware of their responsibilities for identifying possible occasions for child abuse and for establishing controls and procedures for preventing such abuse and/or detecting such abuse when it occurs;
- ✓ ensure that the 'best interests of the child' principle is always paramount, including the need to protect the child from harm, to protect their rights and to promote his or her development;
- ✓ establish, maintain and uphold required standards of conduct and behaviour in all contact and dealings with children at all times;
- ✓ ensure that, if there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a child or children are at risk of exploitation or abuse or have been abused, or abuse is disclosed, the correct reporting procedure is followed and, where practicable and available, follow up support is provided or arranged by VICSEG New Futures;

- ✓ ensure that VICSEG New Futures staff and anyone in contact or working with children in connection with services and activities provided by VICSEG New Futures are obliged to abide by laws relevant to child safety and child protection;
- ✓ ensure that all cases of disclosed or suspected child exploitation and abuse are handled in a consistent, thorough and timely manner and in accordance with the requirements of relevant legislation

Scope

Who this policy applies to - Responsibilities.

This policy applies to all staff including students on work placement, interns, volunteers, contractors, and other personnel whether employed directly by VICSEG New Futures, on contract, or via a sub-contract agreement providing any service at any VICSEG New Futures workplace. Compliance with this policy applies to all staff at all times including outside of business hours e.g. personal time, holidays (domestic and international). Implementation of this policy is the responsibility of all staff, contractors, volunteers, and other personnel. Compliance and monitoring is the responsibility of line Managers.

All staff are required to must agree to abide by our Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Child Safety Code of Conduct.

What this policy applies to:

Child safety and wellbeing policy applies to all activities in the organisation which involve, result in or relate to contact with children.

Principles

VICSEG New Futures provides services to the local communities. Children and young people have the right to be safe and protected. VICSEG New Futures acknowledges the paramountcy in providing children with safe environments where children's rights, needs and interests are met.

In seeking achieve these ends, VICSEG New Futures strives to be a Child Safe Organisation and in doing so consciously and systematically:

- Creates an environment where children's safety and wellbeing are the centre of thought, values and actions;
- Places emphasis on genuine engagement with and valuing of children;
- Creates conditions that reduce the likelihood of harm to children and young people;
- Creates conditions that increase the likelihood of identifying any harm; and
- Responds to any concerns, disclosures, allegations, or suspicions of harm.

- VICSEG New Future's is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing or reducing these risks.
- Having a zero tolerance to child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures.
- Acknowledging and respecting legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously.
- Our organisation has robust human resources and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers.
- Our organisation is committed to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks.
- We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers. We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability.

Children's Rights to Safety and Participation

VICSEG New Future's staff and volunteers encourage children to express their views. We listen to their suggestions and teach children about what they can do if they feel unsafe. We act on any concerns children or their parents, raise with us.

Our Children and Valuing Diversity

This policy is intended to empower children who are vital and active participants in our organisation.

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 and their families
- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and their families
- welcome children with a disability and their families and act to promote their participation
- seek appropriate staff from diverse backgrounds.

Our Staff and Volunteers

This policy guides our staff and volunteers on how to conduct with children in our organisation. Specifically, all of our staff and volunteers must agree to abide by our Child Safety Code of Conduct which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. We provide support and supervision, so people feel valued, respected and fairly treated.

Training and Supervision

Structured and targeted 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 of 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 identify early warning signs and 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 are supervised regularly to ensure they understand our organisation's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse, as well as checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate (please refer to this organisation's code of conduct to understand appropriate behaviour further). Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

Employment of New Personnel

VICSEG New Futures undertakes a comprehensive recruitment and screening process for all workers and volunteers which aims to:

- promote and protect the safety of all children under the care of the organisation;
- identify the safest and most suitable people who share VICSEG New Future's values and commitment to protect children; and
- prevent a person from working at VICSEG New Future's if they pose a risk to children.

VICSEG New Futures requires all workers/volunteers to pass through the organisations recruitment and screening process prior to commencing their engagement with VICSEG New Futures. Our organisation understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

We actively encourage applications from Aboriginal people, 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 Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this check. Please see the Working with Children Check website www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au for further information.

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.

E-Safety

- New technologies have become integral to the lives of children and young people today.
- The internet and other digital and information technologies are powerful tools, which open up new opportunities for everyone.
- To this end, children and young people should always have an entitlement to safe internet access.
- VICSEG New Futures will ensure that children and young people are able to use the internet and related communication technologies appropriately and safely, ensuring it is addressed as part of the wider duty of care to children and young people.

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, 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 any actions we as an organisation 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

Our organisation takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- **Failure to disclose:** Reporting child sex 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 police.
- **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.
- Any personnel who are **mandatory reporters** must comply with their duties.

Risk Management

- In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified (see information about failure to protect above). In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our children.
- 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 contact with a child in organisations on social media).

Regular Review

- This policy will be reviewed annually and following significant incidents if they occur. We will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute. Where possible we do our best to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

Reporting

- Any staff member, volunteer or contractor who has grounds to suspect abusive activity must immediately notify the appropriate child protection service or the police. They should also advise their supervisor and the Child Protection Officer of their concern.

The appointed VICSEG New Futures Child Protection Officer:

Kiran Rajesth

Mon - Fri 9.00 am - 5.00 pm

T: 9383 2533 | D: 8398 5009

W: vicsegnewfutures.org.au

In situations where the supervisor is suspected of involvement in the activity, or if the person having the suspicion does not believe that the matter is appropriately addressed or dealt with, the matter should be reported to the next highest level of supervision.

Supervisors must report complaints of suspected abusive behaviour or misconduct to the Executive Director and also any external regulatory body such as the police.

Investigating

- If the appropriate child protection service or the police decide to investigate this report, all employees, contractors or volunteers must co-operate fully with the investigation.

Responding

- If it is alleged that a member of staff, contractor or volunteer may have committed an offence or have breached the organisation's policies or its Child Safety Code of Conduct the person concerned may be stood down (with pay, where applicable) while an investigation is conducted.
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- If the investigation concludes that on the balance of probabilities an offence (or a breach of the organisation's policies or Child Safety Code of Conduct) has occurred then disciplinary action may follow, up to and including dismissal or cessation of involvement with the organisation. The findings of the investigation will also be reported to any external body as required.

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 responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place (see information about failure to disclose 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.

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

Definitions

Child protection an activity or initiative for the purpose of preventing or responding to a specific incident of child abuse.

Contact with children means providing a service, working or participating in an activity or position that involved contact with a child, either under the position description or due to the nature of the work environment.

Emotional abuse is where a person in a position of power, authority or trust repeatedly attacks a child's self-esteem verbally or non-verbally e.g. by rejecting, degrading, isolating, ignoring, terrorizing, corrupting and/or exploiting a child.

Identified persons is any person who is a Councillor, member of the Executive Management Team or other staff member or volunteer who's role has an essential requirement to hold Blue Card.

Mandatory reporting is the legal requirement to report a reasonable belief of harm which has been, is being, or may be committed.

Neglect occurs when a child is not provided with adequate food or shelter; effective medical, therapeutic or remedial treatment, and/or care, nurturance or supervision to a severe and/or persistent extent where the health or development of the child is significantly impaired or placed at serious risk.

Physical abuse is when a person in a position of power or trust deliberately hurts or threatens to injure a child.

Reasonable belief is formed if a reasonable person believes that:

- a. the child is in need of protection,
- b. the child has suffered or is likely to suffer "significant harm as a result of physical injury" or
- c. the parents are unable or unwilling to protect the child

A 'reasonable belief' or 'belief on reasonable grounds' is not the same as having proof, but is more than mere rumour or speculation. A 'reasonable belief' might be formed if:

- a child states that they have been physically or sexually abused;
- a child states that they know someone who has been physically or sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves);
- someone who knows a child states that they child has been physically or sexually abused;
- professional observations of the child's behaviour or development leads a professional to form a belief that the child has been physically or sexually abused or is likely to be abused; and/or
- signs of abuse lead to a belief that the child has been physically or sexually abused.

Working with children – working in an activity or in a position that involves or may involve contact with children either under the position description or due to the nature of the work environment, when:

- a "Working with Children" clearance notice or card is required by legislation, or

· Vicseg New Futures determines that the work constitutes ‘working with children’;

Sexual abuse – the use of a child for sexual gratification by an adult or a significantly older child or adolescent. Sexually abusive behaviours can include fondling genitals, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or any other object, fondling breasts, voyeurism, and exhibitionism and exposing the child to, or involving the child in pornography.

Grooming is behaviour that makes it easier for an offender to procure a child for sexual activity, including online grooming.

Child pornography is material that depicts a person, or is a representation of a person, who is, or appears to be, under 18 years of age and is engaged in, or appears to be engaged in, a sexual pose or sexual activity, or is in the presence of a person who is engaged in a sexual pose or activity, and does that in a way that a reasonable person would regard as being, in all circumstances, offensive.

Relevant Standards and legislations:

- ✓ Child Safe Standards
- ✓ Child Protection Act 1999
- ✓ VRQA Guidelines for VET providers/Child Safety Standard

Related Documents:

- ✓ Governance Policy
- ✓ Child Safety Code of Conduct
- ✓ Complaints and Appeals Policy

Last Reviewed: January 2023