

Good leadership and governance in child safe organisations

Child safe standards toolkit: resource one

The child safe standards require organisations that provide services for children¹ to have strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements. Protecting children from abuse is everybody's business, and an organisation's leadership is essential to instilling a child safety culture.

Your organisation may already use good leadership strategies. Organisational leaders can use this resource to help protect children from abuse² by embedding child safety in your organisation's everyday thinking and practice.

Leadership in a child safe environment

Working with children can be very rewarding, and it brings additional responsibilities.

You must act to protect children from abuse in your organisation, and build an environment where children feel respected, valued and encouraged to reach their full potential. This requires a culture of child safety to be embedded throughout your organisation so that child safety is part of everyone's everyday thinking and practice. Such a culture is achieved through proactive leadership in demonstrating the appropriate values, attitudes and behaviours of an organisation.

A child safe environment is the product of a range of strategies and initiatives. Your organisation should foster a culture of openness, inclusiveness and awareness. Children and adults should know what to do if they observe or are subject to abuse or inappropriate behaviour.

All staff and volunteers must consider the safety of all children, and recognise the importance of cultural safety for Aboriginal children, cultural safety for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and the safety of children with a disability.³

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>.

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>.

Governance in a child safe environment

Leadership must take preventative, proactive and participatory approach to child safety issues. The safety and wellbeing of children in your organisation should be a paramount consideration when developing activities, policies and management practices.

Leadership responsibilities

Leadership is responsible for embedding a culture of child safety in your organisation, including by using the below tools. Leadership need to take the lead in protecting children from abuse, and must be made aware of child abuse allegations and risks and take responsibility for ensuring an appropriate response.

You must ensure that all allegations of child abuse and child safety concerns are treated very seriously by your organisation. This includes complying with all legal requirements, including reporting suspicions of child abuse to police and/or child protection. **If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse phone 000.**

Identify and analyse risk of abuse

Your organisation must adopt an approach to prevent, detect and respond to child abuse risks. This includes a risk management strategy and policy that sets out how your organisation identifies, assess, and takes steps to reduce or remove child abuse risks.

Please note: The Department of Health and Human Services intends to release risk management tools in early 2016.

Develop a child safe policy

Your organisation should develop a child safe policy which outlines your commitment to promoting children's wellbeing and protecting children from abuse.

A detailed policy may not be appropriate for all organisations, for example smaller organisations that have minimal responsibility for children could have a public statement of commitment to child safety. See sample policy and statement of commitment in this toolkit (resource two).

Develop codes of conduct

Your organisation must have a code of conduct which specifies the standards of conduct and care required when working and interacting with children, or include elements of child safety in an existing code. You could reference professional codes of conduct where appropriate. See a sample code of conduct in this toolkit (resource three).

You could also have a specific code of conduct to encourage appropriate behaviour between children.

Choose suitable employees and volunteers

Your organisation should take all reasonable steps to ensure that it engages the most suitable and appropriate people to work with children. This includes police record and identity checks, Working with Children Checks where required, face-to-face interviews and detailed reference checks from previous employers, including from the applicant's most recent line manager. The *Recruitment practices for child safe organisations resource* in this toolkit contains further information (resource five).

Support, train, supervise and enhance performance

Your organisation should ensure that volunteers and employees who work with children have ongoing supervision, support and training so that their performance is developed and enhanced to help protect children from abuse. In particular, leadership, managers and a child safety officer/champion (if instituted) need to understand their responsibilities. A child safety officer/champion is a person in your organisation who has knowledge of child safety issues, and could be a point of contact for others who have questions or concerns or want to report an allegation of

abuse. You could consider including child safety officer/champion duties in the person's job description. The *Human resources practices for child safe organisations* resource in this toolkit contains further information (resource four).

Promote inclusion

Your organisation should be inclusive to all children and families. In particular, your organisation should establish a culture that supports:

- cultural safety for Aboriginal children, for example by working in partnership with Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal community controlled organisations
- cultural safety for children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, for example by using inclusive language and images in policy documents, and communications such as the website and newsletters
- the safety of children with a disability, for example by ensuring your organisation is accessible to everyone and ensuring appropriate training and supervision of staff and volunteers working with children with a disability.

Empower and promote the participation of children in decision-making

Your organisation should promote the involvement and participation of children in developing and maintaining child safe environments. For example, you could provide opportunities for children to express their views on your organisation's child safe policy or code of conduct, and then incorporate this feedback to improve your policies and practices. Ideas from children could be sought through suggestion boxes, emails or feedback sessions.

You must listen to children and take them seriously, particularly if they are disclosing abuse or concerns for their safety or the safety of other children.

Further information

Further information on child safe standards can be found on the [Department of Health and Human Services website](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): <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](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/word_doc/0005/955598/Child-safe-standards_overview.doc), 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