

CHILD SAFE POLICY

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POLICY AUTHORISATION

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1. PURPOSE

This policy is intended to empower children who engage with, participate in programs and activities conducted by the parliamentary departments or visit the Parliament of Victoria. We aim to involve them 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 acceptance 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; and
- ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate equally.

2. OUR COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

The parliamentary departments are committed to child safety. We want children to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children and support our employees in their respectful work and engagement with children.

In line with the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*, the parliamentary departments are committed to upholding the Victorian Child Safe Standards, to the best of our abilities and resources. In our commitment to Child Safe Standards, we:

- are committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all children; and
- have a zero tolerance of child abuse, and all safety concerns and allegations will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures.

The parliamentary departments are committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks by:

- having specific processes in place that support staff;
- having robust human resources and recruitment practices for all staff to reduce the risk of child abuse by new team members who work with or run programs for young people; and
- committing to regularly training and educating staff on the Child Safe Standards, Reportable Conduct Scheme, and child abuse risks.

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.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to:

- a) Parliamentary Officers employed under the *Parliamentary Administration Act 2005* (excluding those employed by the Parliamentary Budget Officer);
- b) contractors, consultants and agency on-hire staff engaged by the parliamentary departments; and
- c) volunteers, unpaid interns, and students engaged by the parliamentary departments.

This policy guides parliamentary staff on how to behave with children.

All staff must agree to abide by the Code of Conduct for Victorian Parliamentary Officers which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. All staff are given the opportunity to contribute to the development of the code of conduct. In addition, when developing and reviewing the code of conduct, we take into account any views or feedback from children and families through both informal and established feedback and reporting mechanisms.

4. TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

Training and education are important to ensure that all employees within the parliamentary departments understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility.

Our organisational culture aims for all staff, as well as families and children, to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any child safety concerns or allegations of child abuse. We train our staff to identify, assess and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

We also support our staff through induction and ongoing training 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.

In addition to regular training requirements for all staff, position-specific training will be available to staff who are likely to be in contact with children and young people regularly.

Staff will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand our commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse. This will include ensuring that all staff behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate and aligns with Code of Conduct for Victorian Parliamentary Officers. Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including Child FIRST, the Orange Door, appropriate child protection intake service, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

5. RECRUITMENT

We take all reasonable steps to employ skilled people for positions that are likely to have regular contact with children and young people. We develop selection criteria and advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legal responsibilities. The parliamentary departments understand that when recruiting staff, 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 staff who are engaged in child-related work (as defined in the *Worker Screening Act 2020*) and who are not exempt (for example, registered teachers and police officers) are required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this check. Staff that may otherwise have regular contact with children and young people as part of their working environment will be assessed as to whether a Working with Children Check is required to minimise the risk of harm to children and young people.

We carry out reference checks and police record checks to ensure that we are recruiting people suitable to working with the parliamentary departments, including for those positions that are likely to have regular contact with children and young 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.

6. FAIR PROCEDURES FOR STAFF

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and reasonable to all staff. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.

We record all safety concerns and allegations of abuse using our incident reporting procedures. All records are securely stored. If a safety concern or an allegation of abuse is raised, we provide updates to children and families on progress and actions we as an organisation take.

7. PRIVACY

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be staff, families 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. This is intended to protect anyone reporting concerns or incidents and to ensure that all parliamentary staff are comfortable to disclose any concerns or allegations in relation to child safety without repercussions.

8. LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

The parliamentary departments take our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- **Failure to disclose:** 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 Victoria Police.
- **Mandatory reporting:** Any staff member who is a mandatory reporter (e.g. registered teacher) must comply with their duties.
- **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.
- **Reportable conduct:** The head of the relevant department must be made aware of any allegations of physical and sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, significant emotional or psychological harm or significant neglect by an employee towards a child. We are also legally required to notify the Commission for Children and Young People of the allegation.
- **Duty of care:** If a child is abused by an individual associated with our organisation, our organisation is presumed to have breached its duty of care unless it can prove that it took 'reasonable precautions' to prevent the abuse in question. For more information, please refer to the [organisational duty of care to prevent child abuse page](#) on the Department of Justice and Regulation's website.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified. In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to 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 and online environments.

10. CONCERNS, ALLEGATIONS AND COMPLAINTS

The parliamentary departments take all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our staff are trained to deal with allegations appropriately.

We work to ensure all children, families and staff 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. If an adult has a reasonable belief that an incident has occurred, they must report the incident. Factors contributing to reasonable belief may include:

- 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; and
- observing suspicious behaviour.

Anyone can report a child safety concern through our Child Safety Officer by contacting (03) 9651 8911 or childsafetyofficer@parliament.vic.gov.au These details are published on the Parliament of Victoria's website.

If a child is in immediate danger, call Victoria Police on 000.

Parliamentary staff can also report a child safety concern to their manager, the Child Safety Officer, their Department Head or through our dedicated email address – childsafetyofficer@parliament.vic.gov.au.

If the complaint is of an alleged criminal offence, the complainant and/or the relevant Department Head may report the matter to Victoria Police.

11. REGULAR REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed every two years and following significant incidents if they occur. We will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute to the review process through both informal and established feedback and reporting mechanisms.

Where possible, through agreed mechanisms such as the Reconciliation Action Plan and the Disability and Inclusion Action Plan, we will do our best to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

As part of reviewing the organisation's policies, procedures and child safe practices, improvements will take into consideration:

- analysis of complaints, concerns, safety incidents and significant breaches of policy;
- feedback sought from staff, children, families and communities; and
- implementation of Child Safe Standards as revised from time to time.

12. RELEVANT LEGISLATION, POLICIES AND OTHER DOCUMENTATION

Document Name	Detail
<i>Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)</i>	Act in force
Code of Conduct for Victorian Parliamentary Officers	
Commission for Children and Young People Child Safe Standards	Guidance
Victorian Child Safe Standards	Guidance

Table 1: Relevant legislation, policies and other documentation

13. FURTHER INFORMATION

Contact Child Safety Officer
childsafetyofficer@parliament.vic.gov.au