

Quality and Compliance:

Child Safe Standards Policy 8-1002

1. Child Safe Standards Policy and Procedures

This Child Safe policy and procedures manual was written to demonstrate the strong commitment of MRC North West Region Inc. (MRCNWR) management, staff and volunteers to child safety, and to provide an outline of the policies and practices we have developed to keep everyone safe from any harm, including abuse.

Inclusive of the Child Safe Standards

Definitions & Interpretation

Child/Children means for the purpose of this policy a person under the age of 18 years. This also includes those that are deemed to be at a higher risk:-

- The cultural safety of Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander children and young people under the age of 18 years.
- The cultural safety of children and young people under the age of 18 years from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse background.
- The safety of children and young people under the age of 18 years with a disability.

Abuse means for the purpose of this policy any act committed against a child involving but not limited to:-

- Physical violence
- Sexual offence
- Serious emotional or psychological abuse
- Serious neglect

This policy applies to all MRCNWR activities inclusive of face to face, online and off-site environments.

Legislative Context

The Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005, requires all MRC North West Region Inc., staff and volunteers to adopt and maintain a 'Child Safe' policy and comply with compulsory Child Safe Standards.

The 'failure to disclose' offence introduced as part of the Crimes Amendment (Protection of Children) Act 2014 requires that any adult (aged 18 and over) who holds a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria by an adult against a child must disclose that information to police.

The criminal offence for 'failing to protect' a child imposes penalties for a 'person in authority' within the organisation if they know of the risk of abuse, have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but failed to do so.

Victorian State Government has introduced compulsory minimum standards for organisations that provide services for children to help protect children from abuse. The **Child Safe Standards** form part of the Victorian Government's response to the **Betrayal of Trust Inquiry** (the 2013 Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Non-Government

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Organisations). Education, awareness raising and helping organisations to create and maintain child safe environments will be the initial focus of the Child Safe Standards.

All clients/customers/students under the age of 18 of age who are supported by MRCNWR have a right to feel and be safe. MRCNWR is committed to the safety and well-being of young individuals accessing our services. MRCNWR undertakes to comply with relevant child safety legislation across jurisdictions of operations and commits to establishing and maintaining child safe environments following the Keep Them Safe:

2. Policy Scope

This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, contractors, members of Committee, and any person representing MRCNWR in its delivery of services.

3. Policy Purpose

This policy demonstrates the commitment to creating and maintaining a child safe organisation that is consistent with the Child Safe Standards by providing a safe environment, where children and young people are safe and feel safe. MRC North West Region Inc. (MRCNWR) has a zero tolerance of child abuse. This policy shall be read and implemented in conjunction with MRCNWR's associated practices and procedures to guide staff, volunteers and contractors on requirements to meet Child Safe Standards.

Child Safe Standards

Standard 1 – Management strategies & commitment

MRCNWR will facilitate an organisational culture of child safety and the prevention of child abuse occurring within the organisation by:

- Ensuring that all staff, volunteers, children and families, know that they can engage the organisations Child Safety Representative/Officer and or the management team for all items relating to child abuse – notifications to be displayed in the staff room, training board and reception lounge. The Policies and Procedures manual also advises the process to reporting any concerns.
- 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. This awareness commences at Induction of new employees/ trainers and will be reiterated at staff & team meetings and PD Workshops.
- Provide guidance to staff/volunteers/contractors as to the action that should be taken where they suspect any abuse within or outside of the organisation via staff meetings, induction and professional development workshops.

Standard 2 -MRCNWR Statement of Commitment

MRCNWR is committed to the safety and wellbeing of children and the prevention of child abuse. Reducing and removing the risk of child abuse will be at the centre of our decision-making concerning children in our organisation.

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MRCNWR has zero tolerance for child abuse and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated seriously and acted upon. As a child safe organisation, we are committed to providing a child safe environment where children feel safe, are empowered, valued and protected. MRCNWR will actively listen to children, ensuring their voices are heard and considered in decisions that affect their lives.

MRCNWR's approach to children will be consistent with our commitment to strive to ensure our services are accessible and the people we deal with are treated with dignity and respect regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability, ethnicity, and cultural and socio-economic background.

This Policy is based on principles that aim to embed a culture of child safety by;

- Understanding our commitment to child safety and the duty of care required to meet the obligations under the Child Safe Standards;
- Promoting a culture of child safety understanding and awareness by informing our staff and sharing information regarding child safety;
- Implementing the processes that assist MRCNWR to recruit the best applicants to work with children;
- Promoting a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to child safety;
- Actively listen to and encourage the empowerment of children to participate in decisions which affect their lives;
- Fostering a culture of openness that supports all persons (including children) to safely disclose risks of harm to children;
- Respecting diversity in cultures while keeping child safety paramount;
- Understanding that all children are vulnerable, and some children face additional vulnerabilities, ensuring the understanding of the three overarching principles:
 - the cultural safety of children from all culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
 - the safety of children with a disability.
- Providing guidance on reporting child safety concerns, suspected abuse, neglect or mistreatment of children promptly both internally and to the appropriate authorities;
- Consulting with and valuing the input of families and carers through regular communication;
- Communicating via our Code of Conduct that appropriate conduct and behaviour towards children is always expected.

Standard 3 – Code of Conduct

Code of Conduct outlines expected standards for appropriate behaviour with and in the company of children, including but not limited to face to face, online and off-site conduct.

MRCNWR will adapt training services provided for children and use our Code of Conduct in line with the following:

- As part of induction training for new management team members, staff and volunteers.
- As part of refresher training for existing management team members, staff and volunteers.

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- To inform parents/carers and other persons associated with the organisation what behaviour they can expect from the organisation's management team members, staff and volunteers.
- To support and inform organisational protocols and reporting procedures should breaches of the code be suspected or identified.
- Include a reference to the Code of Conduct in employment advertisements and contracts to ensure compliance requirements are met.

MRCNWR will:

- Take a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to child safety;
- Implement child safety policies and procedures which support ongoing assessment and reduction of risk.
- Foster a culture of openness that supports all persons to safely disclose risks and/or instances of abuse to children.
- Respect diversity in cultures and child rearing practices while keeping child safety paramount.
- Engage only the most suitable people to work with children and have high quality staff and volunteer supervision and professional development.
- Ensure children know who to talk with if they are worried or are feeling unsafe, and that they are comfortable and encouraged to raise such issues.
- Report suspected abuse, promptly to the appropriate authorities.
- Share information appropriately and lawfully with other organisations where the safety and wellbeing of children is at risk.
- Value the input of and communicate regularly with families and carers.

Provide all staff, volunteers and contractors with the Child Safe Code of Conduct and Agreement form, which will be read, agreed to and signed by all MRCNWR staff and anyone who has regular contact with children at MRCNWR.

Please refer to Appendix sheet attached Code of Conduct.

Standard 4 – Recruitment, training and supervision

Recruitment

Our commitment to child safety will be further demonstrated in careful selection of people that we work with both through employment and in the provision of services to MRCNWR. The engagement of staff will be subject to robust reference checking, interviews and working with children and police checks.

MRCNWR applies the best practice standards in the recruitment and screening of staff and volunteers. Recruitment procedures shall comply with the MRCNWR Recruitment and Selection Policy. The MRCNWR Recruitment and Selection Policy must ensure that child safety requirements are addressed in the recruitment process through strategies including:

Training

Training and education are important to ensure that everyone understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility within MRCNWR. All Staff will be made aware of their obligations and expectations of working in a Child Safe Organisation via MRCNWR's Code of Conduct, new employee

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induction, awareness and training sessions. All staff to undertake available mandatory Child Safe Training.

MRCNWR is committed to ensuring that all leaders, staff and volunteers receive training to ensure they understand their responsibilities in relation to child safety.

Mandatory training requirements for MRCNWR leaders, staff and volunteers will be as follows:

- Induction: Child Safe Code of Conduct and Child Safe Policy;
- Identifying indicators of child abuse;
- How to respond to disclosures of child abuse;
- Complaint, Code of Conduct breach and child safety incident reporting procedures.

As these training courses are essential to support MRCNWR' zero tolerance of child abuse approach, leaders, staff and volunteers are required to undertake all of these components before being allowed to work in a child-related role.

Other training provided to MRCNWR leaders, staff and volunteers includes (but is not limited to):

- Risk management practices in relation to child safety;
- Creating cultural safety for all children;
- Investigating child abuse concerns and allegations.

Supervision

Employees and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand our organisation's commitment to child safety 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).

Standard 5 - Responding to and reporting of suspected incidents

Child Safety Representative /Officer

MRCNWR will ensure employees, volunteers, children, other students and parents will be supported through our delegated Child Safety Representative/Officer's with specified 'child-safe' duties, including being the designated person to hear or be informed about all allegations or concerns.

This will assist MRCNWR in ensuring that child safety is prioritised and that any allegations of abuse or safety concerns are responded to and recorded in line with MRCNWR's legal duty of care and obligations and policies and procedures.

MRCNWR takes all allegations, concerns and complaints seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. MRCNWR will work to ensure all staff and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse, and/or if they notice inappropriate behaviour. MRCNWR has a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if there is reasonable belief that an incident took place.

Record keeping and incident monitoring

MRCNWR has a Records Management Policy and is committed to best practice record keeping.

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In accordance with the Records Management Policy and as required in the Incident Reporting Procedure, all reports of child abuse shall be recorded within the incident reporting system.

MRCNWR, in maintaining records on reports of child abuse, will maintain confidentiality and privacy for children and families in accordance with legislation.

Records will be retained in line with the recommendations from the Office of Public Records.

Reports of child abuse and complaints about child safety will be monitored by the Committee of Management to ensure that they are appropriately managed.

Risks to child safety that are identified in complaints and reports of abuse will be reviewed and incorporated into the relevant risk management plan.

The MRCNWR Incident Reporting Policy and Framework will also include how to respond to an allegation or incident of child abuse. The Incident Reporting Policy and Framework will include the following elements:

- If a staff member, volunteer or contractor becomes aware of an incident or allegation of abuse, the first responsibility is to ensure that the child or children are safe and the risks of further abuse or harm are mitigated.

If the incident or allegation of abuse could involve criminal conduct, the matter must be immediately reported to Victoria Police. If there is any ongoing risk to a child or children, then the staff member or volunteer should immediately call 000. It may also be appropriate to notify the Department of Health and Human Services if there is a belief that a child is in need of protection. This may involve notifications to the police or Child Protection.

- All reports of child abuse will be treated as serious, whether they are made by an adult or a child.
- When an allegation of child abuse is received, all mandatory reporting requirements must be met, including reporting to:
 - Police
 - Department of Health and Human Services
 - the Commission for Children and Young People under the reportable conduct scheme
 - other government departments or regulators as appropriate.

Standard 6 - Risk Management

A risk management approach will be adopted to minimise or eliminate the potential for child abuse or harm to occur. Risk analysis and data is utilised to inform policy, procedures and activity planning, helping to facilitate ongoing continuous improvement.

Risk management strategies are outlined in our Risk Management and Policy guidelines and are used to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise risks. In addition to general occupational health and safety, risk assessments will include potential risks to child safety such as the physical environment and include the online environment.

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The Risk Management Policy and Framework to include the assessment and mitigation of risks of child abuse at MRCNWR. The following elements to be included in the risk management policy and framework:

- All existing and new activities and facilities must be assessed for risks of child abuse including:
 - Environmental risks (e.g. areas that might obscure a line of sight)
 - Vulnerability risks (such as activities that may foster personal relationships between staff/volunteers and children who have an increased risk of being exploited, such as children who are highly vulnerable and dependent on the staff/volunteer for their needs).
- All identified risks of child abuse are actively reduced by designing and implementing appropriate preventative measures.
- Risk management plans are documented for all existing and new activities and facilities.
- Staff, volunteers and contractors are made aware of their responsibility for identifying risks of child abuse and their obligation to work with management on reducing those risks.
- Families and children are made aware of how to report on identified risks of child abuse.
- Risk management plans are living documents that are updated as required, referred to regularly and reviewed periodically.

Standard 7 - Promote Participation & Empowerment of children

All details for our Child Protection & Reporting Policies and procedures can be accessed upon request. Information for reporting and contacting is placed around our office on MRCNWR Notice Board.

Legislation / Regulations Reference Documents

Includes the following:

- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005
- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005
- Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012
- Crimes Act 1958
- Privacy & Data Protection Act 2014
- Public Records Act 1973
- Working with Children Act 2005
- Child Safety Reporting Guidelines
- Child Safe Code of Conduct
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Recruitment and Selection Guidelines
- Risk Management Policy and Guidelines
- Privacy Policy
- Child Safe Standards 2016

4. Organisational Context

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Significant research into child abuse in organisations has occurred over the last decade. Measures have been identified that reduce the risk of children being exposed to or experiencing harm. As a result, Victoria introduced compulsory minimum standards (Child Safe Standards) applicable to organisations that provide services for children to help ensure their safety. The Child Safe Standards form part of the Victorian Government’s response to the Betrayal of Trust Inquiry.

The inquiry’s final report made several recommendations that have been acted on by the Victorian Government. One of the recommendations included Creating Child Safe organisations – making it mandatory to have Child Safe Standards and reportable conduct scheme. The standards are compulsory for all organisations working with children. The reportable conduct scheme requires centralised reporting of abuse allegations to an oversight body.

MRCNW has been prescribed by the Victorian State Government to be included on the Information Sharing Entity list and will adhere to the Family Violence Multi Agency Risk Assessment Management Framework, Child Information Sharing Scheme and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme. More information is available on:-

<https://www.vic.gov.au/information-sharing-schemes-and-the-maram-framework>

5. Key Roles and Responsibilities

Every person employed with or acting on behalf of MRCNWR has a responsibility to understand their important and specific role, individually and collectively, to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make. Key roles and responsibilities have been outlined for the purpose of clarity and understanding as follows:

Key Role	Key Responsibilities
All staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete the compulsory employee Induction training on commencement of employment with MRCNWR. • Conduct work according to the requirements of the MRCNWR Child Safe Policy, procedures and Code of Conduct. • Maintain a physical environment that actively celebrates diverse cultures and recognises cultural differences. • Commit to ensuring our facilities promote inclusion of children of all abilities. • Report all concerns regarding child safety or harm to a Child Safety Officer. • Be aware of and participate in the annual review of Risk Analysis, which identifies, assesses and controls workplace risk. • Where a child is in immediate danger call 000. • Employees can also call Child Protection Crisis Line available 24/7 on 1312 78
Child Safety Officers (All Team Leaders are Child Safety Officers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act as the first point of contact for child safety concerns or allegations of abuse within MRCNWR and provide support to other personnel. • Oversee the implementation of Child Safe policies and procedures. • Engage the assistance of expert advice as required when the nature of the child safety issue is beyond experience, knowledge or qualifications.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure child safety concerns are reported in accordance with MRCNWR's Child Safe reporting process.
Hiring Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct recruitment practices in line with MRCNWR's recruitment and selection guideline requirements for child related work. • Ensure appropriate child safety checks and screening is undertaken prior to offering positions. • Ensure employees and volunteers have access to and are aware of the Child Safe Policy and procedures. • Ensure that new workers complete compulsory Induction on commencement with MRCNWR.
Committee of management and All staff and teams.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information (including Code of Conduct) relating to the Child Safe Standards and Policy via training / induction material and make available to managers, team leaders and coordinators for dissemination. • Manage MRCNWR's Child Safe Policy. • Manage MRCNWR's disciplinary procedures as they apply to the Child Safe Standards and policy. • Support the application of relevant recruitment and pre-employment screening processes to select appropriate staff to work with children. • Support staff to build resilience and cope with child abuse incidences, for example through resilience training, and Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counselling service. • Reflect a culture of child safety in Organisational activities.

5.1 Retention of Records

All records will be retained in accordance with MRCNWR's record keeping requirements under the *Public Records Act 1973* and privacy requirements under the *Privacy & Data Protection Act 2014* and MRCNWR's Privacy Policy. MRCNWR will ensure the securing and safe handling of sensitive information is maintained in accordance with our Privacy Policy.

5.2 Compliance

All people to whom this policy applies must adhere to this policy at all times. Noncompliance may also constitute a breach of employment or contractual obligations, misconduct, harassment, discrimination or some other contravention of the law. Failure to comply with the requirements under the Child Safe Standards or this policy may be dealt with in accordance with MRCNWR's disciplinary procedures, where applicable.

6. Child Safety Reporting Process

MRCNWR is a Child safe organisation. Protecting children and preventing and responding to child abuse is part of the everyday practice of all members, staff, volunteers and contractors; this is regardless of whether they work directly with children or not.

WHO MUST REPORT?

All members, employees, contractors and volunteers of MRCNWR.

WHAT SHOULD I REPORT?

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You must report any disclosure of abuse or harm or any reasonable belief you have that there are signs of abuse (sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, physical violence, grooming, behaviour, significant neglect etc.,) as outlined in the (Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005) which has reference to full outline of definitions of child abuse.

WHEN DO I REPORT?

As soon as you become aware of an incident or you form a reasonable belief.

HOW TO REPORT?

Complete a Child Safe Report which is available on Teams.

WHO TO REPORT TO?

Need advice on reporting? Contact a Child Safe Officer. All Team Leaders at MRCNWR are Child Safe Officers. Victoria Police – Dial 000 oor DHHS 131278

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

MRCNWR will gather as much information and the matter may be referred too the Commission for Children and Young People through the Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme.

WHERE CAN I GET SUPPORT?

Discussing child abuse can cause distress. If you need support please approach your respective Team Leader and they will guide you.

Regular Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years and following significant legislative changes if they occur. We also undertake to seek views, comments, and suggestions from families, children, parents, staff and volunteers. Where possible we will do our best to work with local all communities.

Non-compliance with this policy and the Code of Conduct

MRCNWR will enforce this policy and the Code of Conduct. Following any non-compliance, we will instigate a review that may result in restriction of duties, suspension or termination of employment or other corrective action.

POLICY REVIEWED	20 February 2024	NEXT REVIEW DATE	2 Years
MODIFICATIONS	Policy created for November 2018 and reviewed with minor modifications and inclusive of any changes to the National Quality Standards and Education and Care National Regulations. Approved by the Executive & COM.		