



# YMCA SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Our Movement's Child Protection Policy  
Adopted 30 November 2014

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT AND CEO



It is within the very fabric and identity of the YMCA Movement to provide programs and services for children, young people and their families.

A child-safe organisation acknowledges that safety does not just happen. It requires conscious action to protect children from harm. It extends guardianship to all children and young people. The YMCA strives for an inclusive society where everyone has the opportunity to reach his or her potential. The YMCA is a Movement of people committed to provide opportunities for all people to grow in body, mind and spirit. Caring about the welfare of children and young people is our first consideration.

The YMCA has a legal, moral and Mission-driven responsibility to protect children and young people from harm. So we have developed this policy, the YMCA Licence Standards, the local Member procedures and guidelines. These administrative instruments acknowledge and codify within the Y that the safety of children and young people is paramount. The priority to protect children and young people will apply equally in all our YMCA locations, by all who take on the YMCA name and by all who work with or for the YMCA.

Everyone who is bound by this policy is expected to do all they can to ensure every child or young person in the care of the YMCA is safe from harm. It is the responsibility of all at the YMCA, from Board Directors to staff and volunteers, to understand the important role they personally have to play to ensure the safety of the children and young people in their care is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make.

This is the inaugural National Council of YMCAs endorsed Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy. At this time our focus is to provide robust and easily understandable child protection initiatives for the YMCA Movement in Australia. With this policy we reiterate our commitment to the way we improve child protective practice within the YMCA.

Andrew Smith  
YMCA Australia President

Ron Mell  
YMCA Australia Chief Executive Officer

# DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE

Term	Definition
Emotional or psychological abuse	Emotional or psychological abuse occurs when a child or young person does not receive the love, affection or attention they need for healthy emotional, psychological and social development. Such abuse may involve repeated rejection or threats to a child or young person. Constant criticism, teasing, ignoring, threatening, yelling, scapegoating, ridicule and rejection or continual coldness are all examples of emotional abuse. These behaviors continue to an extent that results in significant damage to the child or young person's physical, intellectual or emotional wellbeing and development.
Physical abuse	Physical abuse occurs when a person subjects a child or young person to non-accidental physically aggressive acts. The abuser may inflict an injury intentionally, or inadvertently as a result of physical punishment or the aggressive treatment of a child. Physically abusive behavior includes (but is not limited to) shoving, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, punching, biting, burning and kicking. It also includes giving children or young people harmful substances such as drugs, alcohol or poison. Certain types of punishment, whilst not causing injury can also be considered physical abuse if they place a child or young person at risk of being hurt.
Sexual abuse	Sexual abuse occurs when an adult involves a child or young person in any sexual activity. Sexual abuse also occurs when a child or young person involves another child or young person in any sexual activity. Perpetrators of sexual abuse take advantage of their power, authority or position over the child or young person for their own benefit. It can include making sexual comments to a child or young person, engaging children or young people to participate in sexual conversations over the internet or on social media, kissing, touching a child or young person's genitals or breasts, oral sex or intercourse. Encouraging a child or young person to view pornographic magazines, websites and videos is also sexual abuse.
Neglect	Neglect is the persistent failure or deliberate denial to provide the child or young person with the basic necessities of life. Such neglect includes the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, adequate supervision, clean water, medical attention or supervision to the extent that the child or young person's health and development is, or is likely to be, significantly harmed. Categories of neglect include physical neglect, medical neglect, abandonment or desertion, emotional neglect and educational neglect. The issue of neglect must be considered within the context of resources reasonably available to the family.
Witnessing Family Violence	Witnessing family violence is a specific form of emotional and psychological abuse. Witnessing family violence occurs when children or young people are forced to live with violence between adults in their home. It is harmful to children and young people. It can include witnessing violence or the consequences of violence. Family violence is defined as violence between members of a family or extended family or those fulfilling the role of family in a child or young person's life. Exposure to family violence places children and young people at increased risk of physical injury and harm and has a significant impact on their wellbeing and development.
Sexual exploitation	Sexual exploitation occurs when children or young people are forced into sexual activities that are then recorded in some way and/or used to produce pornography. Such pornography can be in the form of actual photos or videos or published on the internet. Exploitation can also involve children or young people who are forced into prostitution.
Harm	Harm, to a child or young person, is any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child or young person's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing. It is immaterial how the harm is caused. Harm can be caused by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• physical, psychological or emotional abuse or neglect; or</li> <li>• sexual abuse or exploitation;</li> <li>• a single act, omission or circumstance; or</li> <li>• a series or combination of acts, omissions or circumstances.</li> </ul>
Bullying	Bullying involves the inappropriate use of power by one or more persons over another less powerful person or group and is generally an act that is repeated over time. Bullying has been described by researchers as taking many forms which are often interrelated and include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbal (name calling, put downs, threats)</li> <li>• Physical (hitting, punching, kicking, scratching, tripping, spitting)</li> <li>• Social (ignoring, excluding, ostracising, alienating)</li> <li>• Psychological (spreading rumours, stalking, dirty looks, hiding or damaging possessions).</li> </ul>

# DEFINITIONS USED IN THIS POLICY

Term	Definition
Child or young person	The YMCA considers a child or young person to be a person under the age of eighteen years.
Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy	The Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy is the document that defines the principles and intent of the Movement in relation to child protective practice. The principles and intent of this policy are to be implemented locally to protect children and young people from any form of abuse, bullying and exploitation by Board Directors, staff, volunteers and other services users. The YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy has been adopted by the National Council of YMCAs of Australia and requires compliance by YMCA Australia and all of its Licensed Member Associations.
Code of Conduct	A Code of Conduct is an agreement with a set of rules of behaviour and proper conduct for all Board Directors, staff and volunteers when engaging with children or young people. A Code of Conduct details an organisation's core values and explicitly communicates everyone's responsibility and obligation to adhere to the outlined standards of ethical behaviour when working with children and young people. It is effective in strengthening the control of an environment.
Grooming	Grooming is a term used to describe what happens when a perpetrator of abuse builds a relationship with a child or young person with a view to abusing them at some stage. There is no set pattern in relation to the grooming of children. For some perpetrators, there will be a lengthy period of time before the abuse begins. Other perpetrators may draw a child in and abuse them relatively quickly. Some abusers do not groom children but abuse them without forming a relationship at all. Grooming can take place in any setting where a relationship is formed, such as leisure, music, sports and religious activities, or in internet chatrooms, in social media or by SMS.
Extended Guardianship	Extended guardianship is a term that acknowledges that children and young people rely on all adults to create a safe environment and act in an informed and committed way to protect them. It is expected that all YMCA People act as extended guardians of children and young people who take part in a YMCA service or activity.
YMCA Child Safety Strategy	The YMCA Child Safety Strategy has been developed so that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all YMCA People share the responsibility for the protection of children and young people.</li> <li>• the protection practices for children and young people within all YMCAs is strengthened.</li> </ul> This strategy incorporates the following main three pieces of work for the Movement: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The development of a Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy.</li> <li>2. The development of associated YMCA Licensing Standards.</li> <li>3. An agreement with an independent child protection specialist organisation for the provision of an accreditation and audit program.</li> </ol>
YMCA Movement	The YMCA Movement in Australia is a federation of Licensed Member Associations. Each Licensed Member Association is a member of the National Council of YMCAs of Australia. Each Licensed Member Association is a party to a YMCA Licence Agreement and is subject to abiding by the Constitution of the National Council of YMCAs of Australia.
YMCA People	YMCA People include all YMCA Board Directors, staff and volunteers.
YMCA Licensed Member Association	It is a constitutional requirement of the YMCA Movement in Australia that to be a YMCA, the entity must have entered into a Licensing Agreement with YMCA Australia. Within this policy when this term is used it also incorporates Affiliated organisations.
YMCA Licensing Standards	Each YMCA Licensee must comply with the YMCA Licensing Standards in existence at the time. The YMCA Licensing Standards outline the requirement and responsibilities of a YMCA Licensee.
Affiliated Organisation	Affiliated organisations engage in a contract with a Licensed Member Association to use a YMCA managed or owned facilities or are fully/partly owned by a Licensed Member Association.
Service User	Service User is an individual who participates in a YMCA program or who uses a YMCA service or facility.



## PURPOSE OF OUR POLICY

The YMCA strives for an inclusive society where everyone has the opportunity to reach his or her potential. It is a Movement committed to providing opportunities for all people to grow in body, mind and spirit.

It is part of the very fabric of the YMCA Movement to promote the healthy development of children and young people who access its programs and services.

YMCA Australia and all of its Licensed Member Associations, Board Directors, staff and volunteers have a legal, moral and Mission-driven responsibility to:

- protect children and young people from all forms of abuse, bullying and exploitation
- create and maintain a child safe culture that is understood, endorsed and put into action by all the individuals who work for, volunteer, govern or access a YMCA program, service or managed facility
- acknowledge that protecting children is everyone's business.

## HOW WILL THIS POLICY APPLY

The Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy of the YMCA has been adopted nationally at the 2014 AGM of the members. It consist of a set of principles that underpin the policies and procedure of all the YMCA Licensed Member Associations. Compliance to the Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy is required as a 'priority one' YMCA Licensing Standard

## WHO DOES THE POLICY APPLY TO?

The Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy of the YMCA covers all Board Directors, staff and volunteers of YMCA Australia and Licensed Member Associations and their affiliated organisations.

All YMCA Licensed Member Associations are required to ensure that the purpose of the YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy are adopted by affiliated organisations.

The contract terms between YMCA Licensed Member Associations and affiliate organisations will clarify a requirement that the affiliate organisation develop and maintain its own policies and procedures that comply with the YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy, and relevant jurisdictional laws and regulations in relation to the protection of children and young people.

# HOW WE WILL ENSURE OUR POLICY IS CONTINUALLY IMPROVED

The YMCA National Board will review this policy annually (or earlier as required) and inform the National Council of YMCAs if changes are required for consideration.

On behalf of the Movement, YMCA Australia will develop a Child Safety Strategy every three years.

On behalf of the YMCA National Board, YMCA Australia will coordinate a yearly Licensed Member Association self-reporting child safety assessment reporting compliance to the Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy.

In consultation with the Movement, YMCA Australia will approve an independent child protection specialist organisation to undertake an independent audit every three years as a minimum. The independent audit will record the YMCAs collective compliance with the Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy.

Annual reports and summaries of identified risks and areas for improvement will be delivered to the Movement.

An annual report of the outcomes of the Child Safety Strategy will be made available to parents, YMCA People and the community.

## OUR POLICY COMMITMENTS

The National Council of YMCAs of Australia is responsible for the development and endorsement of the YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy. It delegates the implementation of the policy to the National Board of YMCA Australia and each of the Boards of the YMCA Licensed Member Associations.

The role of each entity in relation to the YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy is detailed in the table found on page 15.

## OUR COMMITMENT TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- We commit to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people who access any of our programs, services or facilities.
- We commit to providing children and young people with positive and nurturing experiences.
- We commit to listening to children and young people and empowering them by taking their view seriously and addressing any concerns that they raise with us.
- We commit to take action to ensure that children and young people are protected from exploitation, abuse or harm.
- We commit to support families and communities to promote children's healthy development and wellbeing.

## OUR COMMITMENT TO PARENTS AND CARERS

- We commit to supporting parents and carers to protect their children. We will offer assistance that builds on a family's strengths and empowers them to meet the changing needs of their children.
- We commit to communicating honestly and openly with parents and carers about the wellbeing and safety of their children.
- We commit to engaging and listening to parents views in regards to our child protective practice policies and procedures.
- We commit to transparency in our decision-making with parents and carers where it will not compromise the safety of children or young people.

## OUR COMMITMENT TO YMCA PEOPLE

- We commit to having a management structure that supports and develops staff in their roles.
- We commit to providing all YMCA People with the necessary support to enable them to fulfill their roles. This will include regular and appropriate development opportunities and supervision.
- We commit to provide regular opportunities to clarify and confirm policy and procedures in relation to child and young people's protection and welfare. This will include annual training with regards to understanding the principles and intent of the Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy.
- We commit to listen to all concerns voiced by YMCA People in regards to keeping children and young people safe from harm.
- We commit to provide opportunities for YMCA People to receive formal debriefing and counselling arising from incidents of child or young person abuse.

## OUR COMMITMENT TO ENSURING A CHILD SAFE ORGANISATION

- We commit to using best practice standards in the recruitment, screening and employment of YMCA People so as they will not harm, abuse or exploit children and young people who are involved in our programs, services or facilities.
- We commit to creating an environment for children and young people to be safe and to feel safe.



# WHAT WE EXPECT FROM OUR YMCA PEOPLE

## We expect our YMCA People not to harm or exploit children who access our services.

It is a serious breach of this policy, and possibly the law, if a YMCA Person harms or exploits children and young people who are involved in any of our services. Breaches of this policy include, but are not limited to, YMCA People who:

- sexually assault children or young people who are involved in one of our programs;
- physically assault children or young people who are involved in one of our programs;
- verbally abuse, denigrate or bully children or young people who are involved in one of our programs;
- sexually harass children or young people who are involved in one of our programs;
- take, reproduce and/or distribute photos of children or young people without the consent of their guardians;
- publish any material containing images of children or young people who are involved in one of our programs that can be used for the sexual gratification of others.

**Therefore, we expect** all our YMCA People to understand the meanings of abuse contained within this Policy.

## We expect our YMCA People to understand children's rights.

An understanding of children and young people's rights is an important basis for all the programs and services that we offer to children, young people and their families. It enables us to identify when children's needs and entitlements are compromised and when they require support.

**Therefore, we expect** our YMCA People to have a working knowledge of children and young people's rights appropriate to their role and use it to inform decisions about how to behave and act with and on behalf of children and young people.

## We expect our YMCA People to be respectful of children and young people.

As part of our commitment to children and young people, we will facilitate opportunities for children and young people to tell us their views and feedback about the services we provide to them. We will treat children as individuals and respect their unique abilities and vulnerabilities.

**Therefore, we expect** YMCA People to express attitudes and engage in behaviour that respect and support children and young people.

## We expect that our YMCA People do not contravene any policies, regulations or laws in relation to the safety and protection of children and young people.

It is a serious breach of this policy if a YMCA Person contravenes any regulations or laws in relation to the safety and protection of children whether or not they are working or volunteering at the time.

## We expect our YMCA People to understand and acknowledge the significance of family relationships for children and young people.

Families, in all their diverse forms, are the foundation of children and young people's development. Families can act as supportive resources for growth and resilience in children and young people. Family relationships can also restrain and harm children and young people's functioning. Families are the single most significant influence in shaping the way children and young people develop and perceive their sense of identity.

The YMCA will provide documentation in developmentally appropriate language and in translation to accommodate the main communities that access our services.

**Therefore, we expect** YMCA People to recognise, respect and work to strengthen the capacities of parents/carers and other family members to care and protect their children.

## We expect our YMCA People to always follow the Code of Conduct endorsed by their Licensed Member Association.

A code of conduct sets out the rules for behavior with and around children and young people. The YMCA code of conduct aims to ensure that YMCA People are always safe adults who act to protect children and young people. All YMCA People will be engaged and employed within the requirements of the code of conduct.

**Therefore, we will request** all YMCA People to endorse and affirm their understanding of the YMCA code of conduct.

## We expect our YMCA People to understand and respond to the special needs of all children and young people.

We acknowledge that all children and young people are vulnerable due to their age and associated stage of development. We also understand that we will need to be proactive in recognising the additional vulnerability to exploitation and harm that children and young people with developmental delays or disabilities experience.

The YMCA will provide documentation in developmentally appropriate language and in translation to accommodate the main communities that access our services.

**Therefore, we expect** our YMCA People to act in ways that communicate effectively with and are supportive of children and young people.

## We expect our YMCA People to show extended guardianship to all children and young people.

Experience of abuse, family violence, neglect, bullying and exploitation are significant sources of trauma for children and intensify the risk of children and young people developing a range of emotional, psychological, social and behavioural problems. Child/young person physical abuse and sexual abuse is a crime. Interventions which identify risk factors of abuse and prevent it from happening are instrumental in supporting children and families. Extended guardianship means YMCA People need to understand the indicators of child abuse and exploitation. YMCA People are to understand that

perpetrators of abuse can be male or female. They can be old, young, peers, friends, Board Directors, employees, volunteers. There is no stereotypical construct of an offender of sexual abuse. Sexual abuse can occur in contexts that do not have adequate controls on behaviour, environments and relationships. Abuse can be opportunistic, premeditated, or a combination of both. Grooming behaviour can form part of the premeditation. The YMCA needs to provide an environment that acknowledges how abuse occurs and put safeguards in place to create an environment that does not tolerate abuse risk behaviours in any way.

**Therefore, notwithstanding our obligations under the law, we expect** our YMCA People to ensure that appropriate action is taken to respond to concerns about the wellbeing or safety of a child or young person.

## We expect our YMCA People to know and follow the law in relation to reporting child abuse.

We expect YMCA People to know and follow relevant laws in their state/territory jurisdiction to report child abuse, family violence, neglect or exploitation.

## We expect our YMCA People to co-operate with police and/or other formal investigations.

In every circumstance, we expect YMCA People to co-operate to the best of their ability with any formal investigation undertaken by the police or other relevant state/territory authorised body in relation to the care and protection of children and young people.

## We expect our YMCA People to respect the cultural and religious practices of families who access our services.

We recognise the importance of culture and religion in the lives of children and families. However, no cultural or religious belief will take precedence over the right of children or young people to be protected from harm.

**Therefore, we expect** YMCA People to act in ways that are inclusive and respectful of the cultural and religious practices of families who access our services.

**We expect our YMCA People to be aware of the formal recruitment, screening and employment practices of the YMCA in relation to working or volunteering with children and families.**

All YMCA People will be informed during their recruitment that their employment will be subject to clearance under the relevant state/territory Working with Children Check system, a National Criminal Records Check and local Member Association general screening requirements. It is a serious breach of this policy if an individual, who has convictions that would make him/her ineligible to be granted a Working with Children Check (or equivalent) clearance, gains employment or is allowed to volunteer with children or young people who access our services. It is also a serious breach of this policy, if an individual continues in his/her employment or volunteer role with us if he/she has been charged or convicted of a crime that would make him/her ineligible to be granted a Working with Children Check (or equivalent) clearance.

**Therefore, we expect** that our YMCA People understand that their continued participation in our organisation is based on the outcomes of these employment practices.

**We expect our YMCA People to protect the privacy of children, young people and families.**

The YMCA privacy policy will ask for consent from children, young people and their parents/carers before we seek out or provide information about them to any other individuals or organisation. However, we may not ask for consent to disclose information to Police, a regulatory authority or a statutory child protection agency in the event that we have concerns about the safety and well-being of a specific child or young person. The YMCA Privacy document will outline how this will work.

**Therefore, we expect** our YMCA People to protect the privacy of children, young people and families.

**We expect our YMCA People to act on any concerns raised by children, young people and/or their parents/carers.**

We will take seriously any concerns or issues raised by children, young people and/or their parents. We will investigate all complaints or allegations made against any of our Board Directors, staff or volunteers relating to a breach of any YMCA policy or operational procedure. We will ensure that we report

any abuse crimes against children or young people to Police or other relevant legislated authorities in accordance with the law.

**Therefore, we expect** our YMCA People to follow our complaints procedure without hesitation in response to concerns raised by children, young people and/or their parents/carers.



# WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTING

Entity	Role/Responsibility
National Council of YMCAs of Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote the principles and intent of this policy.</li> <li>Ensure the policy is reviewed on a three yearly cycle as a minimum or at a time governed by legislation, regulations or organisational learnings that precipitates a change to the policy.</li> <li>Facilitate regular discussions at all levels of the Movement to support a culture of openness, continued improvement and accountability to protecting children and young people.</li> </ul>
National Board – YMCA Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate a review of the Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy annually as a minimum or at a time determined or promoted by changes to legislation, regulations or organisational review.</li> <li>Develop, monitor and annually review the YMCA Licensing Standards to ensure that they are continuously improved to support the protection of children and young people.</li> <li>Ensure all Licenced Member Associations provide an annual child safety assessment referencing the requirement of the policy via a self-reporting process.</li> <li>Support all Licenced Member Associations and their affiliates to achieve accreditation and a positive audit result with an agreed independent child protection specialist organisation.</li> <li>In collaboration with Licensed Member Associations, develop and implement a YMCA Child Safety Strategy for the Movement every three years.</li> <li>Ensure adequate resources are allocated to allow for the development and effective oversight of the YMCA Child Safety Strategy and the Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy.</li> <li>Develop and promote opportunities for the Movement to enhance a culture of transparency, accountability and continuous improvement in relation to the YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy.</li> <li>Approve an independent child protection specialist organisation to work with the YMCA, in consultation with the Movement.</li> <li>Advocate for, and promote the rights of, children and young people nationally.</li> <li>Empower and engage children and young people in this policy.</li> </ul>
Licensed Member Associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure all YMCA People understand their obligations in accordance with the intent and principles of YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy and its implementation at a local level.</li> <li>Ensure that the YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy is complied with.</li> <li>Ensure that localised policies, codes of conduct and procedures support compliance to the Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy.</li> <li>Adhere to the YMCA Licensing Standards in place at the time.</li> <li>Provide to YMCA Australia an annual child safety assessment referencing the requirement of the policy via a self-reporting process.</li> <li>Allocate adequate resources to enable the effective implementation of local policies and operational procedures that are compliant with the YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy.</li> <li>Support the YMCA Child Safety Strategy.</li> <li>Achieve and maintain accreditation with an agreed independent child protection specialist organisation.</li> <li>Provide YMCA Australia with the outcome reports of independent audits on a three year cycle as a minimum.</li> <li>Advocate for and promote the rights of children and young people at a local level.</li> <li>Empower and engage children and young people in support of this policy.</li> <li>Develop opportunities for regular discussion at all levels of the Association to support a culture of continuous improvement and accountability for the protection of children and young people.</li> <li>Communicate with YMCA Australia in the event of a breach of this policy.</li> <li>Ensure children, staff, volunteers, Board Directors and families are listened to and have a way of being heard in regards to child protective practice.</li> <li>Empower and engage children and young people in local policy and/or operational procedure development that has a direct impact on them.</li> </ul>

All references used in the development of this policy can be found via [www.ymca.org.au](http://www.ymca.org.au)





[www.ymca.org.au](http://www.ymca.org.au)

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