



## Principles for Child Safety in Organisations

endorsed by the following

Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians (ACCG)

Barry Salmon, Acting Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, Queensland

Howard Bath, Children's Commissioner, Northern Territory

Pam Simmons, Guardian for Children and Young People, South Australia

Elizabeth Daly, Acting Commissioner for Children, Tasmania

Bernie Geary, Principal Commissioner, Commission for Children and Young People, Victoria

Michelle Scott, Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia

Kerryn Boland, Acting Children & Young People Commissioner, New South Wales

Alasdair Roy, Children & Young People Commissioner, Australian Capital Territory

# Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians (ACCG)

## Principles for Child Safety in Organisations

Organisations will:

1. Take a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to child safety.
2. Implement child safety policies and procedures which support ongoing assessment and amelioration of risk.
3. Value and empower children to participate in decisions which affect their lives.
4. Foster a culture of openness that supports all persons to safely disclose risks of harm to children.
5. Respect diversity in cultures and child rearing practices while keeping child safety paramount.
6. Provide written guidance on appropriate conduct and behaviour towards children.
7. Engage only the most suitable people to work with children and have high quality staff and volunteer supervision and professional development.
8. Ensure children know who to talk with if they are worried or are feeling unsafe, and that they are comfortable to do so.
9. Report suspected abuse, neglect or mistreatment promptly to the appropriate authorities.
10. Share information appropriately and lawfully with other organisations where the safety and wellbeing of children is at risk.
11. Value and communicate with families and carers.

The above principles and following explanatory notes draw on the collective knowledge and experience of Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians (ACCG) and reflect the principles and practice guidelines outlined in various ACCG member publications as well as the *National Framework for Creating Safe Environments for Children – Organisations, Employees and Volunteers: Guidelines for Building the Capacity of Child Safe Organisations 2005*. A list of relevant ACCG member publications is listed in the Appendix 1.

The principles and accompanying explanatory notes also take into account and are reflective of, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). A link to the Convention is included in Appendix 1.

## **ACCG Principles for Child Safety in Organisations – with explanatory notes**

For the purpose of this document, the word:

- *Children* refers to children and young people up to the age of 18 years
- *Harm* refers to any and all types of intentional or unintentional abuse, neglect or mistreatment of children including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and cultural
- *Risk* refers to anything that can threaten the safety and wellbeing of children
- *Staff* refers to an organisation's paid employees and volunteers

### **1. Take a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to child safety.**

A child-safe organisation:

- takes preventative action by undertaking a systematic child safety review; adopting a structured approach to risk management; implementing appropriate controls to eliminate or mitigate identified risks, and engaging in an ongoing process of review and improvement
- is proactive by raising awareness within the organisation of child safety risks; planning the work of the organisation to minimise situations where children may be harmed; taking account of the increased level of risk associated with the nature of some activities and the particular vulnerability of some children; and by planning for, and responding immediately to any child safety concerns which do arise
- is participatory by empowering all staff, volunteers, parents, carers and children to have a say in, and influence decisions about, child safety policies and practices, and ensuring everyone understands and has confidence in, the organisation's child safety approach.

### **2. Implement child safety policies and procedures which support ongoing assessment and amelioration of risk.**

A child safe organisation implements child safety policies and procedures which:

- sit within a governance framework that includes an overarching child safety policy, risk management strategy and code of conduct
- prioritise child safety in the recruitment, selection and management of staff and volunteers
- specify how risk will be managed in routine situations or activities (for example, in one-to-one situations with a child; child staff –ratios)
- establish processes for assessing and making decisions about new or high risk activities and special events
- identify individual and organisational child safety responsibilities and accountabilities
- raise awareness about the types of harm children can experience and how to respond
- empower children to speak up, reducing the potential for harm to go unreported
- give clear directions about the handling of (i) risk management or code of conduct breaches and (ii) disclosures, allegations or suspicions of harm; and
- provide support and guidance for staff, volunteers, children and families (including a complaints process).

### **3. Value and empower children to participate in decisions which affect their lives.**

A child-safe organisation recognises the vulnerability of children and that there is a difference in power between children and adults in positions of trust and authority.

A child-safe organisation values children and respects their rights to participate in decisions which affect them, thereby giving them some control over their lives. The organisation empowers children by:

- teaching them about their rights (and corresponding responsibilities)
- building their confidence and assisting them to develop skills for participation, such as communication skills
- committing to children's participation (being inclusive of all children) and providing staff with resources that support participation
- adopting a process for participation that incorporates planning, preparation, action and feedback
- matching participation methods to the age, capabilities and background of the children and being adaptive to their ways of working
- creating opportunities for children to be involved in policy and program development, implementation and review – being honest with children about the extent of their involvement, and giving feedback on how their views have been actioned
- planning formal and informal times and activities for information sharing and discussion with children about issues and/or decisions
- establishing pathways and mechanisms which enable them to raise concerns safely, with confidence, and
- using inclusive and empowering, child-friendly language in everyday activity and relevant written documents.

#### 4. Foster a culture of openness that supports all persons to safely disclose risks of harm to children.

A child-safe organisation fosters and demonstrates openness in multiple ways that directly and indirectly create a culture where all persons – staff, volunteers, parents/carers and children – feel confident and enabled to safely disclose child safety concerns. In an organisation where openness is fostered and demonstrated:

- management leads by example, establishing an honest two-way communication process between themselves and staff, volunteers, parents/carers and children; making time to listen to them; and encouraging the expression of different views
- children and their families/carers are made to feel welcome and staff willingly provide information
- interactions between staff, volunteers, parents/carers and children are respectful and non-discriminatory
- policies and practices are transparent, developed in a participatory way, and applied fairly and equitably
- information is shared openly with forums for exchanging information and opinions in a respectful manner
- decision making criteria and outcomes are openly discussed
- new ideas are encouraged; best practice is promoted and changes are made when the need for improvement is identified
- inappropriate behaviour is dealt with immediately and positive behaviours are recognised
- accessible pathways are provided for staff, volunteers, parents/carers and children to raise issues safely, without fear of retribution
- complaints are addressed and investigated to the highest standard and information is conveyed to children about the process and the outcome in an accessible and child-friendly way
- personal information is treated confidentially and privacy is respected
- reporting of child safety concerns is handled sensitively – and everyone has confidence in the process; and
- external scrutiny is welcome.

#### 5. Respect diversity in cultures and child rearing practices while keeping child safety paramount.

A child-safe organisation respects cultural differences and differences in child rearing practices due to a family's personal, cultural or religious beliefs. However a child-safe organisation recognises that such differences do not diminish a child's right to be safe or the organisation's responsibility to protect the child from harm.

Respecting diversity should be taken to mean '*having the same aims for people's wellbeing and safety but findings different ways to achieve them*' that are more appropriate to the person's different perspective. For example, a child-safe organisation that respects cultural difference:

- thinks about safety and wellbeing concepts from a cultural perspective
- takes steps to develop cultural competence within the organisation so staff and volunteers can respond in a culturally appropriate manner
- takes guidance from experienced others (for example, seeks advice from recognised Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisations in regards to the needs of children from these backgrounds), and
- approaches family cultural contexts with sensitivity.

A child-safe organisation also ensures:

- all parents/carers understand the organisation's:
  - commitment to child safety and what this means; and what is meant by 'abuse' and 'neglect'
  - Code/s of Conduct and what is acceptable behaviour
  - policies and procedures, including in relation to child safety
- the Code of Conduct affirms that discriminatory behaviours and practices are not tolerated
- policies acknowledge that a child's cultural identity or religious beliefs are fundamental to their well-being
- appropriate accommodations are made for the particular needs of children from different backgrounds
- positive images and references to race, culture or religion are used within the organisation, and
- language and communication methods are adopted that foster trust, cooperation and understanding, recognising that culture can affect communication styles and processes.

#### 6. Provide written guidance on appropriate conduct and behaviour towards children.

A child-safe organisation provides written guidance in the form of a Code of Conduct which:

- outlines the behaviour, relationships, attitudes and responsibilities expected of staff and volunteers in relation to children with whom the organisation has contact
- defines what is appropriate and inappropriate by specifically referring to types of behaviours that are relevant to the organisation
- makes people accountable for their conduct, and
- establishes the basis for complaint and disciplinary procedures for non-compliance with the Code.

<p>A child-safe organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• involves staff, volunteers, parents/carers and children in developing its Code of Conduct</li> <li>• openly discusses the Code with staff and volunteers, children, parents/carers and members of the public</li> <li>• makes a practice of distributing the Code to all members of the organisation on an annual basis and/or when the Code is updated</li> <li>• develops separate Codes of Conduct for parents, children, and visitors if appropriate</li> <li>• manages breaches of the Code in accordance with an agreed process, and</li> <li>• reviews the Code regularly.</li> </ul>
<p><b>7. Engage only the most suitable people to work with children and have high quality staff and volunteer supervision and professional development.</b></p>
<p>A child-safe organisation adopts <u>recruitment and selection processes</u> that help it to identify the most suitable persons to work with children and which deter unsuitable persons from applying or being appointed, either in a paid or voluntary capacity. As part of those processes, the organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• states its commitment to being a child-safe organisation in job advertisements and organisational materials</li> <li>• provides applicants (for paid and volunteer positions) with its Child-Safe Policy, Code of Conduct, screening and complaints procedures</li> <li>• conducts thorough interviews and referee checks, and where applicable, verifies qualifications and professional registration, and</li> <li>• undertakes, or may ask the applicant to undertake, a criminal history check to assess a person's fitness and propriety and, where legally required, a working with children check.</li> </ul> <p>A child-safe organisation provides high quality <u>supervision and professional development</u> for staff and volunteers. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• written job descriptions and duty statements outlining expectations, responsibilities and accountabilities</li> <li>• induction and refresher training in risk management; the organisation's policies and procedures (including Code of Conduct and the handling of safety concerns); and any compulsory training required by industry standards or legislation</li> <li>• education in child development and child protection awareness training (including the nature and signs of abuse and how to respond)</li> <li>• support processes such as mentoring, conflict resolution and an accessible complaints procedure</li> <li>• regular reviews of work performance, including workplace behaviours and relationships, and</li> <li>• opportunities to share workplace observations and problems, and to safely explore views about child safety issues with a trusted other.</li> </ul>
<p><b>8. Ensure children know who to talk with if they are worried or are feeling unsafe, and that they are comfortable to do so.</b></p>
<p>A child safe organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• talks to children about rights and responsibilities – making sure children know it is their right to feel safe at all times, and that the organisation has a responsibility to make sure they are safe</li> <li>• establishes what safety means to children – when they feel safe and when they feel unsafe – and teaches them to say 'no' to anything that makes them feel unsafe</li> <li>• teaches them about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and contact, in a manner appropriate to their age and level of understanding, and involves children in developing Codes of Conduct</li> <li>• explains who is, and who is not, a staff member (or volunteer) and what people's roles are</li> <li>• provides protective behaviours training adapted to the needs of children</li> <li>• helps children to identify adults who they trust, and feel they can go to when they are worried or feeling unsafe</li> <li>• encourages children to tell a trusted adult whenever they have a problem, feel unsafe or witness something they don't like</li> <li>• requires staff to be vigilant to the signs of harm, and to routinely check with children to see if they are 'OK'</li> <li>• creates venues and opportunities for children to share their concerns in safe ways</li> <li>• provides child focused and inclusive complaints processes</li> <li>• takes anything a child says seriously, follows up their concerns, and lets them know what action has been taken, and</li> <li>• arranges appropriate support and/or counselling for children with a problem or involved in adverse events.</li> </ul>

## 9. Report suspected abuse, neglect or mistreatment promptly to the appropriate authorities.

A child safe organisation:

- takes proactive steps to ensure that staff and volunteers are able to identify children at risk of harm
- makes staff and volunteers aware of their reporting responsibilities, and the importance of prompt notification if –
  - there is a breach of the Code of Conduct or a risk management procedure
  - a child discloses abuse or neglect
  - an allegation has been made or
  - they have a suspicion, on reasonable grounds, that a child has been, or is being abused or neglected.
- has policies and procedures for –
  - managing breaches of the Code of Conduct or risk management procedures, and
  - handling disclosures, allegations and/or suspicions of harm, and
- ensures everyone knows the policies and procedures and are confident about applying them
- includes in those policies and procedures –
  - explanations of a breach, a disclosure, allegation or suspicion of harm
  - the guidelines for documenting and reporting in these situations, and
  - who must comply with the policy
- includes in its policy for handling disclosures, allegations or suspicions of harm, guidelines detailing –
  - how to respond to a child if they make a disclosure about harm
  - the immediate actions the organisation will take
  - who the disclosure, allegation or suspicion needs to be reported to (what authority) and how the report will be made,
  - how and what details are to be documented in each circumstance, and
  - what will happen after the report has been made – for example, the support that will be offered to the people involved, and the process for reviewing policies and practices to determine if improvements need to be made.

## 10. Share information appropriately and lawfully with other organisations where the safety and wellbeing of children is at risk.

A child-safe organisation is aware of, and complies with:

- any legislative or policy requirement to share information with other organisations where the safety and wellbeing of children is at risk, and
- any confidentiality or privacy requirements which may also apply.

A child safe organisation ensures protocols between jurisdictions and agencies are understood and respected.

## 11. Value and communicate with families and carers.

A child safe organisation welcomes families and carers into the organisation and acknowledges that:

- considerable variation exists in the structure of families, the role different family members may play in a child's life, family backgrounds and cultures
- circumstances can require some children to live apart from their family and the organisation needs to be sensitive to the rights and roles of adults with different caring responsibilities, and
- families and carers are in the best position to advise about their children's needs and capabilities.

As articulated in article 18 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, parents/carers or significant others with caring responsibilities have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of their child. This includes:

- being informed about the organisation's operations and their children's progress, and
- being treated as partners in the decisions that affect their children.

A child-safe organisation adopts a two-way communication process with families and carers. This includes:

- using a range of strategies for communicating about its policies, programs and activities; adapting its communication methods to the needs of particular families
- providing families and carers with timely information, and in a form and language that is understood
- reporting on children's activities frequently, and creating regular opportunities to discuss matters
- seeking out the views, and involvement of parents/carers when developing organisational policies and addressing issues that impact on their children
- making contact as soon as a problem is identified so prompt action can be taken, and
- following through on any communication, doing what they say they will do and reporting back on outcomes.

## APPENDIX 1

**List of relevant publications by Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians**

Child Safety Commissioner. (2006). *A Guide for Creating a Child-safe Organisation*. Melbourne: Author.  
 Link: [http://www.cyp.vic.gov.au/childsafetycommissioner/downloads/childsafe\\_organisation.pdf](http://www.cyp.vic.gov.au/childsafetycommissioner/downloads/childsafe_organisation.pdf)

Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian. (2012). *Creating Safe and Supportive Environments for Children and Young People: Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy Toolkit*. Brisbane: Author.  
 Link: <http://www.cypcg.qld.gov.au/pdf/bluecard/rmst/RMS-toolkit-update-081012.pdf>

Commissioner for Children and Young People. (2009). *Involving Children and Young People: Participation Guidelines*. Western Australia: Author.  
 Link: <http://www.cyp.wa.gov.au/files/Participation%20Guidelines.pdf>

Commissioner for Children and Young People. (2013). *Are you listening? Guidelines for making complaints systems accessible and responsive to children and young people*. Western Australia: Author.  
 Link: <http://www.cyp.wa.gov.au/files/Other%20resources/Are%20You%20Listening%20-%20Guidelines%20for%20making%20complaints%20systems%20accessible%20and%20responsive%20to%20children%20and%20young%20people%20-%20Updated%20June%202013.pdf>

**Link to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:**

<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf>