

Child Safety Policy

Bellarine Catchment Network



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Bellarine Catchment Network would like to acknowledge the Geelong Field Naturalists in providing their Child Safe Policy as guidance in developing this document.

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CHILD SAFE STATEMENT

Bellarine Catchment Network is committed to child safety. We want children to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children.

Bellarine Catchment Network has a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse, and is committed to upholding children's best interests and keeping them safe.

We promote diversity and tolerance within our organisation, in our partnerships, in our interactions with community and in all of our child-based activities.



STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

Bellarine Catchment Network's Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

BCN has zero tolerance for child abuse and all forms of harm to children. BCN is committed to child safety in accordance with the Child Safe Standards, compulsory minimum standards for all organisations in Victoria providing services to children under the age of 18 years.

Bellarine Catchment Network is committed to:

- The safety, participation and empowerment of children
- Understanding and supporting child safety policies and practices
- Promoting cultural safety, participation and empowerment of all children including children who are indigenous, gender diverse, children with disability, same sex attracted, and culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- The establishment and continuous improvement of a child safe policy and supporting procedures
- The prevention of child abuse by regularly training and educating our employees and volunteers on BCN commitment, policies and procedures and child safe practices
- Always being compliant with Commonwealth Government and Victorian Government legislation, guidelines and practices in the promotion of child safety and prevention of child abuse
- Taking all reasonable steps for thorough recruitment due diligence, including the requirement that all employees, contractors and volunteers in child facing roles hold a valid Working with Children Check
- By always adhering to the BCN's child safe statement, code of conduct and child safe procedures and guidelines at all times.
- The modelling of Child Safe Standards at Bellarine Catchment Network by the Leadership Team
- Supporting and adhering to our business partners Child Safety code of conduct and practices
- Working with our partners, in the provision of clear, fair and transparent processes in responding to, and the timely reporting of, actual or suspected child abuse

CHILD SAFE PROCEDURE AND GUIDELINES

In most instances, Bellarine Catchment Network's interaction with children is as an educational support and resource for other community and education based organisations. Generally we are not the primary organisation responsible for the care and well being of children and are not within scope under the mandatory reporting requirements to the Commission. However, we are still responsible for preventing and reporting child abuse.

It is important that we work in conjunction with our business and community partners in the prevention and reporting of child abuse.

The child safe standards aim to protect children from abuse in organisations, including physical violence, sexual offences, serious emotional or psychological abuse and serious neglect

Our Commitment and Aims - Our commitment to child safety

Our organisation is committed to child safety. We want children to be safe, happy and empowered.

We support and respect all children

We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently according to BCN policies and procedures.

We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously.

Our organisation is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks.

Our organisation is committed to educating staff and volunteers on child abuse risks.

We are committed to implementing all Victorian Government and Commonwealth Government legislation and guidelines on Child Safety.

We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our staff and volunteers achieve these commitments.

If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse, phone 000.

Our Staff and Volunteers

The Child Safe Procedures and Guidelines, along with our BCN Child Safe Statement, Statement of Commitment to Child Safety, Child Safe Code of Conduct, and Child Safe Guideline Practices is designed educate and inform our staff and volunteers in any interaction with children as part of their roles and responsibilities as an employee or volunteer of Bellarine Catchment Network.

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The documents clearly states our responsibilities, legal obligations and commitment to child safe practices and, along with any mandatory training, will govern your behaviour when interacting with children as an employee or volunteer of BCN. You are encouraged to discuss any questions or seek further clarity with the Leadership team or the Child Safety Officer.

All of our staff and volunteers must agree to abide by our Child Safety commitment, practices and guidelines, and adhere and sign the Child Safe Code of Conduct.

Training and supervision

Our organisational culture aims for all employees and volunteers, in addition to parents/carers, business and community partners and children, to feel; confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns.

We train our leadership team, employees and volunteers to understand and implement BCN's Child Safety mission statement, statement of commitment, code of conduct, and guidelines and procedures, to minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

Employees and volunteers will be expected to fully understand our organisation's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse;

- by taking part and completing all mandatory training,
- by checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate,
- by understanding their responsibility in reporting child abuse
- that any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter
- having a clear understanding of our partners Child Safety policies and practices and any agreed protocols in reporting child abuse.

Recruitment

We take all reasonable steps to recruit employees and volunteers with appropriate skills to work with children.

The employees and volunteers must demonstrate a commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities.

Our organisation understands that when recruiting employees and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

The BCN Leadership Team will ensure that all people (employees and volunteers) engaged in child-related work are required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this Check. Confirmation of a Working with Children check will be held on file. See the Working with Children Check website <www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au> for further information.

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If necessary, the BCN Leadership team will carry out reference checks and police record checks to ensure that we are recruiting the right people to lead and assist activities focused upon involvement of children.

Police record checks are used only for the purposes of recruitment and are discarded after the recruitment process is complete. We do retain our own records (but not the actual criminal record) if an applicant's criminal history affected our decision-making process.

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.

Fair procedures for personnel

The safety and well-being of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and just to personnel. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form, including investigation updates.

All records are securely stored.

If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to children and families on progress and any actions we as an organisation take.

Privacy

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be employees, volunteers, partners in the delivery of services, and parents 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.

Risk management

In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, in conjunction with our business partners, 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.

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Regular review

This policy will be reviewed every two years and following significant incidents if they occur. We will encourage families and children to have the opportunity to contribute. Where possible we will do our best to work with local Indigenous, diverse communities, our business partners and people with a disability.

Allegations, concerns and complaints

Our organisation takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly.

Our key Leadership Team, Child Safety Officer, employees and volunteers are trained to deal appropriately with allegations.

We work to ensure all children, families, employees and volunteers 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 (see information about failure to disclose above).

If appropriate, we will consult and coordinate the response to the complaint with our business partners including reporting.

If an adult has a reasonable belief that an incident has occurred then they must report the incident.

Factors contributing to reasonable belief may be:

- 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
- Observing behaviour you believe maybe suspicious

A person will not commit this offence if they have a reasonable excuse for not disclosing the information, including a fear for their safety or where the information has already been disclosed. Further information about the failure to disclose offence is available on the Department of Justice and Regulation website

<https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/failure-to-disclose-offence>

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The child safe standards require organisations that provide services for children to have processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse.

This resource is designed to provide guidance on what to do if a child discloses an incident of abuse, or if a parent/carer raises a concern or allegation of abuse which may have taken place.

If a child discloses an incident of abuse to you

- Try and separate them from the other children discreetly and listen to them carefully.
- Let the child use their own words to explain what has occurred.
- Reassure the child that you take what they are saying seriously, and it is not their fault and that they are doing the right thing.
- Explain to them that this information may need to be shared with others, such as with their parent/carer, specific people in your organisation, our partner's organisation (if appropriate), or the police.
- Do not make promises to the child such as promising not to tell anyone about the incident, except that you will do your best to keep them safe.
- Do not leave the child in a distressed state. If they seem at ease in your company, stay with them.
- Provide them with an incident report form to complete, or complete it together, if you think the child is able to do this.
- As soon as possible after the disclosure, record the information using the child's words and report the disclosure to the BCN Leadership team or the Child Safety Officer (if the position exists), police or child protection.
- Ensure the disclosure is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely.

If a parent/carer says their child has been abused or raises a concern

- Explain that your organisation has processes to ensure all abuse allegations are taken very seriously.
- Ask about the well-being of the child.
- Allow the parent/carer to talk through the incident in their own words.
- Advise the parent/carer that you will take notes during the discussion to capture all details.

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- Explain to them the information may need to be repeated to authorities or others, such as the organisation's management or Child Safety Officer, business partners organisation (if appropriate), the police or child protection.
- Do not make promises at this early stage, except that you will do your best to keep the child safe.
- Provide them with an incident report form to complete, or complete it together.
- Ask them what action they would like to take and advise them of what the immediate next steps will be.
- Ensure the report is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely.

You need to be aware that some people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds may face barriers in reporting allegations of abuse. For example, people from some cultures may experience anxiety when talking with police, and communicating in English may be a barrier for some. You need to be sensitive to these issues and meet people's needs where possible, such as having an interpreter present (who could be a friend or family member).

If an allegation of abuse involves an Aboriginal child, you will need to ensure a culturally appropriate response. A way to help ensure this could include engaging with parents of Aboriginal children, local Aboriginal communities or an Aboriginal community controlled organisations to review policies and procedures.

The child safe standards aim to protect children from abuse in organisations, including physical violence, sexual offences, serious emotional or psychological abuse and serious neglect. For further explanation of the different types of child abuse, please see An Overview of the **Victorian child safe standards: <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/> at the Commission for Children and Young People's website.**

Some children with a disability may experience barriers disclosing an incident. For example, children with hearing or cognitive impairments may need support to help them explain the incident, including through sign language interpreters. Advice on communicating with people with a disability can be found on the Department of Health and Human Services website <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-business-and-community/community-involvement/people-with-a-disability-in-the-community/communicate-and-consult-with-people-with-a-disability/communication-with-peoplewith-disabilities>.

If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse phone 000.

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Legislative responsibilities

Our organisation takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- **Failure to disclose:** Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. 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 the police.
- **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.

While the child safe standards focus on organisations, every adult who reasonably believes that a child has been abused, whether in their organisation or not, has an obligation to report that belief to authorities.

The failure to disclose criminal offence requires all adults (aged 18 and over) who hold a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria by an adult against a child under 16 to disclose that information to police (unless they have a reasonable excuse not to, for example because they fear for their safety or the safety of another).

More information about failure to disclose is available on the Department of Justice and Regulation website

<<https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/failure-to-disclose-offence>>.

While failure to disclose only covers child sexual abuse, all adults should report other forms of child abuse to authorities. Failure to disclose does not change mandatory reporting responsibilities.

More information about mandatory reporting is available in the Child protection manual

<www.cpmmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/intake/mandatory-reporting>.

See the Department of Health and Human Services website for information about how to make a report to child protection <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/guide-to-making-a-report-to-child-protection-or-child-first>.

The failure to protect criminal offence (commenced on 1 July 2015) applies where there is a substantial risk that a child under the age of 16 under the care, supervision or authority of a relevant organisation will become a victim of a sexual offence committed by an adult associated with that organisation. A person in a position of authority in the organisation will commit the offence if they know of the risk of abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently failed to do so.