**Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy**

Bellarine Catchment Network
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**Contents**

[**Policy Title** 2](#_Toc108688626)

[**Definitions** 2](#_Toc108688627)

[**Purpose** 3](#_Toc108688628)

[**Scope** 3](#_Toc108688629)

[**Policy status and review** 3](#_Toc108688630)

[**Responsibilities** 5](#_Toc108688631)

[**BCN Child Safety Documents** 6](#_Toc108688632)

[**Policies and Procedures Document** 6](#_Toc108688633)

[**Privacy and information sharing** 7](#_Toc108688634)

[**Risk management** 7](#_Toc108688635)

[**Legislative responsibilities** 7](#_Toc108688636)

[**Part 2** 8](#_Toc108688637)

[**Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy** 8](#_Toc108688638)

[**2.1 Creating culturally safe environments for all Aboriginal children and their families** 8](#_Toc108688639)

[**2.2 Taking child participation and empowerment seriously** 8](#_Toc108688640)

[**2.3 Involving families and communities** 9](#_Toc108688641)

[**2.4 Respecting equity and diversity** 9](#_Toc108688642)

[**2.5 Ensuring staff understand and adhere to Child Safety and Wellbeing Policies and Procedures** 10](#_Toc108688643)

[**2.6 Implementing Complaint Management** 10](#_Toc108688644)

[**2.7 Ensuring staff and volunteers have the knowledge, skills, and awareness to keep children safe at all our activities, projects, and events** 11](#_Toc108688645)

[**2.8 Providing a safe physical and online environment** 11](#_Toc108688646)

[**Part 3** 13](#_Toc108688647)

[**Reporting Process Flow Chart** 13](#_Toc108688648)

[**Relevant legislation and standards** 14](#_Toc108688649)

# **Policy Title**

Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

# **Definitions**

***Child abuse*** can include:

* a sexual offence committed against a child;
* an offence committed against a child under section 49M (1) of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic), such as grooming;
* physical violence against a child; and
* causing serious emotional or psychological harm to a child.

***Harm***is damage to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child or young person, including because of child abuse by adults or the conduct of other children. It includes physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological harm. Harm can arise from a single act or event and can also be cumulative, that is, arising as a result of a series of acts or events over a period of time.

***Child/Children***means a person who is under the age of 18 years.

***Concerns and complaints***a concern refers to any potential issue that could impact negatively on the safety and wellbeing of children.A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction to BCN related to one or more of the following:

* our services or interactions with individuals;
* claims of abuse or inappropriate or harmful behaviour by a staff member, a volunteer or another individual associated with BCN;
* disclosures of abuse or harm made by a child or young person;
* the conduct of a child or young person at a BCN activity, project, or event; and
* general concerns about the safety of a group of children or activity.

**General Definitions**

***BCN*** Bellarine Catchment Network Inc.

***Child Safe Documents*** all BCN documents which address BCN including staff, volunteers and others responsibility to Child Safety and Wellbeing. The documents are listed the section Access to the Policy

***Child Safety Policy*** this refers to BCN’s Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

***Aboriginal Children*** includes Torres Strait Island children

***LGBTIQA+*** means Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and Asexual/Aromantic. The plus indicates that this term includes people who are Gender Non-conforming and Gender Fluid. Sometimes referred under the general heading of Queer.

# **Purpose**

Bellarine Catchment Network (BCN) is regularly contracted to provide environmental education services on a one-off or short-term basis. Our involvement with children always occurs with the permission and under the guidance of at least one person from the organisation who is the primary carer of the children.

BCN wants children to be safe, happy, and to know they have a right to have a say and contribute. We support and respect all children. BCN values child safety which is our priority at all our activities, projects, and events. All staff, committee members, and volunteers are required to understand and practice BCN’s Child Safe policies and procedures as stated in BCN’s Child Safe documents including the Code of Conduct.

# **Scope**

BCN’s Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy applies to all people who work for, or are connected to, BCN in a paid or unpaid capacity. This may include committee members, staff, volunteers, interns, trainees, relevant contractors, members, consultants and others.

BCN’s Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy applies to all activities, projects, events, and services including our member and partner activities, projects, events and services which BCN participates in.

# **Policy status and review**

BCN will undertake a full review of all Child Safety policies, procedures, and practices as well as other Child Safety documents, every two years or when Child Safety laws changes or when advised by the Commission for Children and Young People. The review will include making sure all the Child Safe Standards are followed. BCN will also review and amend its policies, procedures, and practices either in full or in part when children, families, community, or organisations who we provide activities, projects, or events for, make suggestions which improve our child safe practices or after we receive a report of child harm. BCN will report back to whoever has made a suggestion, notified us of a concern, or reported child harm, including changes which have been made to our policies, procedures and practices as well as highlighting the change on our webpage.

The Leadership Team and the Child Safety Officer are responsible for reviewing our Child Safe policies, procedures, and practices. BCNs original Child Safety Policy, procedures and practices was approved by BCN’s membership in May 2020. This new Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and changes to other Child Safe documents were approved by the Committee on ………………

The Bellarine Catchment Network Child Safety policy has been amended to take effect from 1 July 2022' as per the Commission for Children and Young People directives. Any comment or enquiry on BCN’s Child Safe Policy, procedures and practices or documents, should be referred to the BCN Child Safety Officer or the BCN Leadership Team as listed below.

Any incidents of child harm which has been witnessed at a BCN activity or event should be reported immediately to the BCN staff responsible or taking part in the activity, project, or event or by contacting the BCN Child Safety Officer or a member of the BCN Leadership Team.

**Child Safety Officer** Graeme O’Leary, President of BCN  **Ph:** 0497 601 255  **Email:** graemeoleary24@gmail.com

**Leadership Team**

Matt Crawley, Program Manager Naomi Wells, Coastal and Education Program Leader
**Ph:** 0417 231 853 **Ph:** 0411 161 705
**Email:** matt@bcn.org.au **Email:** naomi@bcn.org.au

# **Responsibilities**

All BCN staff, volunteers, committee members, interns, trainees, relevant contractors and member representatives are responsible for familiarizing and practicing BCN’s Child Safety and Wellbeing policies, procedures, and practices. This includes member and partner Child Safe policies and procedures where appropriate

**The BCN Leadership Team and Child Safety Officer are responsible for:**

* BCN’s Child Safety and Wellbeing policies, procedures and practices as outlined in the BCN Child Safe Documents under this section;
* Making sure all staff and volunteers who take part in BCN activities, projects and events are familiar with and understand BCN’s Child Safety and Wellbeing policies and practices as stated in the below documents;
* Provide Child Safety and Wellbeing training to all staff and volunteers;
* That the policies, procedures, and practices are reviewed regularly;
* That any reported Child Safety concerns or reports of harm to children are taken seriously and actioned urgently;
* Making sure that all people who work or volunteer, where considered appropriate\*, for BCN and who take part in any way in our activities, projects, and events, including our partner, or members activities, hold a current Working with Children Check card and that a copy of the card is held on BCN files; and
* Making sure all BCN staff, committee members and volunteers, where considered appropriate\*, sign and understand the Child Safety Code of Conduct.

\*Volunteers who either hold a leadership position or work directly with children are considered to be appropriate volunteers that need a Working With Children Check.

**Team Supervisors and all staff overseeing activities, projects and events are responsible for:**

* Making sure that all people, including children taking part in our activities, projects and events understand both BCN’s and our partner or members Child Safe Policies and practices and confirming that they are understood;
* Encouraging children to voice their ideas and concerns about the activity, project or event;
* Making sure BCN’s Child Safe policies and practices are understood by our partners and members who have engaged BCN to provide activities;
* Making sure that all our activities, projects and events take place in safe spaces for children and those children are protected as much as possible from harm;
* Reporting any Child Safety and Wellbeing concerns or incidents either witnessed, or reported to them by children or an adult, to the Leadership Team and the Child Safety Officer; and
* Follow the BCN procedures and guidelines of managing a complaint or incident, including making sure the child is safe.

# **BCN Child Safety Documents**

All the following documents are sometimes collectively referred to in this Policy as ‘BCN Child Safe Documents’. The following Child Safety and Wellbeing documents are part of BCN’s commitment to keeping children safe and should be read to understand BCN’s Child Safe policies, procedures, and commitments.

The BCN Child Safety and Wellbeing documents are available on BCN’s [webpage](https://www.environmentbellarine.org.au/cb_pages/child_safety_policy.php).

* Child Safe Statement and Commitment to Child Safety
* Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
* Child Safe Code of Conduct
* Complaint Process and Contact Information
* Incident Report Form

Paper copies of the above documents are also available on request. The Child Safety Procedures and Guidelines document can be provided by making a request to either the BCN Leadership Team or the Child Safety Officer.

# **Policies and Procedures Document**

The following BCN policies are related to the Child Safety Policy

* BCN Code of Conduct
* BCN Child Safety and Wellbeing Incent Reporting Procedure
* BCN Occupational Health and Safety Policy
* BCN Online and Social Media Policy
* BCN Privacy Policy – soon to be approved
* BCN Record Keeping Policy
* BCN Recruitment Policy

BCN is committed to making and keeping full and accurate records of all child-related complaints or safety concerns.All child safety complaints, concerns, incidents will be filed securely under the BCN Privacy Policy.Records which may assist with the investigation of a complaint or safety concern will be identified and kept as part of the record of an investigation. Records will be kept even if an investigation does not support a complaint. We will record and keep the outcome of any investigations, and the resolution of any complaints. This includes findings made, reasons for decisions and actions taken.Records will be stored securely and kept for at least 7 years.

# **Privacy and information sharing**

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.

Any complaint or incident will be the responsibility of the Leadership Team and the Child Safety Officer and where possible, will be managed under the BCN Privacy Policy. Please note, this may not always be possible particularly in relation to our legal responsibilities as we may be required to report to a third party (e.g., police) as part of our duty of disclosure. We will always inform the child or the adult who has reported the incident if we need to provide information to someone outside BCN. All BCN staff, relevant contractors and volunteers must comply with our Privacy Policy and practices.

# **Risk management**

In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, in conjunction with our business partners, we proactively manage risks of abuse and harm to children. We have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse and harm risks, which include risks posed by physical environments and online environments.

# **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).

# **Part 2**

# **Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy**

The section clearly states the responsibilities, legal obligations and commitment to child safe practices and, along with any mandatory training, will govern behaviour of BCN staff and volunteers when interacting with children. All BCN staff, volunteers, members and relevant contractors must agree to abide by this Child Safety commitment, practices and guidelines, and adhere and sign, where considered appropriate, the Child Safe Code of Conduct.

# **2.1 Creating culturally safe environments for all Aboriginal children and their families**

BCN is committed to creating safe spaces where Aboriginal culture is celebrated and Aboriginal children, families and community members are welcomed and included. Strategies to embed cultural safety for Aboriginal children include:

* An Acknowledgement of Country at all our meetings, activities, projects, and events;
* Where relevant, BCN will consult with and seek guidance and approval from the local Aboriginal Traditional Owners or other appropriate members and representatives of the Aboriginal community, including families, to identify opportunities to promote Aboriginal culture, knowledge language and practice;
* Where possible and known, BCN will provide opportunities for children to share and express their cultural identity, heritage, and their knowledge including their connection to land and marine environments, in all BCN activities, projects, and events;
* Provide training for staff, and volunteers on the strengths of Aboriginal history, culture, knowledge, and traditional practices and its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children;
* Staff are trained on how to recognise and respond appropriately to racism and will not allow any forms of racism by any staff, volunteers and participants in our activities, projects, or events;
* BCN celebrates NAIDOC Week and acknowledges significant events including National Sorry Day and National Reconciliation Week; and
* BCN actively encourages feedback from the local Traditional Owners, as well as Aboriginal children, families, and communities on their experience of BCN projects, activities, and events.

# **2.2 Taking child participation and empowerment seriously**

BCN takes child involvement and the right to speak up and contribute seriously and includes this when creating and delivering of all our activities, projects, and events.

* When BCN, is presenting activities, projects, or events either directly or on behalf of other organizations we will always inform children of their rights including their right to safety, to participate or not participate, to speak up and to contribute;
* BCN informs all people including children of the aim, what will happen, how to keep safe, and expected outcomes of the activity project or event;
* BCN always encourages children to provide feedback and to raise any concerns they have, including the opportunity to raise those concerns privately. All feedback is taken seriously;
* BCN also encourages feedback from parents, primary carers, schools, and other organizations who engage BCN to provide educational activities or projects, or to organize events; and
* BCN encourages children’s friendship networks and peer support in all activities and projects.

# **2.3 Involving families and communities**

BCN recognises the important role of, and encourages feedback from children, families, primary carers, the community as well as organisations who engage our services and participate in our programs, activities, projects, and events. Strategies to involve families and communities include:

* Ensure public documents are easily accessible and include the BCN Child Safe Statement and Commitment to Child Safety, Child Safety Policy and Wellbeing Policy, Child Safety Code of Conduct, Child Safe Incident Report Form, as well as how to make a comment or a complaint on our webpage; [www.environmentbellarine.org.au/cb\_pages/child\_safety\_policy.php](http://www.environmentbellarine.org.au/cb_pages/child_safety_policy.php);
* BCN has developed a detailed Child Safety Procedures and Guidelines document which clearly states our Child Safety responsibilities, obligations, complaint handling and Incident reporting processes and resolution. This document is available on request by contacting either the Leadership Team or the Child Safety Officer; and
* BCN has provided our Child Safety Team’s contact details for the anyone, including children, make a comment or suggestion or to raise a Child Safety Concern, or report an Incident. We have also included BCN’s Child Safety Incident Report form on our webpage.

# **2.4 Respecting equity and diversity**

BCN promotes acceptance of all people, cultures, identities, and backgrounds and all our activities, projects and events are safe spaces for the expression of culture and identity. BCN provides public statements of inclusion and support for diversity. Strategies to respect equity and diversity include:

* Bellarine Catchment Network always promotes and practices fairness, cultural safety, the right to participate and speak up and contribute, of all children, including children who are indigenous, identify as LGBTIQA+ or queer, children with disability, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and children living away from home;
* BCN staff and volunteers will always use language that includes everyone in all our presentations, activities, projects, and events and where possible, all activities will be physically accessible. Everyone will be made to feel welcome;
* BCN encourages everyone including children to express themselves in a way that is inclusive and will address any incidents of bullying or exclusion or inappropriate language. We encourage people from diverse backgrounds to provide feedback; and
* All BCN staff are clearly informed and trained in BCN’s diversity policies and practices.

# **2.5 Ensuring staff understand and adhere to Child Safety and Wellbeing Policies and Procedures**

BCN recognises the importance of recruitment practices, staff development polices, induction and ongoing training, supervision, and staff performance reviews, in making sure staff and volunteers understand and practice BCN’s Child Safe and Wellbeing Policy, procedure, and values.

* BCN understands that when we recruit new employees, interns, contractors, and volunteers we have a responsibility to make every effort to recruit people who will not cause harm or abuse children;
* The BCN Leadership Team will be responsible to make sure that all people (employees, interns, relevant contractors, and volunteers, where considered appropriate\*, who interact with children hold a current Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of the Check;
* All positions advertised which include working with children will clearly state that all people who apply for the position must have a current Working with Children’s Check which they must provide. We also notify applicants that further child safety checks will be made for the successful applicant;
* All Position Selection Criteria where staff and volunteers work with children will clearly state that applicants must be able to demonstrate their commitment to, and practice of Child Safe values;
* All referee checks for successful applicants who will work with children include questions relating to the applicants working with children experience; and
* All relevant staff and volunteers will undergo training in BCN’s Child Safety policies, procedures, responsibilities, and practices at induction and at regular intervals.

\*Volunteers who either hold a leadership position or work directly with volunteers are will require a Working with Children Check.

# **2.6 Implementing Complaint Management**

BCN recognizes that the safety and wellbeing of children must come first. BCN have put in place a child friendly online complaints management system which is explained in the Child Safe Procedures and Guidelines and the Child Safe Incident Report.

All reports of child abuse and child safety concerns will be treated seriously, and sensitively whether they are made by an adult or a child and whether they are about the behavior of an adult or a child. All complaints and child safety concerns will be investigated as soon as we are made aware them and resolved as soon as possible. BCN will provide support to the child who has been harmed or abused, or anyone who has witnessed child harm or abuse, whilst involved in one of our activities, projects or events. This support may include third party counselling if required or requested. We take responsibility for managing all incidents and concerns reported to us.

BCN staff encourages anyone who takes part in our activities and projects, including children to talk to either the staff member responsible for the activity and project or directly to BCN Leadership Team or Child Safety Officer about any safety concerns or incidents.

The link below is to our Complaints information guidelines on our webpage including how to make a complaint and who to contact. The link also includes our Child Safe Incident Report form [link].

If a complaint of child abuse or harm is made, then BCN staff and volunteers must report it immediately and follow the complaint and Child Safety and Wellbeing Incident Reporting Procedure and procedures as stated in Child Safe Procedures and Guidelines and Child Safe Incident Report. This may include reporting the incident or harm to the relevant authority e.g., Police or Child Protection, BCN staff and volunteers are required to put children’s safety first in any response.

Under the complaint management and disciplinary policies, staff and volunteers may be subject to actions to support child safety, including being stood down during an investigation or terminated following an investigation, or other disciplinary action determined to be appropriate.

# **2.7 Ensuring staff and volunteers have the knowledge, skills, and awareness to keep children safe at all our activities, projects, and events**

Staff and volunteers are provided training on BCN’s Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy, procedures and practices on induction and on a regular basis. This includes:

* Knowing and understanding the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](https://www.unicef.org.au/our-work/information-for-children/un-convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child);
* Knowing how to respond to reports of child safety concerns and harm including reporting responsibilities;
* Inspecting the activity, project, event site to make sure it is safe;
* Recognising signs of child abuse or harm including harmful behaviours by a child towards another child as well as racism and how to respond appropriately to those behaviours;
* Understanding the importance of Record Keeping and external reporting responsibilities; and
* That BCN will also support via third party counselling when requested or considered appropriate.

# **2.8 Providing a safe physical and online environment**

BCN provides a safe physical and online environment for all children. All BCN staff and volunteers must be familiar with and practice BCN’s Occupational Health and Safety Policy and procedures when taking part in our activities, projects, and events, including following a safety check list. This includes making sure our activities, projects and events are safe for children. Actions include:

* BCN staff and volunteers will not have any personal online contact with a child or their family (unless necessary, for example providing children with educational resources, e-newsletters or passing on relevant and related BCN information);
* BCN has security measures in place to protect, as much as possible online data and communication;
* All BCN staff and volunteers must follow BCN’s Online and Social Media Policy and practices;
* Any direct online communication with a child can must include a parent or responsible guardian or a representative of the organisation which has engaged BCN services;
* All online communications relating to children to be conducted via the info@bcn.org.au email address so that it can be viewed by the Leadership Team; and
* All relevant BCN contractors must agree to follow BCN’s policies including Child Safety, Privacy and Online and Social Media policies.

# **Part 3**

# **Reporting Process Flow Chart**

 **Who is responsible?**

**Volunteers/interns/contractors**

**BCN network members**

**BCN committee**

**BCN staff**

A complaint or suspected incident or allegation of child abuse occurs.

**If it is believed that a child is in immediate risk, Police are called on 000.**

**What should be reported?**

* Physical, sexual, grooming, emotional, psychological, neglect or family violence, bullying
* Disclosure of abuse or harm
* Allegations, suspicion or observation

**Step One**Make sure the child is safe and their wellbeing is being managed. Follow actions set out in the
‘Child Safety and Wellbeing Incident Report Procedures’ document

**Step Two**Promptly inform the BCN Leadership Team and the BCN Child Safety Officer

**Step Three**Fill out the ‘Child Safety and Wellbeing Incident Report’ form with the child and/or their guardians and send to BCN Leadership Team and BCN Child Safety Officer

**Third party reporting**The BCN Leadership Team and Child Safety Officer must notify relevant authorities (Victoria Police and/or Department of Health and Human Services Child Protection)

**Victoria Police** **131 444** **(or 000 if immediate danger)
Department of Health and Human Services (Geelong Office)** **4243 5111** **or West Division Intake for Child Services - Rural and regional only - 1800 075 599**

# **Relevant legislation and standards**

Reference and links to relevant legislation, regulations, external policies and standards on child safety and wellbeing, as relevant to the organisation and the services it provides to children. This may include:

* The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](https://www.unicef.org.au/our-work/information-for-children/un-convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child);
* Relevant Commonwealth or Victorian legislation — for example the [*Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)*](https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/child-wellbeing-and-safety-act-2005/034)— or regulations, including legislative requirements for Working with Children Checks, mandatory reporting, the [Reportable Conduct Scheme](https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/reportable-conduct-scheme/) for in scope organisations and criminal offences; and
* Relevant policies or standards, for example the [Child Safe Standards](https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards/).