

**CHILD SAFE POLICY**

1. **Purpose**
* The Victorian Government introduced the Child Safe Standards in 2016. These are compulsory minimum standards for all organisations that provide services for or are used by children and young people to help protect them from harm.
* The Victorian Child Safe Standards was developed to work in tandem with the National Principles of Child Safe Organisations. These principles set out a national consistent approach to promoting a culture of child safety and wellbeing within organisations. This policy supports the implementation of these principles and the work to embed these principles throughout the DRC.
* The purpose of the Child Safety Policy is to ensure that all employees, consultants, contractors or volunteers engaged by DRC (staff, members and volunteers) are aware of DRC’s commitment and obligation to creating a child safe organisation, and their individual obligations.
* The policy aims to communicate DRC’s commitment to child safety, in a way that can be understood by all, including children and young people, and it explains key features of DRC’s approach to meeting the standards.
1. **Scope**
2. This policy applies to all staff.
3. The DRC recognizes that it is outside of the scope of the Reportable Conduct Scheme, however, as an organisation we recognize that child safety is a community responsibility, and we all have a role to play. To that end, DRC adheres to the principles of the scheme, and any and all allegations of misconduct involving children and young people can be made against a staff member, even if that conduct occurred outside of their work.

## **Definitions**

* **Child** means a young person below the age of 18
* **Young Person** means a person between the age of 12-25
* **Staff** means anyone employed by the DRC
* **Volunteer** means team volunteers, board members and members of DRC working groups
* **Informed consent** means the process in which a person is given all important information regarding a decision they need to make, in an accessible way they can understand. The level of risk should determine what level of capacity of understanding is needed to provide informed consent. Informed consent can only be given if a person is
	+ able to understand what their decision is about
	+ able to understand the potential outcomes of their decisions – the risks and benefits
	+ able to understand all the options they have available
	+ able to make the decision without pressure
1. **Statement of Commitment**
2. DRC is committed to the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people.
3. DRC will uphold the rights of children and young people who come into contact with the organisation, so that they feel heard, safe and protected.
4. DRC recognizes that ‘child safety and wellbeing’ is a verb – meaning it’s an action, not something that can be done once. As an organisation it commits to the ongoing implementation of the National Principles and Victorian Child Safety Standards.
5. DRC has zero tolerance for child abuse and will take all allegations of reportable conduct and safety concerns very seriously, ensuring such conduct is dealt with in accordance with policies, procedures and the law.
6. DRC
	1. has robust human resources and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers.
	2. Will provide regular child safety training for all staff and volunteers, so that they are equipped with knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe. This training will help them understand their specific responsibilities and how to recognize and respond to signs of abuse or neglect.
	3. will provide a safe environment for, and consider the needs of, children and young people with a disability, and consider their needs in providing that environment.
	4. will provide a safe environment for, and consider the needs of, children and young people who have suffered trauma, and consider their needs in providing that environment.
	5. will provide a safe environment for, and consider the needs of, gender diverse and LGBTQIA+ children and young people, and will consider their needs in providing that environment.
	6. will provide a safe environment for, and consider the needs of, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people and will consider their needs in providing that environment.
	7. Will ensure children and young people are aware of their rights and what to expect of the adults around them within the organisation
	8. Will ensure all adults are aware of the expectations around their behaviour with children and young people, as well as their responsibilities.
	9. Will regularly review and improve upon the implementation of these principles and standards
7. DRC requires all staff to uphold these commitments.
8. **Child Safe Code of Conduct**
9. All staff and volunteers aged 18 years or over are responsible for supporting the safety, participation, wellbeing and empowerment of all children and young people involved with DRC.
10. Staff must ensure that they display appropriate standards of behaviour towards children and young people at all times, ensuring their rights are respected, that they feel safe and protected, and that their concerns are taken seriously.
11. All staff and volunteers are required to follow this code of conduct, and failure to do so will be considered misconduct. Breaches of this code will be handled using DRC’s disciplinary procedures.
12. All staff and volunteers will:
	1. Take all reasonable steps to protect children and young people from physical, emotional or sexual abuse, harm or neglect.
	2. Treat all children and young person with respect by listening to them, valuing their idea and opinions and ensuring cultural sensitivity.
	3. Support and welcome all children and young people regardless of their background and lived experience.
	4. Maintain appropriate professional boundaries both in real life and online.
	5. Respect the privacy of children and young people, and only disclose information with informed consent or when there is a duty of care concern.
	6. Raise any concerns about the safety of a child or young person with their supervisor.
	7. Report any breaches of this code through the complaints method listed below.
	8. Contact the police if a child or young person is at immediate risk.
13. All staff and volunteers will not:
	1. Shame, humiliate, oppress, belittle or degrade any child or young person
	2. Discriminate against any child or young person on the basis of age, gender, race, culture, disability, vulnerability or sexuality.
	3. Engage in any activity with a child or young person that is likely to cause them physical, emotional or cultural harm.
	4. Initiate unnecessary physical contact with a child or young person or do things of a personal nature for them.
	5. Meet with a child without another adult present
	6. Be alone with a young person unnecessarily and/or for more than a short period of time
	7. Develop a ‘special’ relationship with a specific child or young person.
	8. Engage in a romantic or sexual relationship with a young person they work with, or made first contact with through this work, regardless of the age of the young person.
	9. Show favouritism through gifts or inappropriate attention
	10. Arrange unauthorised contact (including online or over phone) with a child or young person.
	11. Photograph or video a child or young person without informed consent.
	12. Use inappropriate language in the presence of children or young people
14. When in doubt, or if this document does not cover something, all staff should talk to their manager or supervisor. Child and Young Person safeguarding will be responded to as top priority.

**6. Recruitment**

1. The recruitment and selection of staff aims to support DRC’s commitment to promoting organisational culture of child safety. DRC has robust recruitment and selection processes. DRC carries out reference checks and police record checks to ensure that the right people are recruited.
2. All prospective / new staff members to DRC must undertake a National Criminal History Record Check prior to commencement of employment.
3. All people engaged in child-related work as defined in the Working with Children Act 2005, including volunteers, are required to hold a Working with Children (WWC) Check and to provide evidence that the WWC Check is valid at all times whilst employed by DRC.
4. This commitment to child safety and screening requirements will be included in all job advertisements.
5. **Staff and volunteers reporting a child safety concern or complaint**
6. DRC works to ensure all children and young people, families, staff and volunteers understand their obligations and know who to tell if they observe abuse, are a victim themselves, or if they notice inappropriate behaviour. DRC takes all allegations of child abuse and reportable conduct seriously. It is committed to ensuring that such allegations are addressed in accordance with processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse.
7. Child safe issues should be reported to the EO. If the incident is a criminal offence (see below), the incident must also be reported to the police on 000.
8. In Victoria, adults (anyone over 18) must report to police any reasonable belief that a sex offence has been committed by an adult against a child under the age of 16. If they do not report, it may be considered a ‘failure to disclose’, unless they have a reasonable excuse or another exemption applies. Failure to disclose is a criminal offence.
	1. In some instances, if they are over the age of 16 a report may still legally need to be made.
	2. For more information please read this fact sheet from the department of justice and community safety https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/failure-to-disclose-offence
9. The following reportable conduct must be reported to the police:
	1. A sexual offence committed against, with, or in the presence of a child.
	2. Sexual misconduct, committed against, with or in the presence of, a child
	3. Physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of, a child
	4. Any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child
	5. Significant neglect of a child.
10. If a staff member or volunteer is concerned about improper behaviour between any adult and young person within DRC, they should immediately inform the EO.
11. If the concern is about the EO, the incident should be reported to the DRC Chair of the Board. If a child or young person, their parent/carer or a trusted adult discloses improper behaviour of a DRC Staff member or volunteer, the EO (or Chair of the Board if more appropriate) should be informed immediately.
12. In all instances, as soon as possible a Child Safe Incident report should be completed, using the child/parent/carer/trusted adult’s words.
13. The EO (or Chair of the Board if more appropriate) will:
	1. Initiate internal processes in consultation with the person who made the report to ensure the safety of the child/young person, clarify the nature of the concern/complaint and if required, begin an investigation.
	2. Decide, in accordance with legal requirements and duty of care whether the matter should be reported to police, child protection or other relevant bodys.
		1. If it is determined that is should be reported to the police, they will support the person who raised the concern in doing so.
	3. Ensure the report is recorded accurately, and it is stored securely
	4. Ensure all staff and volunteers involved have appropriate support
	5. Remove the volunteer or staff member against whom the allegation is made from any engagement that involves children or young people while the investigation is occurring.
	6. Notify anyone relevant to the allegation of the outcome of the investigation
	7. Review the incident with relevant staff and volunteers to identify and implement actions that should be taken to minimize the chase of another incident occurring.

Key Contacts:

* The Child Protection Crisis line on **131 278** (24 hours, 7 days a week, toll free in Victoria)
* The child protection intake service that covers the area in which the child lives, from the list here:

<https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/child-protection-contacts>

Other Contacts:

* The Sexual Assault Crisis Line Victoria (SACL) **1800 806 292** is a state-wide, after-hours, confidential, telephone crisis counselling service for people who have experienced both past and recent sexual assault. SALC operates between 5pm weeknights through to 9am the next day, and throughout weekends and on public holidays
* Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRC) **03 9486 9866**
* Victoria Police’s SANO task force – **1800 110 007** **sanotaskforce@police.vic.gov.au** is the statewide task force for child sexual abuse in an institutional context.
* The Sexual Offenses and Child Abuse Investigation Teams (SOCITs) are made up of specialist detectives who are training to investigate the complex crimes of sexual offences and child abuse. They are based around the state, and deal with cases from the time of disclosure, throughout the investigation process, and then onto court. To find your nearest SOCIT search by region here: <https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/child-protection-contacts>

# **8. Privacy**

1. All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of individuals involved, unless there is a risk to someone’s safety.
2. The DRC will have safeguards and practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected and will follow DRC’s Privacy Policy and Procedures.
3. Everyone is entitled to know how their personal information is recorded, what will be done with it and who will be able to access it.
4. The DRC will endeavour to ensure that any relevant persons is aware of this entitlement.