

Child Safe Policy

Yarriambiack Shire Council encourages a working environment which promotes gender equality and models non-violent and respectful relationships.

1 Objective

Yarriambiack Shire Council is committed to complying with the Child Safe Standards (Standards) introduced by the Victorian Government, setting out the compulsory minimum standards for organisations that provide services for children and young people (or are used by children and young people), to help protect them from harm.

This policy is intended to ensure that all employees, volunteers and contractors (staff) engaged by Council are aware of its commitment to create and maintain a child safe environment that meets the Standards.

2 Responsibility

This policy applies to all staff and to the broad range of situations where interaction with **children and young people may occur in the delivery of Council's services.**

3 Policy Statement

This policy affirms Council's commitment to providing a child safe and child friendly environment for all children and young people who engage with Council's service.

Council recognises, respects and promotes its responsibilities to keep children safe from abuse from those associated with Council, and commits to ensuring the safety of children as a priority. Council values diversity and will not tolerate child abuse or discriminatory practices.

Council pays particular attention to the safety and cultural safety of the following groups of children, in recognition of their increased vulnerability, and diverse and unique identities and experiences:

- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people;
- children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds;
- children with a disability;
- children who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and/or intersex;
- children who are non-binary or gender diverse;
- children in and out of home care and youth justice.

4 Council's approach to Child Safety

In continuing to implement and promote a child safe system of work, Council will:

- a) develop an environment in which children feel listened to, valued and their concerns are acted upon, including encouraging and allowing children to participate in decisions important to them;
- b) consult with staff and other appropriate parties, including families and children;
- c) proactively assess and manage the risk of abuse to children who interact with Council, including through recruitment practices and in online environments;
- d) take a proactive approach to child safety, including fostering a culture of openness that supports all staff to report any concerns of child safety through (see part 7 below);
- e) report suspected abuse, neglect or mistreatment promptly to the appropriate authority, whether the law requires reporting;
- f) ensure children know the options available to them if they are concerned or feeling unsafe, and foster an environment where children are safe to raise such concerns;
- g) recruit staff who are suitable to work for children (see further at 6 below) and provide high quality training, supervision and professional development to staff;
- h) have policies, procedures and supports in place to reflect these commitments, and review these on a regular basis.

5 Child Safety Code of Conduct

All staff are responsible for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people who engage with Council. **All staff are expected to act in accordance with Council's Child Safety Code of Conduct** in their physical and online interactions with children and young people under the age of 18 years.

6 Recruitment and Training

Council's recruitment process, including advertising, referee checks and staff and volunteer preemployment screening, has an emphasis on child safety and wellbeing in line with its commitment to promote child safety. Council has robust recruitment and selection processes, to ensure the recruitment of suitable staff to minimise the risk of recruiting individuals who may commit Child Abuse. All relevant staff must have current Working with Children Checks to support the ongoing culture of child safety.

All Council staff may be required to provide a current police check at the time of employment and may be required to update this information from time to time.

Council is committed to ensuring that staff have access to appropriate induction and ongoing training **in relation to their child safety responsibilities, including Council's child safety and wellbeing policies** and procedures, external reporting obligations (e.g., mandatory reporting) and the Child Safety Code of Conduct.

In addition to position specific training requirements, training will be available to staff who are likely to come into regular contact with children and young people. This training will include how to identify, assess and minimise risks of Child Abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

7 Reporting Child Safety concerns or incidents

Council has a responsibility for receiving, responding to and investigating complaints of child harm or abuse that prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. All staff are responsible for reporting any child safety concern to their line manager or the Council Child Safety Officer as soon as possible after receiving such information or forming a belief that a child is at risk.

Council also works to ensure all children and young people, families and staff understand their obligations and know who to tell if they observe abuse, are a victim, or if they notice inappropriate behaviour.

All child safe concerns should be reported to the relevant line manager or the Council Child Safety Officer soon as possible.

Reportable Conduct includes the following incidents that must be reported:

- a) a sexual offence committed against, with or in the presence of, a child, whether or not a criminal proceeding in relation to the offence has been commenced or concluded; or
- b) sexual misconduct, committed against, with or in the presence of, a child; or
- c) physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of, a child; or
- d) any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child; or
- e) significant neglect of a child.

If a staff member has a reasonable belief that Reportable Conduct may have occurred, then they must report the incident to Council Child Safety Officer and immediately. If the incident potentially involves a criminal offence, the incident must also be reported to the local police station or by calling 000 after consulting with the Council Child Safety Officer if reasonably practicable, before contacting police.

Where a law enforcement agency is seeking to investigate any child safety concerns, staff members must co-operate to the best of their ability.

The Council Child Safety Officer, Gavin Blinman can be contacted by email at gblinman@yarriambiack.vic.gov.au or by phone on 0427 680 253.

8 Risk Management

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified. In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our 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.

9 Privacy

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, **whether they be staff, volunteers, families or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety.** Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it and who will have access to it. This stance on privacy is intended to protect reporters and to ensure that all members of Yarriambiack Shire Council are comfortable to disclose any allegations or concerns in relation to child safety without repercussions.

10 Review of Policy

This policy is to undertake a review cycle every two years.

11 References

- a) Information Privacy policy
- b) *Occupational Health and Safety Act (2004)*
- c) Child Safety Code of Conduct incorporated into Employee Code of Conduct
- d) Child Safe Code of Conduct (Early Years)
- e) Child Safe Environment Policy (Early Years)

12 Definitions

Child	Child means a child or younger person under the age of 18 years.
Child Abuse	Child Abuse means a sexual offence committed against, with or in the presence of, a child, whether or not a criminal proceeding in relation to the offence has been commenced or concluded, sexual misconduct, committed against, with or in the presence of, a child, physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of, a child, any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child or significant neglect of a child.

Council Approved Policy

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