

Protection of Children and Vulnerable People Policy

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the Centre's commitment to the protection and safety of children and all vulnerable people that use our programs and services.

2. Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the Centre's Board to ensure that this policy is implemented.

It is the responsibility of the Centre's CDO to ensure that the procedures are implemented.

3. Principles

The Centre recognises its legal and ethical responsibility to the safety and well being of children, young people and other vulnerable persons who access the services and programs of the Centre.

4. Definitions

Child - means a person under the age of 18.

Criminal history assessment - involves obtaining information about relevant potential employees, volunteers, contractors or consultants on the basis that the information is deemed relevant to working in a child-related area. The information gathered may include details concerning previous employment and relevant experience; verification of qualifications and professional registration; criminal history information, reference checks and work history reports.

Vulnerable Person – someone over 16 who is, by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness and unable to safeguard their own wellbeing, property, legal rights or other interests, and either of the following applies:

- the person is engaging in (or is likely to engage in) conduct which causes or is likely to cause self harm; or;
- another person's conduct is causing (or is likely to cause) the person to be harmed or exploited.

(Definition adapted from Law Commission's, '*Making Decisions*', Lord Chancellors Department 1999, U.K and *Closing the Gap, Enhancing South Australia's Response to the Abuse of Vulnerable Older People Report* for the SA Office of Ageing and Disability Services, October 2011.)

Child Safe Environment - an environment which protects children from abuse and/or neglect and harm

Abuse - abuse can be physical, emotional and sexual and/or neglect and include harassing behaviours like bullying.

Physical abuse - Physical abuse occurs when a person injures or threatens to injure a child or vulnerable person. This may take the form of slapping, punching, shaking, kicking, burning, shoving or grabbing and the resultant injuries may take the form of bruises, cuts, burns, bites or fractures. Possible signs of physical abuse are:

- Physical evidence of injury;
- Refusal to discuss injuries or improbable excuses to explain injuries;
- Withdrawal from physical contact;
- Fear of returning home or of caregivers being contacted
- Wariness or distrust of adults
- Aggression towards others;
- Self-destructive tendencies;
- Chronic running away.

Emotional Abuse - Emotional abuse is an ongoing attack on a child or vulnerable person's self-esteem. It can take the form of name calling, threats, ridicule, intimidation or isolation of the child or vulnerable person. Possible signs of emotional abuse are:

- Delays in physical, mental or emotional development including speech development and sudden speech disorders;
- Low self-esteem and high anxiety;
- Inappropriate emotional responses to painful situations;
- Extremes of passivity or aggression;
- Drug/alcohol abuse, compulsive stealing, chronic running away.

Neglect - Neglect is the failure to provide the child or vulnerable person with the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter and supervision, to the extent that the person's health, development and well being are placed at risk. Possible signs of neglect include:

- Frequent hunger, tiredness and poor hygiene;
- Lateness and non-attendance at school;
- Untreated medical problems;
- Low self-esteem and poor social relationships;

Sexual Abuse - Sexual Abuse occurs when an adult or someone physically bigger or older than the child or vulnerable person uses power or authority over the individual to involve the child or vulnerable person in sexual activity. Sexual abuse can be divided into two main categories:

- Contact abuse involves touching or fondling in a sexual manner and may include oral sex, vaginal or anal intercourse
- Non-contact abuse may include exposure to obscene or sexually intrusive comments, exposure to or participation in pornography, being forced to masturbate or watch others masturbate.

Possible signs of sexual abuse include:

- Bruises, scratches and other injuries in the genital or anal area not consistent with accidental injury;
- Evidence of itching, soreness, discharge, STDs or unexplained pain in the abdomen or genital area;
- Adolescent pregnancy where the identity of the father is secret or vague.

Behavioural indicators of sexual abuse may include:

- Precocious knowledge of sexual matters or acting out of sexual behaviour with adults, dolls or other children;
- Displaying unusual interest in the genitals of others;
- Promiscuity or repetitious sexually precocious behaviours;
- Sudden changes in mood or behaviour including sleeping and eating patterns;
- Regressed behaviours including bed wetting, or separation anxiety;
- Lack of trust in familiar adults, fear of strangers, fear of men;
- Acting out behaviours such as aggression, lying, running way, substance abuse and self-harming behaviours;
- Withdrawn behaviours such as passivity, excessive compliance or depression
- Learning problems and poor peer relationships at school;
- Excessive bathing or poor hygiene.

Sexual abuse is different to other forms of abuse in that it is usually premeditated. Offenders will often take time to groom their victim by building and maintaining a trusting relationship with the child or vulnerable person and his/her carers and/or isolating the child or vulnerable person in order to abuse them.

5. Policy

The Centre is committed to the safety and well being of children, young people and other vulnerable persons who access our services and programs. The Centre supports the rights of all vulnerable persons and will act without hesitation to ensure that a child safe environment is maintained at all times.

The Centre also supports the rights and well being of staff and volunteers and encourages their active participation in building and maintaining a safe environment. The Centre has high expectations of its partners and will only collaborate with organisations and agencies that demonstrate a similar commitment to child protection.

The Centre promotes the development of an open and aware culture that links all aspects of the environment to ensure that the Centre's program is protective, that the Centre's facilities are safe and open to appropriate surveillance. We expect clear boundaries between the personal and professional lives of staff and volunteers..

The Centre will build an open and aware culture:

- focusing on the relationship between staff/volunteers and children and other vulnerable persons and ensuring that there are clear boundaries between roles;

- ensuring that our programs are accountable and open to outside scrutiny and influence.
- supporting staff and volunteers through the provision of rigorous recruitment practices, adequate staffing levels and ongoing supervision and training.
- ensuring that the rights of all vulnerable persons are articulated and acted upon.

6. Procedures

Managing Risk to Minimise Abuse

A child safe environment is created and the risk of abuse is minimised by developing strategies that will reduce the opportunity for abuse to occur and increase the likelihood that abuse will be detected and reported. Strategies are developed in the following categories:

- recruitment and supervision of staff and volunteers
- physical environment
- programs, services and activities
- reporting procedures
- training
- use of Criminal History Assessments.

Recruitment and Supervision of Paid Staff and Volunteers

Rigorous recruitment processes are vital to providing a component in the creation of a child safe environment at the Centre. We believe that paid staff and volunteers have exactly the same responsibilities when it comes to the development of a child safe environment within the Centre.

By demonstrating a professional and rigorous approach to the selection and supervision of staff and volunteers, the Centre will attract good quality individuals and deter potential offenders. The Centre will implement the following strategies:

- position descriptions that clearly outline the nature of the position and the range of tasks as well as the expectations and accountabilities of the role – including specific information regarding child protection issues - will be developed for all staff and volunteers
- formal interview processes in which the applicant's skills, abilities, interests and potential are evaluated against the Job Description will be undertaken for all paid and voluntary positions
- interviews for all positions that have direct contact with children and vulnerable people will include specific questions about protection issues
- claims made in position applications will be checked and referees will always be contacted

- a comprehensive induction process that provides an overview of the Centre as well as specific details on staff supervision and support and the *Protecting Children and Vulnerable Persons Policy* will be conducted by the Community Development Officer and volunteer/programme team leader
- Criminal History Checks will be conducted for all new staff/volunteers, prior to their commencement, and every 2 years thereafter

- regular and ongoing staff supervision and professional development sessions will be scheduled for all paid staff and volunteers
- supervision of staff and volunteers who are involved in the delivery of programs for children and vulnerable people will have a particular focus on establishing and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries and will ensure that poor practice is addressed and remedied by, firstly:
 - reporting concerns to the Community Development Officer
 - discussing the issue with Community Development Officer/Team Leader
 - referring to Code of Conduct.
- performance appraisals of all paid staff and volunteers will be conducted on an annual basis.

Physical Environment

In order to reduce the potential for abuse to occur, the Centre will work towards the protection of children and vulnerable people at all times to promote an environment where:

- all rooms that are utilised by programs for children and vulnerable people are open and accessible;
- staff ratios are appropriate to supervise children and vulnerable people in programs which may be based in more than one room;
- in transporting children and vulnerable people there are always two adults in the vehicle. In those exceptional circumstances where this is not possible eg medical emergencies, the staff member or volunteers will inform the Community Development Officer of this action;
- on camps and excursions where the environment may be difficult to supervise, appropriate staff/volunteer ratios will be maintained to ensure that there is proper supervision of children and vulnerable people.

In those instances where the environment is unsafe or where it is not possible to provide appropriate supervision or support, the Centre will halt or cancel the scheduled events or activities until the risks have been overcome.

Programs Services and Activities

The Centre's Code of Conduct clearly describes appropriate behaviours in relation to children and vulnerable people within the activities and programs of the Centre. All staff and volunteers will sign a statement of acceptance that will be included in their personnel file. All breaches of the Code of Conduct will be addressed by the Board of Management in conjunction with the Community Development Officer.

Organisations and service providers (regardless if it is an association, body corporate, sole trader or partner in a partnership) who provide services wholly or partly for children and:

- *have regular contact with children and are not directly supervised at all times; or*
- *work in close proximity to children on a regular basis and are not directly supervised at all times; or*
- *supervises or manages persons who either have regular contact with children or work in close proximity to children on a regular basis; or*

- *has access to prescribed records relating to children (e.g. in connection with child protection services, education services, health services, disability services and court orders and proceedings); or*
- *carries out functions of a type prescribed by regulation,*

then, the organisation must, under the Children's Protection Act 1993 establish and maintain a child safe environment by:

- a) having in place appropriate child safe policies and procedures; and*
- b) conduct child related employment screening for each person of the Licence Holder who falls under a requirement set out in points (a) to (e) (inclusive) above; and*
- c) lodge a statement about its child safe environment policies and procedures with the Department for Education and Child Development.*

All service providers, partners or organisations that provide services or activities, wholly or partly for children will sign a statement advising that they have fulfilled their requirements of the Children's Protection Act 1993 prior to the provision of the service.

Family friendships and the protection of children and vulnerable people

In order to ensure that the Centre is a safe place for children and vulnerable people, it is critical that staff and volunteers understand the need to maintain professional relationships with program participants.

Staff and volunteers are actively discouraged from entering into personal relationships with participants outside of the Centre. The unfortunate reality is that individuals who are seeking to abuse children and vulnerable people will use personal relationships outside of the scrutiny of a professional setting to establish abusive relationships with vulnerable children and vulnerable people.

We recognise this is a complex issue for many volunteers and staff. Our Centre is a community and communities interact - personal friendships amongst families and individuals are an important and positive fact of life. Volunteers in many of the Centre's programs do mix socially with the families of program participants and volunteers do find themselves in personal contact with children and vulnerable people who attend Centre programs.

In order to minimise the risk of abusive behaviour, to protect volunteers and staff and the reputation of the Centre and to ensure that friendships between families at the Centre are not restricted, the following strategies will be implemented:

- *Volunteers and staff are actively discouraged from entering into personal relationships outside of the Centre with children and vulnerable people involved in Centre programs*
- *Where friendships between volunteers or staff and individuals and families exist prior to their involvement in Centre programs, then volunteers and staff will identify these relationships in writing to the Community Development Officer*
- *Where volunteers and staff were involved prior to their involvement in Centre programs in caring or parental-type relationships with young people (ie baby-sitting and sleepovers), then volunteers and staff will identify these relationships in writing to the Community Development Officer.*

Reporting Procedures

Abuse of children and young people is a crime and the Centre will ensure that suspicions of abuse are treated seriously and reported to the appropriate authorities (including Child Abuse Report Line on 131478). These responsibilities for reporting are outlined in Section 11 (1) and (2) in the Children's Protection Act 1993. All staff and volunteers of the Centre are obligated by law to notify Families SA if they suspect on reasonable grounds that a child or young person has been or is being abused and/or neglected and the suspicion is formed in the course of the person's work, whether paid or voluntary.

In addition to these responsibilities, the Centre will implement a reporting procedure to deal internally with all complaints and concerns or breaches of the Code of Conduct relating to the protection of children or other vulnerable people. This mechanism will ensure that staff and volunteers deal appropriately with concerns or allegations:

- staff know that they must act when they have a suspicion of abuse
- staff know how to respond when a child or vulnerable person discloses abuse to them
- staff know how to respond when another person reports a suspicion of abuse to them
- staff understand that it is not up to them to investigate the allegation or determine its accuracy
- the Centre will support staff and provide debriefing if required
- appropriate confidentiality will be maintained.

The Community Development Officer is appointed by the Board of Management is to act as the first point of contact for children, vulnerable people and caregivers. The role of the Community Development Officer is to respond to initial concerns raised by children, vulnerable people or their families and to assume an advocacy role.

Training

The Centre will ensure that all paid staff and volunteers involved in the delivery of programmes to children and other vulnerable people and all Board Members will undertake 'Child Safe Environment' Training. Staff and volunteers involved in the delivery of programs and services are expected to attend refresher training at least every two years. (This training will be offered to all Centre volunteers but attendance is not mandatory for people not working with children and vulnerable people.)

7. References

- Children's Protection Act 1993
- Information Sharing Policy
- Criminal History Assessment Policy

8. Forms or Attachments

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9. Approvals

	Policy	Procedure
Approving Authority	Board of Management	Board of Management
Approval Date	February 2016	Board of Management
Next Review Due	February 2019	