



Child Protection Policy & Procedure

Policy number:	Risk 18	Version:	3
Responsible Person:	CEO	Reviewed by:	
NRCHI Area:	Operational / Risk	Review Date:	18/7/2024
Approved and adopted by:	Board of Governance	Next Review Date:	July 2025

Acknowledgement of Country

North Ringwood Community House Inc (NRCHI) acknowledges the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation as the traditional custodians of the land on which we operate. We acknowledge and respect their contributions, experience and knowledge as First Nations people. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present.

Policy Statement

NRCHI is committed to providing a child safe environment where children’s safety is supported and children feel respected, valued and encouraged to reach their full potential.

NRCHI will ensure compliance with the **Victorian Child Safe Standards 2021** effective July 2022 including Mandatory Reporting obligations and requirements and promote a culture of safety and wellbeing to minimise the risk of child abuse or harm to children whilst promoting children’s sense of security and belonging. We recognise the importance of identifying and managing risks of child abuse in physical and online environments at NRCHI and relevant policies and procedures will incorporate Child Safe references. All reports of child abuse will be treated as serious, whether they are made by an adult or a child.

Scope

This policy and procedure applies to management, staff, Board of Governance members, volunteers, families and children, visitors (including contractors) and students of the Service who have a role with children or have access to children’s personal information. This policy applies to all programs, activities and social interactions including room hire by 3rd parties conducted by and/or held at North Ringwood Community House Inc.

Purpose

To ensure all employees and volunteers understand the meaning, and importance of providing a child safe environment and understand their obligations and requirements, and outline the steps we take to do this. This Policy will work together with NRCHI’s *Child Wellbeing Policy, Code of Conduct Policy, Employment Policy* and other related policies to develop a child safe culture within NRCHI and the community. This policy will provide direction and guidance for all staff, contractors, and visitors (including students and volunteers) to comply with and adhere to the 11 Child Safe Standards to ensure a child safe environment for all children.

Definitions

- Child/Children:** refers to both children and young people under the age of 18 years.
- Child Abuse:** refers to 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, causing serious emotional or psychological harm to a child, serious neglect of a child (Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005. Vic)
- Complaint:** Expression of dissatisfaction made to or about an organisation related to its products, services, staff or the handling of a complaint where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required. [AS/NZS 10002:2014 Complaint Management Standard]
- Information Sharing Obligations:** refers to the Child Information Sharing Scheme and the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme.
- Significant Harm:** refers to circumstances causing concern for the safety, welfare and wellbeing a child or young person present to a significant extent. This means it is sufficiently serious to warrant a response by a statutory authority irrespective of the family's consent.
- Reasonable grounds:** refers to the need to have an objective basis for suspecting that a child may be at risk of abuse and neglect based on:
- firsthand observation of the child or family
 - what the child, parent, or other person has disclosed
 - what can reasonably be inferred based on observation, professional training and/or experience that causes the mandated reporter to believe the child has been abused or is likely to be abused or,
 - signs of physical or sexual abuse leading to the belief that the child has been abused.
- Failure to disclose:** refers to the failure of a mandated reporter who has reasonable belief that a child under 16 has had a sexual offence committed to them by an adult to make a report to the police.
- Failure to protect:** refers to a person of authority in the organisation who has the power or responsibility, but who negligently fails to reduce or remove the threat of substantial risk of child sexual abuse.

Identifying signs of child abuse

Understanding the signs of child abuse is critical in supporting children's safety and wellbeing. All NRCHI staff, volunteers, contractors and visitors play a vital role in protecting children from harm by responding to and reporting any incidents, disclosure or suspicions. It is important that they are able to identify signs and behaviours that may indicate that a child has been subject to abuse or identify a community member, staff member, contractor or volunteer who may be a perpetrator.

There are different forms of child abuse-

- physical abuse
- child sexual abuse
- grooming
- emotional child abuse
- neglect
- family violence and
- children exhibiting inappropriate sexual behaviour. Further information about the recognition of signs of child abuse and definitions are include in Appendix 1 of this policy.

Duty of Care

Duty of care means:

- acting on concerns quickly and in the child's best interests
- protecting the safety, health and wellbeing of children in their care
- seeking appropriate advice or consulting when unsure
- reporting concerns to the relevant authorities
- providing ongoing support to a child and their family
- sharing information, upon request, to assist DHHS Child Protection or Police to protect and/or promote the wellbeing and development of a child
- Staff may breach their duty of care towards a child if they fail to act in the way a reasonable/diligent person would in the same situation.

Procedure

Board of Governance

Board of Governance Members must hold valid and current Working with Children and Police Checks. The Board of Governance will champion and model a child safe culture at NRCHI and will work to create a positive culture around reporting child safety issues so that people feel comfortable to raise concerns. They will undertake an Annual Review seeking input from people involved with NRCHI to ascertain how effectively NRCHI is delivering child safety and is responsible for approving the Risk Management Plan.

Risk Management/Assessments

Risk Management Plans will consider risks posed by organisational settings, activities and the physical and online environment and will be developed in consultation with staff, volunteers, parents and children.

The CEO will ensure that appropriate child safety training for staff and volunteers who have a role with children or have access to children's personal information is identified and completed and will ensure that staff and volunteers are conducting risk assessments and taking action to manage risks in accordance with this policy.

Physical and Online environment

Staff and volunteers will identify and mitigate risks in the online and physical environments without compromising a child's right to privacy, access to information, social connections and learning opportunities.

The online environment is used in accordance with NRCHI's Code of Conduct and Child Protection and Child Wellbeing policies and practices.

When contracting facilities and services from third parties, or arranging room hire by providers of services, which involve children, enquiries will be made to ensure that they have policies that ensure the safety of children and young people.

Reportable Conduct

Accessible information

An easy to understand complaints information sheet is available at NRCHI reception and on the NRCHI website for children, families and the community explaining NRCHI's complaint process and the supports available to those making a complaint.

[Risk - Form - Complaints Form for Child -Young Person V1 June 2023.docx](#)

Complaints, investigations and reporting

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction to NRCHI related to one or more of the following:

- Our services or dealings with individuals
- Allegations of abuse or misconduct by a staff member, a volunteer or another individual associated with NRCHI
- Disclosures of abuse or harm made by a child or young person
- The conduct of a child or young person at NRCHI
- The inadequate handling of a prior concern
- General concerns about the safety of a group of children or activity

The CEO is the first point of contact to provide advice and support to children, young people, parents, employees and volunteers regarding the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in our organisation. If a staff member, volunteer or contractor becomes aware of an incident or allegation of abuse, the first responsibility is to ensure that the child or children are safe and the risks of further abuse or harm are mitigated and the CEO is notified.

'Reportable conduct' is defined in the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* to include:

- a sexual offence committed against, with or in the presence of a child; or
- sexual misconduct, committed against, with or in the presence of a child; or
- physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of a child; or
- any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child; or
- significant neglect of a child.

Forming a reasonable belief/reasonable grounds

A person forms a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection, or their safety or wellbeing is at risk when they are more likely to accept rather than reject their suspicion and the belief is formed through disclosures, observations or other information. Proof is not required to support the claim.

Reasonable grounds for forming a belief may include where:

- a child states they have been abused
- a child states they know someone who has been, or is being, abused
- someone who knows the child states that the child has been abused, is being abused, or is at risk of abuse
- you observe a child's behaviour, actions or injuries that may place them at risk of harm or abuse
- you are aware of persistent violence, parental substance misuse, disability that is impacting on the child's safety, stability or development
- you observe signs or indicators of abuse.

Sufficient enquiries should be made to form a belief, however it is not the role of staff to conduct an investigation into child protection concerns or criminal offences. DFFH Child Protection or Victoria Police will determine what is to be investigated.

Reporting to Child Protection Authorities where required

In accordance with the [Responding to incidents, disclosures and suspicions Child Abuse Flowchart](#)

- 1) The CEO will report allegations of suspected criminal conduct or concerns for the **immediate safety of** a child or young person, by calling **Victoria Police on 000** as the first priority and will maintain the primacy of an investigation by Victoria Police of any allegations of criminal misconduct.

For **general safety concerns** about a child or young person, the CEO will contact the Child Protection intake office, **Child Protection, East Division on 1300 360 391** during Business hours

After 5pm and on weekends, contact the Child Protection **After Hours service on 13 12 78**.

The CEO will report allegations to the Board of Governance as soon as is practicable.

2) Reportable Conduct Scheme

- a) In addition to the above, the CEO will ensure that Notifications of Reportable Conduct are made to the Commission for Children and Young People via their website: <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/report-an-allegation/notify-about-a-reportable-allegation> or

Tel: 1300 78 29 78 (9.30–11.30am and 2.00–4.00pm Monday to Friday, except on public holidays)

email: contact@ccyp.vic.gov.au

- b) Allegations of reportable conduct to the Commission for Children and Young People must be made within **three business days** of becoming aware of the allegation. This initial report must include the following information:
- the name (including any former name and alias, if known) and date of birth, if known, of the employee concerned;
 - whether Victoria Police has been contacted about the reportable allegation;
 - the name, address and telephone number of the organisation; and,
 - the name of the head of the organisation.
- c) **As soon as practicable**, the CEO must report to the Commission for Children and Young People the details of who will conduct the investigation.

Investigation

- a) The CEO will undertake an appropriate investigation of the allegation, in accordance with existing employee misconduct processes, or permit an investigation by an existing regulator, as appropriate, and in accordance with existing laws. Refer to attached document for process; [What to do when allegation of child abuse is made.docx](#)
- b) Any employment action taken against a worker or volunteer will be in accordance with existing employment laws, relevant legislation, industrial agreements and employment contracts.
- c) As soon as practicable **after an investigation** has concluded, the Commission for Children and Young People must be notified of the findings of the investigation, the reasons for those findings and details of any disciplinary or other actions proposed.
- d) In addition, a requirement to report client incidents or professional misconduct to a relevant government department or statutory body, Department of Families, Fairness & Housing, or Department of Education, must be complied with.
- e) Within **30 days** or as soon as practicable after becoming aware of the reportable allegation, the CEO must report to the Commission for Children and Young People:
- f) detailed information about the reportable allegation, including the type of conduct alleged, details of the alleged victim;
- g) whether or not the organisation proposes to take any disciplinary or other action against the employee or volunteer and the reasons for this decision; and,
- h) any written submissions made by the employee or volunteer used in determining what action is to be taken.

Record keeping

Effective record keeping is a key strategy in the management of our child safety obligations, including the fulfillment of our duty of care.

All verbal and written communications regarding child safety matters (including notes of observations, student disclosures, meetings and telephone calls must be properly documented. Initial reports will be recorded using the *Responding to suspected child abuse – Initial Record*, and provided to the CEO as soon as practicable. All records should include dates, times and enough detail to record key conversations, especially those relating to the child's disclosure. These records must be stored securely and confidentially. Access should be limited to persons directly involved with the child and the CEO.



Policy & Procedure

All Child Safety complaints, concerns, incidents and near misses will be recorded in the Critical Incident reporting system. NRCHI will ensure that all Records pertaining to child abuse, will be kept in accordance with maintain confidentiality and privacy legislation. Records will be retained in line with the recommendations from the Office of Public Records. Reports of child abuse and complaints about child safety will be monitored by the Board of Governance to ensure that they are appropriately managed. Risks to child safety that are identified in complaints and reports of abuse will be reviewed and incorporated into the relevant risk management plan.

[Risk- Form -Responding to suspected child abuse - Initial Record V1 June 2023.rtf](#)

Recruitment

All Advertisements, Position descriptions and Interview question proformas will include references to the Child Safe Standards.

Screening

All applicants for positions (staff or volunteers) must undergo a screening and selection process based on the skills, qualifications, experience, and suitability for the position applied for. The process will include conducting robust interviews using an open-ended style of behavioural-based questioning which will provide insight into the applicant's values, attitudes and understanding of professional boundaries and accountability, checking resumes of previous experience, and reference checks

Working With Children Check and Police Checks

- a) Board of Governance Members, permanent employees and Admin Volunteers and other individuals who have a role with children or have access to children's personal information at NRCHI are required to hold current Working with Children and National Police checks.
- b) Checks must be provided **BEFORE** employees or Volunteers commence working at NRCHI.
- b) Working With Children and Police checks will be recorded in the Working with Children and Police Check Register and will include the Check numbers and the dates on which each clearance expires. Annual reviews will be undertaken to ensure currency.
- c) Working with Children checks are valid for five years unless suspended or revoked. Working with Children Check Victoria will notify NRCHI in writing if an employee/volunteer's Working with Children Check has been suspended or revoked.
- d) National Police checks are valid for 3 years.
- e) If an individual's check is revoked, suspended or expired, they will be unable to work or volunteer until the check is reinstated.

Induction

A comprehensive induction process is undertaken which includes gaining an understanding of the Code of Conduct, all current policies including Child Protection, Child Safety and Wellbeing, the Reportable Conduct Scheme and other related policies to ensure a child safe environment.



Policy & Procedure

Non Compliance

Potential breaches of this policy, the Code of Conduct and any other child safety and wellbeing policies will be investigated and may result in termination of room hire, restriction of duties, suspension or termination of employment or engagement, or other corrective action.

Related Policy/Procedures

Child Safety & Wellbeing Policy
Access & Equity Policy
Complaints & Appeals Policy
Employment Policy
Staff Handbook
Code of Conduct
Room hire policy
Social media policy
Marketing policy

Forms

Risk – Form – Complaints Form for Child – Young Person
Risk – Form - Responding to suspected child abuse – Initial Record
Risk – Form – What to do when allegation of Child Abuse is made

References:

[Victorian Child Safety Standards 2021:](#)

Child Safety Standards 2.1 -2.4
Child Safety Standard 3.3
Child Safety Standards 7.1 -7.5
Child Safety Standard 9.1 -9.4
Child safety Standard 10.1 – 10.3
Child Safety Standard 11.1 – 11.5

[Supporting Legislation](#)

[Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 \(Vic\)](#)
[Children Youth and Families Act 2005 \(Vic\) including reporting to Child Protection](#)
[Crimes Act 1958 \(Vic\) including Failure to Protect and Failure to Disclose offences](#)
[Wrongs Act 1958 \(Vic\) including Part XIII - Organisational liability for child abuse](#)

Document Locations

Electronic file folders accessible by NRCHI Administration staff
Policy & Procedure Manual
NRCHI Website

Date reviewed	Version	Details of changes (if any)	Date of next review
17/07/2024	3	Minor amendments/clarifications	17/07/2025