

Child Safety Policy

1. Policy Statement

Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited (Uniting) is the community services organisation of the Uniting Church that's worked alongside local communities across Victoria and Tasmania for over 100 years.

Uniting seeks to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice and pledges to be unfailing in our commitment to child safety.

Uniting adopts the [Uniting Church Australia National Child Safety Policy Framework, 2019](#) and the principles of this Policy Framework are directly reflected in the Uniting Child Safety Policy.

We embrace the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations adopted by the Council of Australian Governments in 2019 (available at <https://childsafeframework.gov.au/>).

Child Safety Commitment Statement:

All children involved in any Uniting activity, service, event or program have the right to feel and be safe. Accordingly, Uniting commits to:

- doing all in our power to safeguard children from all forms of abuse
- providing safe environments where children are respected, nurtured and cared for
- upholding the law including reporting abuse or allegations of abuse to the appropriate authorities.
- ensuring policy, practice and decision making which affects the safety of children places paramount consideration on child safety

1. **Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture**

Uniting commits to being a child safe organisation which includes ensuring that what is in the best interests of the child is reflected in our planning and decisions. Children's voices will be listened to, their experience will be considered. This commitment will influence our decision-making and guide our practice.

Uniting's commitment to child safety is embedded across key governance, policy and procedural frameworks demonstrate their child safety commitment via:

- Organisational Governance Policy
- Community & Consumer Safety & Wellbeing Policy
- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Service Excellence Framework

- 1.1 In policy, practice and making decisions which affect the safety of children, Uniting will ensure child safety is its paramount consideration.
- 1.2 Our leaders and our people will publicly commit to child safety, will model and champion child safe policies and practices and will make decisions that will support a child safe culture across Uniting.
- 1.3 Our governance arrangements will facilitate the implementation of child safe policies and practices and will set clear accountabilities.
- 1.4 We will document the standards of behaviour we expect from leaders, staff and volunteers and ensure our people accept individual and shared responsibility for the safety of children in contact with Uniting.
- 1.5 We will work to understand our risk areas and develop strategies which aim to prevent and mitigate risks to children and young people.
- 1.6 We will support our people to understand their obligations for information sharing and record keeping.

2. Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously

Uniting acknowledges children's rights and promotes a culture where children know they have a right to be and feel safe and know what to do if they don't. We know this means providing information to children and young people and their families in a way that is easily understood and accessible, taking into account their age, life circumstance, culture and the context of our contact with them.

Uniting's approach to consumer informed practice is evidenced in the:

- Consumer Partnership Framework
- Consumer Rights and Responsibilities Policy
- Service Delivery Policy
- Service Delivery Manuals and Procedures

We commit to the following principles and actions:

- 2.1 Uniting will work to inform children, young people and their families with information about their rights, including to safety, information and participation.
- 2.2 In our interactions with, and decision-making impacting on children and young people, we will recognise the importance of relationships with family and

friendships and encourage support from significant others in helping children feel safe and connected.

- 2.3 Where relevant to the setting or context, we will consider the need to ensure children have access to sexual abuse prevention information that is appropriate to the age and context.
- 2.4 We will ensure our staff and volunteers are familiar with the signs of trauma, abuse and grooming and have the ability to support children to express their views and raise concerns.

3. Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing

Uniting acknowledges that families have the primary responsibility for creating positive, caring and stable homes for their children. This includes the creation of community and cultural connections which bolster the protective factors that impact a child's vulnerability to abuse. We will work to strengthen families and will include them in our ways of working, making space for all people to voice concerns in relation to the safety of children.

Uniting engage with, and involve families and communities via the:

- Feedback Policy
- Consumer Partnership Framework

We commit to the following principles and actions:

- 3.1 We will support the participation of families in decisions that affect their children and recognise the need to facilitate culturally safe spaces and ways of working.
- 3.2 We will communicate openly with children and families about our child safe approach and make sure that information about it is accessible and available.
- 3.3 We will seek input and feedback from children, families and communities as we develop and review our child safety policies and practices.
- 3.4 We will keep families and communities informed about our child safety approach, operations and governance.

4. Diversity is respected and equity is promoted

Uniting wants to be a child safe organisation, but also a child friendly organisation, where we embrace and value diversity and provide safety for all people to realise their full potential, noting this is different for everyone. We commit to equitable treatment of all people regardless of age, abilities, gender or social, economic or cultural background.

Uniting commitment to diversity and equity is demonstrated in the:

- Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Policy

- Working with Diverse Communities Guidelines
- Uniting Reconciliation Action Plan

We commit to the following principles:

- 4.1 Uniting will promote inclusion of all children, considering the diversity of their circumstances.
- 4.2 We will ensure that children and young people have access to information, supports and complaints processes that are accessible, easy to understand and appropriate to age and culture of the child.
- 4.3 We will commit to meeting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and children from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, children with a disability, children who have experienced trauma and other vulnerable children.

5. Our people are suitable for work with children and committed to values of child safety and wellbeing

Recruitment and screening of all people who work with children is a vital part of keeping children safe. We will be intentional with our people, exploring values, understanding motivations for working with children and ensuring ongoing training and supervision to maintain awareness and vigilance amongst our communities.

Uniting has specific recruitment and screening practices for their workforce, along with ongoing supervision and support outlined within the:

- Recruitment and Selection Policy
- Pre-employment check Policy
- Supervision Protocol and Procedure
- Compliance checking processes

We commit to the following principles and actions:

- 5.1 We will ensure that recruitment, referee checking and screening processes for all our people include an emphasis on child safety and wellbeing.
- 5.2 All persons who need a working with children check will have a current check, including international criminal history checks where required.
- 5.3 Those working with children will receive an induction which emphasises child safe culture and sets out behavioural expectations in working with children, along with record keeping, information sharing and reporting obligations.
- 5.4 Ongoing staff support, supervision and people management will include a focus on child safety and wellbeing.

6. Child focused complaints processes

We acknowledge that to be effective, processes to raise concerns and complaints about the safety of children need to be known, simple and taken seriously. Uniting processes will prioritise the safety and wellbeing of children in the way we manage and respond to complaints and concerns.

Uniting has clear processes for addressing allegations regarding the abuse and neglect of children, which are articulated within the:

- Feedback and Complaints Management Procedure
- Responding to Allegations or Disclosures of Abuse or Harm involving Consumers Protocol
- Reporting Allegations of Child Abuse Protocol
- Incident Reporting and Management procedure
- Quality of Care reviews
- Whistleblower Policy and Procedure

We commit to the following principles and actions:

- 6.1 Uniting will have an accessible, child focused complaint handling policy which clearly outlines the roles and responsibility of leadership, staff and volunteers, approaches to dealing with different types of complaints, breaches of relevant policies - including codes of conduct – and obligations to protect and report.
- 6.2 Our complaint handling process will be culturally appropriate, clear and easily understood by children and young people, and all our people.
- 6.3 Complaints will be taken seriously and responded to promptly and thoroughly. Where a complaint of abuse of a child becomes known it will be immediately reported to the authorities, including police and other statutory authorities, and we will immediately take the appropriate steps to assess and minimise any further risk or harm.
- 6.4 Uniting requires any person who is aware of, or suspects child abuse or harm to make a report to the authorities, including police and other statutory authorities, and we will support relevant authorities' investigations into any concerns about children and/or allegations of abuse or harm towards children. While investigations are being conducted, we will ensure child protection measures continue to be in place. In consultation with police and other authorities, and subject to their approval, we will conduct our own inquiries and investigations in order to identify opportunities for child safe practice improvements.
- 6.5 We will meet reporting, privacy and employment law obligations.

7. Our people are provided with ongoing education and training on child safety

Uniting commits to keeping child safety high on our agenda and will provide initial and ongoing education and training on child safety to those who work with children. We know that this is critical to ongoing maintenance of a child safe organisation and to our people maintaining contemporary knowledge which supports them to make good decisions, to maintain vigilance in recognizing the signs of abuse and to support children who have concerns.

Uniting commit to child safety education and training in the following ways:

- Induction and Orientation Procedure
- Training and Development Protocol
- U-learn platform

We commit to the following principles and actions:

- 7.1 Our people will be trained and supported to effectively implement our child safety and wellbeing policies.
- 7.2 Our people will be given information to recognise indicators of child harm.
- 7.3 Our people will have information on how to respond effectively to disclosures or concerns of abuse by a child or another person.
- 7.4 Our people will be given information about how to build safe environments for children and young people, including environments which are safe for people of different cultures.

8. Physical and online environments promote safety

Uniting acknowledges that physical environments and online behaviour can impact on the safety of children. We will be intentional in our assessment of risks and take steps to mitigate risk as much as possible by considering physical environments, evaluating high risk activities and making online behavioural expectations of our people very clear.

Uniting apply a child safety risk lens to their programs and services, and this is articulated in the:

- Risk Management Framework and Policy

We commit to the following principles and actions:

- 8.1 Our people will identify and mitigate risks in our online and physical environments while facilitating a child's right to privacy, access to information, social connections and learning opportunities.
- 8.2 Our people will understand their obligations in using our online environments.

- 8.3 Where activities involve children, we will assess risk from the type of activity, the physical environment and the organisational setting.
- 8.4 If outside parties are engaged to provide services to us (including temporary/agency staff, procurement), we will consider the child safety requirements in engaging outside parties.

9. Review and continuous improvement of policy, procedure and practice

Uniting is committed to continuous improvement and will be intentional in its review of policy, procedure and practice. We will examine incidences and reports to identify systemic issues and take lessons from what we learn.

Uniting has clear processes for reviewing and improving practice by way of:

- Service Excellence Framework
- Quality and Compliance Policy
- Continuous Improvement Procedure

We commit to the following principles and actions:

- 9.1 We will monitor the implementation of our child safe policies and procedures and conduct regular reviews of our child safe practices.
- 9.2 We will critically review all incidents and reports to identify causes and trends, manage risks, identify systemic issues and improve our child safe policies and practices.
- 9.3 We will communicate with our people and communities on the findings of relevant reviews.

10. Policies and procedures document child safety

Uniting acknowledges that it is not enough to have in principle commitment to child safety but that these commitments must be documented in policy and procedure so that there is clarity, accountability and shared understanding.

Uniting's policies, protocols, procedures and work instructions are contemporary and governed by the:

- Policy Framework

We commit to the following principles and actions:

- 10.1 Our policies and procedures will address all the child safe principles set out in this policy framework.
- 10.2 Our policies and procedures will be documented and easy to understand.
- 10.3 Development of policies and procedures will include stakeholder consultations.
- 10.4 Leaders will champion and model compliance with policies and procedures.
- 10.5 Our people will be supported to understand and implement, and consistently apply policies and procedures.

Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board (or the delegated Board Committee) is responsible for approving this policy, any changes to it and overseeing compliance with this policy • Management are responsible for ensuring that policies are operating effectively and being adhered to • In the first quarter of each financial year management will report to the Board regarding adherence to approved policies and any required improvement plans
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2. Definitions

Term	Meaning
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	A person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives.
Allegation	A claim or assertion, without definitive proof, that a wrongdoing (i.e. abuse or grooming of a child) has happened or is likely to happen.
Child	Any person under the age of 18.
Child Abuse	<p>Child abuse is an act by a person or persons which endangers a child or young person's physical or emotional health or development. Child abuse can be a single incident or may take place over time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical abuse occurs when a child suffers or is likely to suffer significant harm from an injury inflicted by a child's parent or caregiver or any other adult. The injury may be inflicted intentionally or may be the inadvertent consequence of physical punishment or physically aggressive treatment of a child. This may take the form of punching, beating, shaking or otherwise harming a child. • Sexual abuse occurs when a person uses power, force or authority over a child in any form of sexual activity. • Grooming is a predatory behaviour designed to prepare a child for sexual abuse.

- Emotional Abuse occurs when a child's parent or caregiver or any other adult repeatedly rejects the child or uses threats to frighten the child and includes exposure to family violence.
- Neglect is the failure to provide the child's basic needs of life such as food, clothing, shelter, medical attention or supervision, to the extent that the child's health and development is, or is likely to be, significantly harmed.

Child Safe

Refers to an organisational environment that has an open and aware culture, understands child abuse, is supported by well-known child safety policy, promotes the empowerment and participation of children, manages child safety risks; and expects all stakeholders to report all allegations, disclosures or concerns. Child safety encompasses matters related to protecting all children from child abuse and neglect, intervening early where concerns arise, preventing abuse where possible, managing the risk of child abuse, providing support to a child at risk of child abuse, and responding to incidents or allegations of child abuse. Child safety includes cultural safety for children.

Child protection

Refers to legislation, statutory authority responsible for child protection, and all measures taken to minimise the risk of child abuse. Child protection is a core part of the broader, over-arching concept of child safety.

Code of conduct

The Uniting policy which specifies behaviours expected of all employees, volunteers and leaders in the organisation.

Complaint

Includes any allegations, suspicions, concerns or reports of a breach of the institution's code of conduct, or disclosures made to an institution that may constitute or relate to child sexual abuse in an institutional context.

Cultural safety

Respecting, accommodating and being responsive to the cultural and spiritual beliefs and needs of our consumers, staff and stakeholders; creating an environment that is

	<p>safe for people and free from discrimination, challenge or denial of their identity.</p> <p>Culturally and Linguistically Diverse. Refers to people of diverse ethnic and other cultural backgrounds, who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are identified as Aboriginal and Torres Islander culture• Were born overseas in a non-English speaking country• Are Australian born with at least one parent born from a non-English speaking country or are Australian born and have a strong affiliation to a cultural and linguistic heritage that is not Anglo Celtic• CALD is inclusive of those people who identify with the deaf community.
Culturally and/or linguistically diverse background (CALD)	
Disability	<p>Any physical, sensory, neurological disability acquired brain injury or intellectual disability or developmental delay that affects a child’s ability to undertake everyday activities. A disability can occur at any time in life. Some disabilities may be obvious while others are hidden.</p>
Disclosure	<p>Refers to a child telling someone (through words, drawings or actions) that he or she feels unsafe or has been harmed.</p>
Mandatory reporter	<p>A mandated reporter is a person who, because of his or her profession, is legally required to report any suspicion of child abuse or neglect to the relevant authorities. There is variation between states on which professions are mandated to report.</p>

3. Related Legislation/Regulations

Duty of Care – Children, Youth & Families Act 2005 (VIC)

Organisational Liability – Wrongs Amendment (Org Child Abuse) Act 2017 (VIC)

Child Safe Standards – Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (VIC)

Failure to Disclose – relevant to each Australian State/Territory

Failure to Protect – relevant to each Australian State/Territory

Voluntary Reporting – relevant to each Australian State/Territory

Mandatory Reporting – relevant to each Australian State/Territory

Reportable Conduct – relevant to each Australian State/Territory

Working with Children/Vulnerable People Checks – relevant to each Australian State/Territory

Grooming – relevant to each Australian State/Territory

Age of Consent – relevant to each Australian State/Territory

4. Related Documents

External

Uniting Church Australia - National Child Safety Policy Framework

Human Rights Commission - National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

Commission for Children and Young People (Victoria) - A Guide for Creating a Child Safe Organisation

Internal

As referenced throughout document.