

Child Safety Policy

1. Policy Statement

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that at Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited (Uniting), our representatives along with the families, children, young people, stakeholders and communities that engage with our activities, services and programs are aware of our commitment and obligation to creating a child safe organisation.

All children and young people have a right to feel safe and be safe. We are committed to providing environments where children and young people are respected, nurtured and cared for.

Uniting acknowledges that abuse, harm and neglect to children and young people may come from:

- parents/caregivers
- guardians or supervisors
- people engaged by Uniting
- members of the public
- other children or young people

Uniting aims to create a safe, culturally safe and inclusive environment for **all** children and young people, and actively promotes:

- cultural safety of children and young people that identify as First Nations people
- cultural safety of children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- The safety of children and young people with a disability
- the safety of children and young people that identify as LGBTIQI+
- the safety of children and young people that do not live at home.

This policy intends to:

- articulate the Uniting commitment to keeping children and young people safe.
- reinforce a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse, harm and neglect.
- document the key principles and components which help maintain a child safe environment.
- promote the rights, empowerment and diverse circumstances of all children and young people.
- raise awareness for Uniting representatives of their conduct and responsibilities when working with and engaging with children and young people at any time.
- identify risks and appropriate responses to concerns of child abuse, harm and neglect.
- protect children and young people from all forms of abuse, harm and neglect in the delivery of activities, services and programs.

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2. Scope

Uniting operates activities, services and programs in Victoria, Tasmania, and other States/Territories across Australia. This policy, along with related policies and procedures apply to all related geographical areas.

We have created this policy to ensure that our people, children, young people, families, stakeholders and communities accessing Uniting activities, services and programs are clear on our child safety commitment.

This policy applies to the following people:

- all people engaged by Uniting
- organisations and entities which Uniting partners with

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1. Uniting Board

The Uniting Board are responsible for:

- Owning the Uniting Child Safety strategy and policy
- Providing oversight of organisation-wide child safe practices
- Ensuring appropriate resourcing is allocated to implementing child safe practice
- Advocating for child safe practices both within Uniting and with partner organisations
- Monitoring of organisational compliance to legislative requirements and key frameworks
- Ensuring processes are appropriately followed when a concern of child abuse, harm and neglect arise.

3.2. Uniting Management:

Uniting Management are responsible for:

- Ensuring Uniting Child Safety strategies and policies are implemented across the organisation
- Prioritising child safe practices at an operational level
- Ensuring Uniting representatives are suitable, skilled and aware of their roles and responsibilities
- Advocating for child safe practice both within Uniting and with partner organisations
- Ensuring organisational compliance to legislative requirements and key frameworks
- Role modelling an open and aware child safe and child friendly culture.

3.3. Uniting representatives:

Uniting representatives are responsible for:

- Adhering to the Child Safety Policy, Child Safety Code of Conduct and related Child Safety policies and procedures

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- Promoting child safe practice across the organisation
- Ensuring personal knowledge and education regarding child safety is current
- Identifying, mitigating and managing risks to children and young people
- Ensuring children and young people are engaged and are consulted about things that impact or affect them at Uniting
- Recognising, appropriately responding to, and reporting concerns of child abuse, harm and neglect.

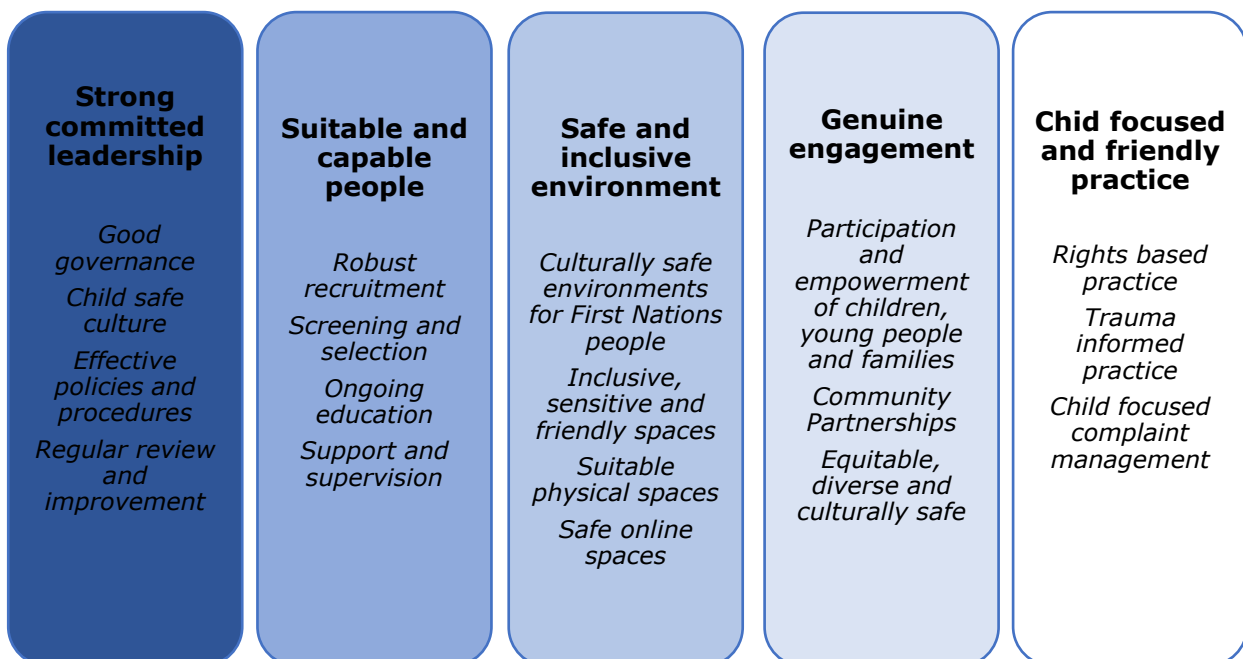
4. Policy

4.1. Child Safety Commitment Statement

All children and young people have the right to feel and be safe and connected to their lands, sea and culture. Accordingly, Uniting commits to:

- doing all in our power to safeguard children and young people from all forms of abuse, harm, neglect, discrimination or exclusion.
- providing culturally safe environments where children and young people are respected, nurtured and cared for.
- ensuring we report abuse or allegations of abuse, harm and neglect to the appropriate authorities.
- ensuring policy, practice and decision making which affects the safety of children and young people focuses on the importance of child safety.

4.2. Uniting Child Safety Framework



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4.3. Forms of Abuse

The forms of abuse referenced in this policy include:

- Sexual abuse and sexual misconduct
- Grooming
- Harmful sexual behaviour
- Physical abuse
- Emotional and psychological abuse (inclusive of cultural abuse)
- Exposure to family violence
- Neglect

Refer **Appendix A** for full definitions of forms of abuse.

4.4. Legislation, Standards and Frameworks

Uniting’s Child Safety policy and procedures align with the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), the [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#) and State and Territory based Child Safe Standards. The policy principles have been mapped to the requirements of the UCA National Child Safety Policy and Framework to ensure alignment.

We understand our compliance requirements to State and Territory based legislation in the jurisdictions we serve (Refer **Appendix B**).

4.5. Breaches

Any non-compliance or breaches of the **Child Safety Policy, Child Safety Code of Conduct** or related Child Safety policies and procedures will be taken seriously and treated as a breach of the terms of employment or engagement with Uniting and may result in disciplinary action. This action may include termination of employment or engagement.

5. Policy Principles

Strong and committed leadership

Reference: National Principles for Child Safe Standards: 1, 9, 10
Victorian Child Safe Standards: 2, 10, 11

5.1. Good governance

Our governance arrangements facilitate the implementation of Child Safety Principles and Standards, our Child Safety Policy, Child Safety Code Conduct and related policies and strategies to enhance the rights and safety of children and young people. We ensure the roles, responsibilities and obligations of our representatives to keep children and young people safe are clearly defined, we are held accountable, and we are transparent with our actions.

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5.2. Child safe culture

Uniting believes that a child safe culture is led and modelled by Uniting governance and leadership and extends to all of those we come in contact with. Our Child Safety Code of Conduct applies to all of our representatives, and will be actively applied across all activities, services and programs as a part of everyday practice. Refer **Child Safety Code of Conduct**.

5.3. Effective policies and procedures

Our policies and procedures support us to be a child safe organisation and are reviewed on a regular basis, with stakeholder consultation. Our Child Safety policies and procedures will be accessible to all Uniting representatives, children, young people, families and the broader community, as relevant. All of our representatives must demonstrate practices and behaviours that support our policies and procedures, and our leaders will monitor the implementation and compliance of such.

5.4. Regular review and improvement

Uniting aims to continuously improve our child safe and child friendly environments and actively seeks feedback from stakeholders (children, young people, families/carers, Uniting representatives) to do so. We acknowledge that there are always enhancements to be made, ensure that we regularly review our child safety performance, execute improvement plans and provide adequate resourcing to do so. Refer **Continuous Improvement Procedure**.

Suitable and capable people

Reference: National Principles for Child Safe Standards: 5, 7
Victorian Child Safe Standards: 6, 8

5.5. Robust recruitment

Uniting seeks to recruit representatives that are safe to work with children and young people and are aligned to our work in creating child safe and child friendly environments. Robust processes will be applied to the recruitment process, and those responsible for recruitment will be adequately skilled and supported to do so.

5.6. Screening and selection

All representatives will be screened as per legislative requirements (including National and International Crime Check and Working with Children Check (Vic) or the State/Territory based equivalent and selected as being suitable to work with children and young people, via thorough interviews and reference checking processes that include child safety elements. Refer **Recruitment Policy, Safety Screening Policy & Volunteers Policy**.

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5.7. Ongoing education

Our representatives will be adequately trained and supported to complete their roles in a child safe organisation, implement child safe standards, and support the rights of children and young people. All Uniting representatives will receive a child safety related induction and commit to upholding our policies, along with ongoing education to improve their child safety skills. Training will be appropriately resourced and recorded. Refer **Induction and Orientation Procedure & Training and Development Protocol**.

5.8. Support and supervision

Ongoing supervision and people management will be provided and have a focus on child safety and wellbeing. The supervision, support and management of our representatives includes identifying child safety training needs and will support an ongoing assessment of our representative's suitability to work with children and young people. Refer **Supervision Protocol & Procedure**.

Safe and inclusive environments

Reference: National Principles for Child Safe Standards: 2, 8
Victorian Child Safe Standards: 1, 9

5.9. Culturally safe environments for First Nations people

Our representatives will actively support and facilitate the participation and inclusion of our First Nations people, and recognise their achievements, communities and culture. We work in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's First Peoples and as the traditional owners and custodians of this land. Uniting will not tolerate any form of racism and will ensure any examples of such are identified and appropriately addressed. Refer **Reconciliation Action Plan**.

5.10. Inclusive, sensitive and friendly spaces

Uniting uphold the rights of children and young people to express their culture, celebrate diversity and appreciate the strengths of cultures. Our activities, services and programs must meet the needs of all children and young people (and their families) and provide environments that are inclusive, sensitive and friendly.

5.11. Suitable physical spaces

Uniting recognises our responsibility to proactively identify and reduce or remove risks to children and young people. Risk management strategies are in place to identify, assess, and minimise child safety risks, and these risks are managed via a risk management plan and register. Wherever possible, children and young people will be involved in risk identification and mitigation strategies. Refer **Risk Management Framework and Policy**.

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Safe physical environments will be provided by Uniting. Safety assessments will be conducted on facilities/sites to ensure they are suitable and safe for Uniting activities, services and programs with children and young people to occur.

5.12. Safe online spaces

Uniting representatives will have an awareness of safe practice when communicating with children and young people via online and electronic systems. Online risks will be considered in risk management planning, along with opportunities for children and young people to report any concerns about electronic/online communication. Refer **Electronic Communication with Children and Young People Protocol** and **Social Media Procedure**.

Genuine engagement

Reference: National Principles for Child Safe Standards: 2, 3, 4
Victorian Child Safe Standards: 1, 3, 4, 5

5.13. Participation and empowerment of children, young people and families

Uniting promotes the voices of children and young people and places a high priority on their participation and empowerment as community members. We believe in building an organisational culture based on what is in the best interests of children and young people at all times. We understand that children and young people are more likely to speak up about concerns if they know that their views are valued, and welcomed by, an organisation.

Our representatives will ensure that children and young people are aware of their rights and are supported to exercise them. A child friendly version of this policy will be made available to children and young people. We will consult with children and young people wherever possible, and they will inform our decision making.

Importantly, we know that families, carers and guardians are key stakeholders, and alongside our representatives, play a role in maintaining safe environments for children and young people and supporting Uniting to be a child safe organisation. We will work in partnership with families and facilitate regular communication and meaningful participation. Refer **Consumer Partnerships Framework**.

5.14. Community partnerships

We acknowledge that our activities, services and programs at Uniting rely on strong community partnerships, and our role in maintaining child safe environments stretches to the broader community. Our commitment to child safety, along with relevant policies, procedures and information will be available to the communities in which we work, and the partnerships we form. We will ensure all partner organisations meet our child safety standards.

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5.15. Equitable, diverse and culturally safe

Uniting strongly believes all children and young people have the right to live safely and will not tolerate any form of bullying, harassment, harm or abuse. The wellbeing of *all* children and young people, including environments that are culturally safe is an indicator of a child safe organisation. Refer **Diversity Statement, Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Policy & Working with Diverse Communities Guidelines**.

We acknowledge the needs of children and young people from diverse backgrounds, including those:

- living with a disability
- who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (or questioning) or Intersex (LGBTQI+)
- living away from home
- are First Nations people
- are culturally and linguistically diverse.

We will provide children and young people with access to information, support and complaints processes in ways that are culturally safe, accessible and easy to understand.

Child focused and friendly practice

Reference: National Principles for Child Safe Standards: 2, 6
Victorian Child Safe Standards: 3, 7

5.16. Rights based practice

Uniting supports the **United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child's** child rights approach. This approach recognises, respects and protects the human rights of children and young people in the development and implementation of laws, policies, practices and decisions affecting them. It focuses on genuine engagement with children and young people, their right to know their rights, taking action to promote their right to safety and their right to have their views heard. Refer **Consumer Rights and Responsibilities Policy**.

5.17. Trauma informed practice

At Uniting, we understand how trauma affects people's lives, especially children and young people.

We recognise we must respond appropriately to children and young people who are dealing with trauma and its effects, to ensure best outcomes for individuals and families. We will support our representatives to apply the principles of a trauma informed approach to all instances and concerns of child abuse, harm and neglect.

Refer **Responding to Allegations or Disclosures of Abuse involving Consumers Procedure**.

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5.18. Child focused complaint management

Uniting will ensure clear and accessible complaint pathways are available for children, young people, their families, the broader community and our representatives. For pathways for raising a complaint, refer to our **Consumer Handbook**.

All complaints will be treated seriously and responded to accordingly (and in line with the Uniting process for responding to, and reporting concerns of abuse, harm and neglect), and with the best interests of children and young people as the priority. Uniting will use the outcomes of complaints to review their child safety policies, practice and culture. Refer **Feedback, Compliments and Complaints Procedure** and **Whistleblower Policy**.

5.19. Responding to concerns, allegations and incidents

Our representatives are required to respond in sensitive and appropriate ways to concerns, allegations, disclosures and incidents of child abuse, harm and neglect and will be supported to do so. Children, young people and their families will be supported throughout the process and (where applicable) will be consulted to ensure their rights and participation in decision making is upheld. Refer **Responding to Allegations or Disclosures of Abuse involving Consumers Procedure**.

Uniting commits to undertaking prompt and effective investigations into allegations involving our representatives. Investigations will be conducted with the principles of procedural fairness, confidentiality and privacy and the outcomes of investigations and any improvement/changes to practice will be communicated to stakeholders as appropriate. Refer **Safeguarding & External Reporting Investigations processes**.

5.20. Reporting instances of child abuse, harm and neglect

Uniting will ensure that all concerns, allegations and incidents are reported via internal and external pathways, as required by law, ethically and in line with our policies. Our representatives will co-operate with authorities and investigators, and ensure all reporting obligations are met, including reporting requirements mandated by law. A reporting procedure, along with training to clarify reporting roles and responsibilities has been made available to our representatives. Refer **Reporting allegations of child abuse Procedure**.

5.21. Privacy and confidentiality

All Uniting representatives involved in the handling of allegations of child abuse, harm and neglect will be mindful of the sensitive nature of the issue and take all reasonable steps to maintain confidentiality and respect the privacy of all those involved. In order for Uniting to perform its functions under legislation, we may be required to collect personal information about our representatives or children and young people and disclose that information to a third party. Refer **Privacy Policy** and **Information Sharing and MARAM Policy**.

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5.22. Record keeping

Uniting will ensure that accurate records of child safety related concerns are collected and stored in line with best practice standards. Refer **Record Keeping and Release of Information Policy**.

5.23. Historical allegations

As part of our work of being a child safe organisation and promoting the safety of children and young people, Uniting may become aware of a disclosure of non-recent (historic) abuse, harm or neglect from those who have attended a Uniting activity, service or program in the past. Uniting commits to responding to such allegations in a sensitive and effective manner, noting that there may be a possibility that a person who abused a child or young person in the past may still be doing so, and criminal prosecutions may still take place even though the allegations are historical in nature. Refer **Incident Management and Reporting Procedure**.

5.24. Review and updates

Uniting commit to reviewing the Child Safety Policy as required, and at a minimum, every three years or as required by legislation. Review of the Policy will include consultation with experts and key stakeholders, including children and young people. Changes to any child safety related policy, child safety code of conduct or procedure will be communicated to all stakeholders.

6. Definitions

Term	Meaning
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	A person who is of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait descent, identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander by an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community.
Abuse	Refer to appendix A for definitions of all types of abuse
Child	Any person under the age of 18 years old (typically 0-12 years).
Child Safe	An environment where children and young people’s safety and wellbeing is at the centre of values and actions and where there is an emphasis on genuine engagement with and valuing of children and young people. Conditions reduce the likelihood of harm to children and young people, increase the likelihood of identifying any harm and responds to any concerns, disclosures, allegations or suspicions of harm.

Child Friendly	Behaviour, conduct, practice, process, attitude, environment and / or treatment that is humane, considerate and in the best interest of children and young people.
Child Protection	Statutory authority responsible for child protection, and all measures taken to minimise the risk of child abuse.
Child Safety Code of Conduct	A document which specifies behaviours expected of all people of the organisation when engaging with children or young people.
Consultant	A person who provides expert advice professionally.
Contractor	A person or organisation that undertakes a contract to provide labour, a service or job.
Cultural safety	The positive recognition and celebration of cultures. It is more than just the absence of racism or discrimination, and more than cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity. It is an environment which is socially and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for children. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening.
Culturally and/or linguistically diverse background (CaLD)	Identification with particular cultural or linguistic affiliations by virtue of place of birth, ancestry or ethnic origin, religion, preferred language or language spoken at home or because of parents' identification on a similar basis.
Disability	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.
Disclosure	A child or young person telling someone (through words, drawings or act) that they feel unsafe or have been harmed.
Harm (of a child/young person)	Damage to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child/young person, as a result of child abuse by adults or the conduct of other children/young people. It includes physical, emotional, sexual and psychological harm. Harm can arise from a single act or event and can also be cumulative, that is, arising as a result of a series of acts or events over a period of time
Leaders	Leader refers to any employee or volunteer who holds management responsibilities.

Uniting Representatives	All people performing paid and unpaid work on behalf of Uniting including, employees, contractors, volunteers, temporary or agency employees and people on work experience.
Visitor	A person who is a member of the public, visiting a Uniting site.
Volunteer	An unpaid member of Uniting supporting program delivery or operations.
Young Person	Any person under the age of 18 years (typically 13-18yrs).

7. Legislation/Regulations

[United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

[National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#)

See **Appendix B** for State and Territory Based Legislation and Child Safe Standards

8. Related Documents

[Uniting Church Australia National Child Safety Policy Framework, 2022](#)

[Diversity Statement](#)

[Child Safety Commitment Statement](#)

Child Safety Code of Conduct

Community and Consumer Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Consumer Handbook

Consumer Partnership Framework

Consumer Rights and Responsibilities Policy

Continuous Improvement Procedure

Electronic Communication with Children and Young People Protocol

Feedback, Compliments and Complaints Procedure

Freedom from abuse, neglect, violence, exploitation & discrimination guidelines

Incident Reporting and Management Procedure

Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Policy

Induction and Orientation Procedure

Information Sharing and MARAM (Multi – Agency Risk Assessment & Management) Policy

Legislative Compliance Policy

Organisational Governance Policy

Policy Framework

Safety Screening Policy

Privacy Policy

Recruitment Policy

Reconciliation Action Plan

Record Keeping and Release of Information Policy

Reporting allegations of child abuse Procedure

Responding to Allegations or Disclosures of Abuse involving Consumers Procedure

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Risk Management Framework
 Risk Management Policy
 Safeguarding & External Reporting Investigations processes
 Service Excellence Framework
 Social Media Procedure
 Supervision Protocol & Procedure
 Training and Development Protocol
 Volunteers Policy (coming soon)
 Whistleblower Policy & Procedure
 Working with Diverse Communities Guidelines

9. External Documents

Victorian Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP)–

- [A guide for creating a Child Safe Organisation](#)
- *Empowerment and Participation* – [A guide for organisations working with children and young people](#)

SNAICC –

- *Keeping our kids safe: Cultural safety and the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations*

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Appendix A – Forms of Abuse¹

Sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse is when a person uses power or authority over a child to involve them in sexual activity. It includes a broad range of behaviours involving a sexual element that are committed against, with or in the presence of a child. Sexual offences may involve contact, like touching or penetration. They also include acts that do not involve physical contact like 'flashing', possessing child abuse material or grooming.

Sexual misconduct

Sexual misconduct includes a variety of sexualised behaviours against, with or in the presence of a child. These behaviours may not meet the threshold for a sexual offence but can still pose a significant risk to children. Behaviours could include inappropriate conversations of a sexual nature, comments that express a desire to act in a sexual manner, or in some cases, behaviour that crosses a professional boundary, such as having or seeking to establish an inappropriate or overly personal or intimate relationship with a child.

Grooming

Grooming behaviour can involve the use of a variety of manipulative and controlling techniques used to build trust or normalise sexually harmful behaviour. Grooming is often described as the 'preparation' phase of child sexual abuse, undertaken by the perpetrator to gain the trust of a child, and to establish secrecy and silence. Perpetrators may groom to gain access to a child, initiate and maintain sexual abuse of that child, and to conceal the sexual abuse from others who may identify it.

Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) is developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour which is displayed by children and young people and which may be harmful or abusive. It can be displayed towards younger children, peers, older children or adults. It is harmful to the children and young people who display it, as well as those it is directed towards.

Physical abuse

Physical violence can occur when a person intentionally or recklessly uses physical force against, with or in the presence of a child without their consent, which causes, or could cause, the child harm. Physical violence can include hitting, punching, kicking, pushing or throwing something that strikes a child. It also includes the use of

¹ Victorian Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP)– A guide for creating a Child Safe Organisation
 National Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)
 SNAICC - Keeping our kids safe: cultural safety and the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations
 Family Law Act 1975 (Cth) – Definition of Exposure to Family Violence

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words or gestures that cause a child to believe that they are about to suffer physical violence.

Emotional or psychological abuse

Emotional and psychological abuse may arise in circumstances that involve persistent verbal abuse, coercive or manipulative behaviour, hostility towards a child, humiliation, belittling or scapegoating, conveying to a child that they are worthless, unloved, inadequate or rejected, or causing a child to frequently feel frightened or in danger.

Cultural Abuse

Cultural abuse can cause emotional and psychological harm. Cultural abuse occurs when the culture of a people is ignored, denigrated or intentionally attacked. It can be overt or covert, for example, a lack of cultural sensitivity or absence of positive images about another culture. Cultural abuse is especially harmful for children

Exposure to Family Violence

Exposure to violent, threatening or other behaviour by a person that coerces or controls a member of the person's family (the family member), or causes the family member to be fearful. A child is exposed to violence if that child sees or hears family violence or otherwise experiences the effects of family violence.

Neglect

Neglect is a failure to meet the basic needs of a child (such as their wellbeing and safety). Neglect can arise as a result of a single event or a combination of different events. Some neglectful behaviours that can occur in organisations include:

- supervisory neglect (failure to appropriately exercise adequate supervision or control of a child)
- physical neglect (failure to meet a child's physical needs including the provision of adequate and appropriate food, clothing, shelter or physical hygiene)
- educational neglect (failure to ensure that a child's formal educational needs are being met)
- emotional neglect (failure to provide adequate nurturing, encouragement and support to a child).

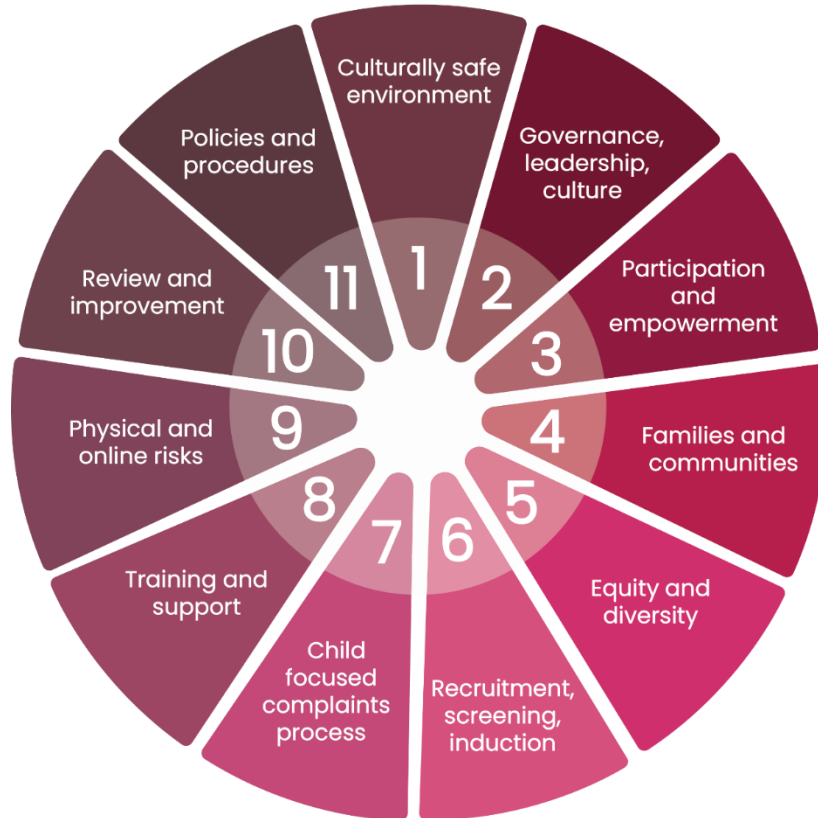
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Appendix B – Related Frameworks and Legislation

[United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

[National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#)

Victorian Child Safe Standards:



State and Territory Based Legislation:

Organisational Liability	VIC , TAS , NSW , ACT , QLD , SA , NT ,
Child Safe Standards	VIC , NSW , SA
Duty of Care, Voluntary and Mandatory Reporting	VIC , TAS , NSW , ACT , QLD , SA , NT ,
Failure to Protect	VIC , NSW , ACT , QLD , SA
Failure to Disclose/Report	VIC , TAS , NSW , ACT , QLD , SA
Reportable Conduct Scheme	VIC , NSW , ACT
Grooming	VIC , TAS , NSW , ACT , QLD , SA , NT ,
Age of consent	VIC , TAS , NSW , ACT , QLD , SA , NT ,
Working with Children Checks	VIC , TAS , NSW , ACT , QLD , SA , NT ,
Information sharing	VIC , TAS , NSW , ACT , QLD , NT ,
Family Law Act 1975	Commonwealth

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