

Policy Title:	Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy		
Approved by:	Board	Version:	2.0
Responsibility:	CEO	Adopted on:	29 August 2024
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1 POLICY STATEMENT

At South East Community Links (SECL), we are committed to ensuring the safety, protection, and wellbeing of all children under our care. We recognize that children are among the most vulnerable members of our community, and it is our responsibility to create a safe and nurturing environment for them to thrive. This policy statement outlines our commitment to promoting child safety and wellbeing in all aspects of our operations.

2 SCOPE

This policy and procedure apply to all employees and officers (including directors) of SECL and also contractors / sub-contractors and other workplace participants including volunteers and work experience students (**Workplace Participants**).

3 ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND DELEGATIONS

3.1 OUR COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

SECL is committed to child safety.

- We want children to be safe, happy, and empowered.
- We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers.
- We are committed to the safety, participation, and empowerment of all children.
- We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our policies and procedures.
- We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously.
- SECL is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early and removing and reducing these risks.
- SECL has human resources and recruitment practices to reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing workplace participants.

- SECL is committed to regularly training and educating our workplace participants on child abuse risks.
- We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability.
- We have specific policies and procedures in place that support our board members, staff and volunteers to achieve these outcomes.

3.2 OUR COMMITMENT TO CHILDREN

This policy is intended to empower children, who are vital and active participants at SECL. We involve them when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say.

We promote diversity and acceptance at SECL, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome. We:

- promote the cultural safety, participation, and empowerment of Aboriginal children
- promote the cultural safety, participation, and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate equally

3.3 RESPONSIBILITIES

The Board

In accordance with the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations it is the responsibility of the board to ensure that:

- SECL has appropriate policies, procedures, and culture in place to:
 - Proactively promote child safety
 - Safeguard against the risk of harm to children and young people; and
 - Ensure management responds effectively if harm is suspected or confirmed

Management

- It is the responsibility of Management to induct all workplace participants who are new to SECL to this policy during their period of induction and orientation.
- It is the responsibility of Management to lead the embedding of a child safe culture within their programs and to proactively seek out, identify and address any issues or concerns.

Workplace Participants

- It is the responsibility of all workplace participants to ensure practices comply with this policy and future revisions made
- It is the responsibility of all workplace participants to ensure they have read, understood and comply with this policy
- It is the responsibility of all workplace participants to actively promote a child safe culture within SECL, to raise any issues or concerns which they observe

3.4 TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

Training and education are important to ensure that everyone at SECL understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility.

Our organisational culture aims for all workplace participants, families, and children to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. We train our workplace

participants to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

We also support our workplace participants through ongoing supervision to develop their skills to protect children from abuse and promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds, and the safety of children with a disability.

New workplace participants will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand SECL's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse. This will include checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate (please refer to SECL's code of conduct for information about appropriate behaviour).

Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

3.5 RECRUITMENT

We take all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children. We develop selection criteria and advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legal responsibilities. SECL understands that when recruiting workplace participants, we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

We actively encourage applications from Aboriginal people, people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability.

All people who are engaged in child-related work and who are not exempt, including volunteers, are required to hold a valid Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this check.

We carry out reference checks and police record checks to ensure that we are recruiting the right people. If during the recruitment process a person's records indicate a criminal history then the person will be given the opportunity to provide further information and context before a decision is made regarding their potential recruitment.

3.6 FAIR PROCEDURES FOR WORKPLACE PARTICIPANTS

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and reasonable to all workplace participants. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form. All records are securely stored. If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to children and families on progress and actions we as an organisation take.

3.7 PRIVACY

Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it and who will have access to it. This is intended to protect reporters and to ensure that all members of SECL's are comfortable to disclose any allegations or concerns in relation to child safety without repercussions.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form through Employment Hero. All records are securely stored.

If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to children and families on progress and actions we as an organisation take.

3.8 LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

SECL takes its legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- Failure to disclose: All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to Victoria Police
- Mandatory reporting: Any workplace participants who are mandatory reporters (doctors, nurses, midwives, teacher, principals and police officers) must comply with their duties
- Failure to protect: People of authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so
- Reportable conduct: The head of our organisation must be made aware of any allegations of physical and sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, significant emotional or psychological harm or significant neglect by an workplace participants towards a child. The head of our organisation must notify the Commission for Children and Young People (Commission) of any allegations within 3 business days of becoming aware of the reportable allegation
- Duty of care: If a child is abused by an individual associated with our organisation, our organisation is presumed to have breached its duty of care unless it can prove that it took 'reasonable precautions' to prevent the abuse in question.

3.9 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.

4 ALLEGATIONS, CONCERNS OR COMPLAINTS

SECL takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our workplace participants are trained to deal with allegations appropriately.

We work to ensure all children, families, workplace participants know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour.

We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse to the Commission within 3 business days if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place. If an adult has a reasonable belief that an incident has occurred, then they must report the incident. Factors contributing to reasonable belief may include:

- a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves)
- behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- observing suspicious behaviour.

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

5 REGULAR REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed every two years and following significant incidents if they occur. We will ensure that families and children can contribute. Where possible we will do our best to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

6 RELATED LEGISLATION, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- Code of Conduct Procedure
- Child Safety Code of Conduct Procedure
- Child Safety and Reporting Procedure
- Deed of Confidentiality
- Recruitment and Selection Policy
- Risk Management Plan
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (VIC)
- Children, Youth & Families Act 2005 (VIC)
- Crimes Act 1958 (VIC)
- Wrongs Act 1958 (VIC)