

Policy type	Council
Adopted by	Council
Responsible General Manager	Community
Responsible officer	Manager Community Development
Date adopted	26 July 2017
Scheduled for review	26 July 2021

PURPOSE

To comply with State Government mandated Child Safe Standards to protect children from harm, abuse and neglect.

To comply with the *Child Safety and Wellbeing Standards Act 2005*.

To outline Council's commitment to child safety by creating and maintaining a child safe environment and a child safe workplace that supports the health and wellbeing of all children in Moira Shire.

SCOPE

Council is committed to creating a culture of child safety and recognises that protecting children and preventing and responding to child abuse is an organisation wide responsibility.

This policy applies to all Moira Shire staff, Councillors and Volunteers associated with Moira Shire Council.

DEFINITIONS

Child

A person under 18 years of age

Aboriginal Children

A person under the age of 18 who is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and is accepted as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community.

Child abuse

Any act committed against a child involving: physical violence, sexual offences, serious emotional or psychological abuse and serious neglect.

Children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds

A person under the age of 18 who identifies as having particular cultural or linguistic affiliations by virtue of their place of birth, ancestry or ethnic origin, religion, preferred language spoken at home or because of their parents' identification on a similar basis.

Child safe organisation

In the context of the child safe standards, a child safe organisation is one that meets the child safe standards by proactively taking measures to protect children from abuse.

Children with a disability

A person under 18 with a disability, which can be 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. Children can be born with a disability or acquire a disability suddenly through an injury or illness. Some disabilities may be obvious while others are hidden.

Neglect

Serious neglect is the continued failure to provide a child with the basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, shelter, hygiene, medical attention or adequate supervision, to the extent that the child's health, safety and/or development is, or likely to be, jeopardised. Serious neglect can also occur if an adult fails to adequately ensure the safety of a child where the child is exposed to extremely dangerous or life threatening situations.

Reasonable belief

If an adult has a reasonable belief that an incident has occurred then they must report the incident. Factors contributing to reasonable belief may be:

- 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

Mandatory reporters

- Nurses (including school nurses, Maternal Child Health Nurses)
- Early years, primary and secondary school teachers, and principals
- Registered practitioners and police

Child Safe Champions

Child Safe Champions will be a point of contact for staff that may have questions or concerns or want to report an allegation of child abuse. Council's Child Safe Champions are:

- Team Leader, Maternal and Child Health Services
- Team Leader, Community Services
- Manager, Organisational Development
- Senior Human Resources Advisor

POLICY

Significant research into child abuse in organisations has occurred over the last decade. Measures have been identified that reduce the risk of children being exposed to or experiencing harm. As a result, Victoria introduced compulsory minimum standards (Child Safe Standards) applicable to organisations that provide services for children to help ensure their safety.

The seven Child Safe Standards are:

- Standard 1:** Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements
- Standard 2:** A child safe policy or statement of commitment to child safety
- Standard 3:** A code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behavior with children
- Standard 4:** Screening, supervision, training and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel
- Standard 5:** Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse
- Standard 6:** Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse
- Standard 7:** Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children

Council is committed to acting in children's best interests, with a zero tolerance to child abuse and commitment to creating and maintaining a child safe and child friendly environment where all children feel safe and protected from abuse. All children in Moira Shire have a right to feel and be safe, with the adoption of a Child Safe culture being a Council wide responsibility.

Council has dedicated Child Safe Champions supporting the implementation of this Policy. Council's Child Safe Champions are:

- Team Leader, Maternal and Child Health Nurses
- Team Leader, Community Services
- Manager, Organisational Development
- Senior Human Resources Advisor

1. Valuing Diversity

Council values diversity and will not tolerate any discriminatory practices.

To achieve this Council will:

- Promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children and their families
- Promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and their families
- Welcome children with a disability and their families and act to encourage their participation

2. Recruiting Staff and Volunteers

Council will implement accurate and effective screening tools during the recruitment process to employ suitable staff and volunteers; this will include robust reference checking and criminal history checks, and working with children checks for appropriate positions within the organisation.

3. Training and supporting Staff and Volunteers

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility with the organisation. All staff will be made aware of their obligations and expectations of working in a child safe organisation via Council's Code of Conduct, employee induction, awareness and training sessions.

4. Risk Management

Council recognises the importance of a risk management approach to minimising the potential for child abuse or harm to occur and use this to inform our policy and procedures.

In addition to general occupational health and safety strategies, Council will proactively manage risks of abuse to children and ensure they comply with the Child Safe Standards.

5. Reporting

Council is committed to complying with all legal requirements regarding child safety concerns and where an alleged / suspected incident occurs.

Council has reporting and responding procedures for Council staff, Councillors, and Volunteers who have a reasonable belief that a child is at significant risk of harm (abuse or neglect).

Council takes allegations of abuse seriously and will investigate all allegations fairly and appropriately to protect and support the health and wellbeing of children.

RELATED LEGISLATION

Child Safety and Wellbeing Act 2005 (VIC)

Child Safety and Wellbeing Amendment Act 2015 (VIC)

Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (VIC)

Betrayal of Trust: Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Non-Government Organisations Report 2015

RELATED POLICIES/DOCUMENTS

Moirá Shire Council Employee Code of Conduct / Ethical Behaviour 2009

Moirá Shire Council Councillors Code of Conduct 2017

Maternal and Child Health Mandatory Reporting

Moirá Shire Council Recruitment and Selection Procedure

Moirá Shire Council Risk Management Policy

Moirá Shire Council Committee of Management Operations and Risk Management Manual

REFERENCES

Policy Development Guidelines

REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed four years from the date of adoption, with operational amendments as required, in accordance with Council's approval.