

▶ CHILD SAFE POLICY

POLICY NUMBER: 81 (C)

NAME OF POLICY: Child Safe Policy

DATE OF NEXT REVIEW: December 2021

DATE APPROVED: 19 December 2017

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: Coordinator Governance and Information

REFERENCES:

- Victorian Child Safe Standards
- Children Youth and Families Act (2005)
- Working with Children Act (2005)
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act (2005)
- The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act (2006)
- The Commission for Children and Young People Act (2012)

## INTRODUCTION

Hepburn Shire Council believes that creating safe places for children to fully and actively participate in the life of the community benefits everyone.

This policy is written to demonstrate the strong commitment of the management, staff and volunteers of the Shire to child safety and to provide an outline of the policies and practices we have developed to keep children and youth safe from any harm, including abuse.

## SCOPE

This policy outlines the roles and responsibilities of Council staff and volunteers when interacting with children and youth. This may be through the delivery of targeted child and youth programs and initiatives, through communications such as web and social media or indirectly through the delivery of services within the community and the building and maintenance of facilities and spaces where children live and play. It applies to all staff, volunteers, contractors of Council, children, their families and carers.

## POLICY

### 1. Commitment to Child Safety

We want all children who live, play, or visit the Shire to feel safe and to be safe.

We believe that child safety is everybody's responsibility and any form of behaviour that would compromise the safety of any child will not be tolerated.

We have zero tolerance to child abuse.

### 2. Children's Rights to Safety and Participation

We acknowledge children as active citizens, capable of contributing to decisions and service improvement. We encourage the participation of all children in our activities and programs and acknowledge their right to 'have a say' about things that are important to them.

We listen to their views and respect what they have to say.

### 3. Valuing Diversity

We value diversity and do not tolerate any discriminatory practices.

In particular we:

- 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 promote their participation

### 4. Recruitment of Staff and Volunteers

Hepburn Shire Council has a robust recruitment process that includes pre-employment screening of all prospective employees and volunteers.

In addition to interviews, we perform reference and Police Checks to ensure that we are recruiting the right people.

All people engaged in child-related work, including volunteers, are also required to have a Working with Children Check.

### 5. Supporting Staff and Volunteers

Hepburn Shire Council seeks to attract and retain the best staff and volunteers. We provide support and supervision so people feel valued, respected and fairly treated. We have a Code of Conduct to provide guidance to our staff and volunteers and an Employee Assistance Program to support their emotional wellbeing.

### 6. Reporting a Child Safety Concern or Complaint

Hepburn Shire Council takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our staff and volunteers are trained to deal appropriately with allegations through our existing complaints procedure.

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

Concerns about the safety and wellbeing of a children can range from an uncomfortable feeling through to a direct observation or a disclosure by a child.

Examples of child safety concerns include:

- Concerns about a physical environment that may pose a risk to children (this includes health and hygiene issues)
- Inappropriate or special relationships developing between staff or volunteers and children
- Inadequate staff-child supervision ratios
- Breaches of the Code of Conduct
- Feelings of discomfort about interactions between a staff member or volunteer and a child
- Suspicions or beliefs that children are at risk of harm
- Observations of concerning changes in behaviour
- Children's disclosures of abuse or harm, which must be reported to Child Protection or the police.

All staff and volunteers have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if they have a reasonable belief that an incident took place using the complaints process.

**Physical or sexual abuse of children is a crime and must be reported to police.**

## 7. Risk Management

We recognise 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, procedures and activity planning. In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to children.

## DEFINITIONS

The following terms are referred to in the policy.

Term	Definition
Council	Hepburn Shire Council
Council Staff	Includes permanent and temporary full-time and part-time council employees, volunteers and contractors and consultants while engaged by Council.
Child Abuse	Children and young people up to the age of 18 years All abuse harms children. Even injuries that are not visible can be profound. They can strike at a child's sense of identity, make them fearful or ashamed, and reduce their ability to participate in their community. Types of abuse include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical</li> <li>• Sexual</li> <li>• Emotional and psychological</li> <li>• Neglect</li> <li>• Racial, cultural, religious</li> </ul>
Aboriginal	The term Aboriginal in this Policy is inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Peoples
Reasonable belief	A reasonable belief is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds. Factors contributing to reasonable belief may be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves)</li> <li>• behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed</li> <li>• someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it</li> <li>• observing suspicious behaviour.</li> </ul>

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Any enquiries about the Child Safe Policy should be directed to Council's Coordinator Governance and Information or the General Manager of Corporate Services.

## IMPLEMENTATION

**If a child is in imminent or immediate danger, call 000 immediately.**

The Child Safe Policy is available to the public and staff and is published on the Hepburn Shire Council's website and intranet. It is also available upon request from all Customer Service Centre's, Libraries and Hubs throughout the Shire.

Staff will receive training in early 2018 on the Child Safe Standards and the commitment of Council to the unconditional protection of children from harm and abuse. This training will also be added to the Corporate induction program for new staff and volunteers.

## REVIEW

This Policy will be reviewed every two years or sooner if required by legislation or organisational changes.

We welcome feedback, comments and suggestions from children, parents, cares, staff and volunteers.

The officer responsible for the review of this policy is the Coordinator Governance and Information.