

THE Y WHITTLESEA

Child Safety and Safeguarding Policy

Policy owner: Risk and Safeguarding Lead

Approval body: CEO/BOARD

Approval date: 24/08/2026

Jurisdiction: Victoria

Related documents:

- Code of Conduct;
- Safeguarding Procedures;
- Complaints Handling Procedure;
- Recruitment and Screening Procedure;
- Risk Management Framework;
- Digital and Online Safety Procedures

1. Statement of Commitment to Child Safety and Safeguarding

Y Whittlesea is committed to the safety, wellbeing and empowerment of all children and young people. Children and young people who engage with the Association have the right to be safe, feel safe, be heard, be respected and participate in environments free from abuse, harm, discrimination and racism.

Y Whittlesea has zero tolerance for child abuse, harm, grooming, exploitation, neglect and unsafe organisational practices. The safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people are the paramount consideration in all decisions and actions of the Association. Where there is a conflict between the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person and any other consideration, the safety and wellbeing of the child or young person prevails.

Y Whittlesea is committed to being a child safe organisation in which child safety and wellbeing are embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture, championed and modelled at all levels, and reflected in everyday practice. This includes:

- creating environments that are safe, inclusive, transparent and accountable;
- preventing harm through strong governance, active risk management, safe recruitment, supervision, training and clear behavioural expectations;
- ensuring children and young people are informed about their rights, supported to participate in decisions affecting them, and taken seriously when they raise concerns;
- working in partnership with families and communities to promote child safety and wellbeing;

- upholding equity, inclusion and cultural safety, including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people;
- responding promptly, lawfully and appropriately to concerns, complaints, disclosures, suspicions and allegations;
- ensuring all personnel understand, accept and meet their safeguarding responsibilities; and
- continuously reviewing and strengthening safeguarding systems, practices and culture.

Safeguarding is fundamental to Y Whittlesea's purpose and is embedded across all aspects of its operations.

2. Purpose

This Policy establishes how Y Whittlesea gives effect to its commitment to child safety and safeguarding in practice. It sets out Y Whittlesea's mandatory expectations, organisational safeguards, behavioural standards and reporting requirements for all activities involving children and young people.

This Policy supports and governs the implementation of Y Whittlesea's child safe culture, governance arrangements, risk management, workforce practices, safe environments, reporting pathways and continuous improvement measures. It is intended to ensure that child safety and wellbeing are consistently prioritised and embedded across Y Whittlesea.

Y Whittlesea implements this Policy in accordance with Victorian child safety, child protection, worker screening and early childhood regulatory requirements. It gives local effect to the Y Australia National Safeguarding Policy Framework and must be read together with the National Safe Behaviours Code of Conduct and Y Whittlesea's local safeguarding procedures, which provide the operational controls, decision pathways and reporting requirements needed for local implementation.

3. Scope

This Policy applies to all Board Directors, committee members, executives, employees, volunteers, contractors, consultants, students and any other person engaged by or on behalf of Y Whittlesea in Victoria.

It applies across all programs, services, activities, facilities, events, transport arrangements, camps, residential and overnight activities, excursions, third-party venues and digital or online environments operated by or on behalf of the Association.

This Policy applies whenever children and young people engage with Y Whittlesea and wherever Y Whittlesea has care, supervision, authority, responsibility or influence in relation to children and young people.

4. Adults at Risk

This Policy is primarily focused on the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. However, the safeguarding principles in this Policy also inform safe, respectful and inclusive practice where Y Whittlesea engages with adults who may be at increased risk of harm due to disability, age, dependency, trauma, isolation, power imbalance or other circumstances.

Where Y Whittlesea provides services to adults at risk, it must identify applicable legal, regulatory, contractual and sector requirements and maintain appropriate local policies, procedures and response pathways. This Policy does not replace any specific adult safeguarding, disability, aged care, health, privacy, family violence, workplace safety or other legal obligations that may apply.

5. Legislative and Regulatory Framework

Y Whittlesea complies with applicable Victorian child safety, child protection, worker screening and child-related criminal law requirements, including the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic), the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic), the Worker Screening Act 2020 (Vic) and relevant offences under the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic). Other laws that support safeguarding practice, including applicable privacy, information-sharing, records-management and sector-specific requirements, are implemented through Y Whittlesea related policies and procedures.

Y Whittlesea implements and maintains compliance with the 11 Victorian Child Safe Standards. Y Whittlesea also complies with the Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme, including notification and response obligations relating to reportable allegations involving workers and volunteers. Each Association identifies and documents the person who is the Head of Organisation for the purposes of the Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme.

Y Whittlesea complies with mandatory reporting obligations under Victorian child protection law and ensures required Working With Children Checks are held and maintained for child-related work. Where services are regulated under the National Quality Framework, Y Whittlesea also complies with applicable child safety requirements under the National Quality Framework, including strengthened child safety, online safety and training requirements.

Where Y Whittlesea operates early childhood education and care services, it recognises the Victorian Early Childhood Regulatory Authority as the integrated sector regulator for the Child Safe Standards in early childhood services and complies with applicable requirements under the Education and Care Services National Law, Education and Care Services National Regulations, National Quality Standard and National Quality Framework, including requirements relating to supervision, staffing, safe physical and online environments, child protection training, notifications, recordkeeping and regulatory cooperation.

Y Whittlesea will cooperate with relevant regulators, including the Social Services Regulator, the Victorian Early Childhood Regulatory Authority where services fall within its remit, Victoria Police, child protection authorities and other prescribed bodies, in accordance with legal and regulatory obligations.

Where multiple requirements apply, the highest applicable standard of child safety and legal compliance is applied.

6. Governance, Leadership and Accountability

Child safety and wellbeing are embedded in Y Whittlesea leadership, governance and culture, and are actively championed and modelled at all levels of the organisation.

Y Whittlesea:

- maintains Board oversight of safeguarding risk, incidents, complaints and compliance;
- determines and documents clear Board-level responsibility for child safety and safeguarding, including arrangements for informed oversight, appropriate challenge and accountability;
- integrates safeguarding into organisational strategy, governance and risk management frameworks;
- ensures governance arrangements support the implementation of this Policy across all levels of the organisation;
- maintains clearly defined safeguarding roles, responsibilities and escalation pathways;
- ensures senior leaders monitor performance and take action to strengthen child safety systems and culture; and
- maintains access to appropriately senior safeguarding leadership to oversee implementation, advice, escalation, regulatory engagement and continuous improvement.

All personnel:

- uphold Y Whittlesea commitment to child safety;
- comply with this Policy and the Code of Conduct;
- maintain appropriate professional boundaries;
- take action when they have concerns about the safety or wellbeing of a child or young person; and
- report concerns promptly.
- Failure to meet safeguarding obligations may result in corrective action, disciplinary action, termination of engagement and/or external reporting, depending on the circumstances.

7. Children and Young People's Rights, Participation and Voice

Y Whittlesea recognises children and young people as active participants in their safety and wellbeing.

Y Whittlesea ensures children and young people:

- are informed about their rights, including the right to be safe, heard and respected;
- understand how to raise concerns and access support;
- are supported to participate in decisions affecting them in age-appropriate, accessible and inclusive ways, with communication support or reasonable adjustments where needed;
- are listened to and taken seriously; and
- are protected from harm, blame or disadvantage arising from raising concerns.
- Y Whittlesea actively incorporates the views and feedback of children and young people to strengthen safeguarding systems, practices and culture. Information about safety, behaviour expectations and complaint pathways is made available in accessible, child-friendly and culturally responsive formats.

8. Families, Communities and Partnerships

Y Whittlesea works in partnership with families and communities to promote child safety and wellbeing.

Y Whittlesea:

- communicates its safeguarding commitment, expectations and complaint pathways clearly and openly;
- provides accessible information about rights, behaviours and reporting options;
- supports families and communities to be informed and involved in decisions affecting children and young people, where this is safe, appropriate and consistent with the child or young person's best interests;
- responds to feedback and concerns respectfully and transparently; and
- embeds child safety expectations in partnerships, third-party arrangements and service delivery relationships that involve children and young people.

9. Aboriginal Cultural Safety

Y Whittlesea establishes and maintains a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. This means recognising and respecting identity, family, community, culture, Country, language and connection, actively preventing and responding to racism, and ensuring Aboriginal children and young people are safe, included, heard and able to participate in ways that are meaningful to them.

Y Whittlesea actively supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to express their culture and enjoy their cultural rights. It builds the capability of personnel to acknowledge and appreciate the strengths of Aboriginal cultures and understand their importance to the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Cultural safety is embedded across governance, workforce capability, family and community engagement, complaints, reporting, risk management and continuous improvement. Y Whittlesea seeks and considers the views of Aboriginal children, families and communities, where appropriate, to strengthen culturally safe practice and reduce barriers to safety, participation and speaking up.

10. Equity, Inclusion and Cultural Safety

Y Whittlesea ensures that equity, inclusion and cultural safety are embedded in policy, practice and service delivery.

Y Whittlesea:

- establishes and maintains a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, where identity and experience are respected and valued;
- ensures children and young people from all backgrounds feel safe, included and able to participate;
- identifies and removes barriers to safety, participation and voice, including barriers related to disability, language, racism, trauma, neurodivergence, gender, sexuality and culture;
- actively prevents and responds to discrimination, racism, exclusion, bullying and harmful behaviour; and
- supports children and families to express their identity, culture and diversity.

11. Safe and Suitable Workforce

Y Whittlesea ensures that people working with children and young people are suitable, supported and accountable to child safety expectations.

Y Whittlesea:

- embeds child safety and wellbeing requirements in role design, recruitment, selection and engagement processes;
- undertakes, verifies and monitors required screening and suitability checks, including Working With Children Checks, teacher registration and other background checks where relevant, and takes appropriate action where a person's clearance, registration or suitability status changes or gives rise to child safety concerns;

Author: Y Safeguarding

Version 1.1

Created: August 2026

- communicates clear safeguarding expectations at recruitment, engagement and induction;
- uses recruitment and referee checking processes that test suitability to work with children and young people, including attitudes to child safety, professional boundaries and willingness to speak up about concerns;
- maintains ongoing supervision and active monitoring of behaviour, conduct and professional boundaries; and
- takes action where concerns arise about a person's suitability to work with children and young people.

Suitability is an ongoing organisational responsibility, not a one-time assessment.

12. Training and Capability

Y Whittlesea equips all personnel with the knowledge, skills and confidence required to safeguard children and young people.

Y Whittlesea:

- provides safeguarding induction and ongoing refresher training;
- ensures personnel understand indicators of abuse, neglect, grooming, exploitation and unsafe organisational practice;
- ensures personnel understand internal and external reporting obligations, information sharing and recordkeeping expectations;
- supports leaders and managers to supervise safeguarding practice and foster a speak-up culture; and
- provides additional role-specific training where risks, authority or responsibilities require it.
- Where applicable, personnel in National Quality Framework services complete required child safety and child protection training.

13. Child Safety Risk Management, Safe Environments and Safe Practice

Y Whittlesea ensures that physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the risk of abuse, harm or exploitation.

Child safety risk management is a proactive and ongoing responsibility. Y Whittlesea identifies, assesses, controls and reviews risks to children and young people across programs, activities, facilities, digital environments and higher-risk settings, including transport, excursions, camps, overnight activities, personal care, one-to-one interactions and services delivered through third parties.

Y Whittlesea:

- identifies, assesses and controls safeguarding risks across all environments and activities;
- maintains supervision arrangements appropriate to the age, needs and risk profile of children and young people;
- ensures interactions with children are safe, professional, appropriate and transparent;
- limits one-to-one interactions and ensures they are visible, authorised and accountable;
- maintains clear expectations for physical contact, personal care and professional boundaries;
- ensures communication with children occurs through approved and appropriate channels;
- restricts unauthorised use of personal devices and private communication channels;
- manages the capture, use, storage and sharing of images and personal information safely and lawfully;
- ensures spaces such as bathrooms, change rooms and private areas are managed to prevent risk;
- ensures transport, excursions and off-site activities are risk assessed, authorised and appropriately supervised; and
- applies additional controls to higher-risk activities, including overnight activities.
- reviews risk controls following incidents, complaints, near misses, environmental changes, regulatory guidance or identified practice gaps; and
- Secret, private or non-transparent interactions with children and young people are not permitted. Use of physical force, inappropriate language, sexualised behaviour, degrading treatment, harassment, discrimination, bullying, coercion, favouritism, gifts intended to create dependency, or any conduct that may place a child or young person at risk is not permitted.

14. Reporting, Complaints and Responding to Concerns

Y Whittlesea fosters a culture of reporting and accountability in which all concerns about child safety and wellbeing, including harm between children and young people, are identified, raised and acted upon.

Children and young people may raise concerns in any way that feels safe to them, including verbally, in writing, through a trusted adult, through family or community members, or through another accessible pathway. Y Whittlesea does not require a child or young person to use formal language, identify a specific policy breach or follow an adult complaints process before action is taken.

Y Whittlesea requires that:

- all concerns, suspicions, disclosures and allegations are reported without delay;
- personnel take action when they have concerns about the safety of a child or young person;
- immediate risks are escalated to emergency services and police where required;
- legal reporting obligations, including mandatory reporting obligations, are met;
- reportable conduct allegations are escalated, notified, investigated and responded to in accordance with the Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme, with Y Whittlesea identified Head of Organisation accountable for ensuring applicable notification, investigation and outcomes-reporting requirements are met;
- responses to harm between children and young people, including bullying, discrimination, coercion, harmful sexual behaviour, image-based abuse and online harm, are developmentally appropriate and prioritise the safety, wellbeing, dignity and rights of all children involved;
- alternative escalation and reporting pathways are available where concerns involve senior leaders, the Head of Organisation, conflicts of interest or failures to respond appropriately;
- suspected criminal conduct is reported to police; and
- internal processes do not delay or prevent external reporting.

Y Whittlesea responds promptly in a child-focused, trauma-informed and procedurally fair manner. Responses prioritise immediate safety and wellbeing, appropriate support for children, young people and families, lawful information sharing, careful recordkeeping and transparent decision-making, with child safety remaining the paramount consideration.

15. Recordkeeping and Information Sharing

Y Whittlesea maintains accurate, secure and timely records of safeguarding matters. Records include concerns, disclosures, allegations, decisions, actions taken, reports made and outcomes.

- Information is shared appropriately, lawfully and proportionately to protect children and young people, promote child wellbeing and safety, support safeguarding responses and comply with legal and regulatory obligations. Privacy and confidentiality are respected, but are not barriers to sharing information necessary to protect a child or young person or to meet legal obligations.
- Where Y Whittlesea is an Information Sharing Entity or Risk Assessment Entity, authorised personnel follow applicable Victorian information sharing schemes, including the Child Information Sharing Scheme, Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme and MARAM responsibilities, to support child wellbeing, safety and family violence risk assessment and management.

- Where Child Link or other prescribed information systems apply, access is limited to authorised users and used only for permitted child wellbeing and safety purposes, in accordance with law, role requirements and local procedures.

16. Continuous Improvement

Y Whittlesea maintains a structured approach to continuous improvement in safeguarding systems, practice and culture.

Y Whittlesea:

- monitors incidents, complaints, risks and system performance;
- analyses trends and identifies opportunities for improvement;
- seeks and considers feedback from children, young people, families and personnel;
- reviews the effectiveness of safeguarding controls and systems; and
- takes action to strengthen safeguarding in response to learning, evidence, incidents, complaints, audits and change.

17. Review

This Policy is reviewed at least every two years, and earlier where required by legislative or regulatory change, organisational learning, emerging risk, a serious incident or complaint, or service change. Reviews consider whether the Policy is understood, implemented and effective, and are informed by feedback from children, young people, families and personnel where appropriate.

18. Glossary.

- **Child / Young Person:** person under 18 years of age.
- **Safeguarding:** The leadership, culture, systems and practices used to prevent harm, uphold rights, reduce risk, respond to concerns and create environments in which children and young people are safe, feel safe, are heard and can participate.
- **Harm:** Any action, omission, behaviour, circumstance or environment that has caused, is causing, or is likely to cause physical, emotional, psychological, developmental, cultural or social harm to a child or young person. Harm may be a single incident or occur over time, and includes exposure to unsafe, inappropriate or harmful situations.
- **Abuse:** A form of harm involving the misuse of power, trust or authority that causes, or is likely to cause, harm to a child or young person. Abuse can include physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional or psychological abuse, neglect, grooming, exploitation, exposure to family violence, or other behaviour that seriously impacts a child or young person's safety or wellbeing.
- **Child Safe:** An approach that prioritises the safety, rights, wellbeing and participation of children and young people, and takes active steps to prevent harm and abuse and respond appropriately to concerns.

- **Cultural Safety:** An environment where a child or young person feels safe, respected and included in their identity, culture and community, and where their experience of safety is recognised and valued.
- **Zero Tolerance:** Y Whittleseaposition on risk to children and unacceptable behaviours: child abuse, harm and behaviours that place children and young people at risk will not be accepted, ignored or minimised.
- **Personnel:** Includes Board Directors, committee and advisory members, executives, employees, volunteers, contractors, subcontractors, consultants, labour hire workers, apprentices, trainees, students on placement and any other person engaged by or on behalf of the Association. Where legislation uses a specific definition of worker, volunteer or employee, that statutory definition applies.
- **Adults at Risk:** Adults who may experience increased vulnerability to harm due to disability, age, dependency, trauma, isolation, power imbalance or other circumstances.
- **Grooming:** Intentional behaviours used to build trust, manipulate, control or create an emotional connection with a child or young person, their family, carers or an organisation, for the purpose of facilitating abuse, exploitation or harm. Grooming can occur in person or online, may involve sexual or non-sexual behaviours, and can occur even if abuse does not ultimately take place.
- **Trauma-Informed Practice:** An approach that recognises the prevalence and impact of trauma on children and young people and seeks to create environments that promote emotional and physical safety, trust, choice, empowerment and connection. It involves understanding how trauma may affect behaviour and wellbeing, responding in ways that avoid retraumatisation, and supporting recovery through respectful, consistent and supportive relationships.
- **Child-Centred Practice:** An approach that places the rights, safety, wellbeing, voice and best interests of children and young people at the centre of decision-making and practice. It recognises children and young people as individuals with unique needs, strengths and experiences and supports their meaningful participation.
- **Psychological Safety:** An environment in which people feel safe to speak up, ask questions, raise concerns, report issues or mistakes, and challenge practices without fear of punishment, humiliation, retaliation or exclusion. Psychological safety supports learning, accountability and the early identification of risk.
- **Reportable Conduct:** An allegation of conduct by a worker or volunteer that may fall within the Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme and must be notified, investigated and managed in accordance with applicable legislation. Reportable conduct includes sexual offences, sexual misconduct, physical violence, behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm, and significant neglect.
- **Mandatory Reporting:** The legal requirement of specified professional groups to report to child protection authorities when, in the course of their professional work, they form a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse and the child's parents have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child.

- **Victorian Early Childhood Regulatory Authority:** Victoria's independent early childhood education and care regulator, responsible for monitoring and enforcing safety, quality and compliance requirements for regulated early childhood services, including Child Safe Standards requirements for the early childhood sector.
- **National Quality Framework:** The national regulatory framework for approved education and care services, including the Education and Care Services National Law, Education and Care Services National Regulations, National Quality Standard, assessment and rating processes, and regulatory monitoring and compliance requirements.

Appendix A: Alignment with Victorian Child Safe Standards and the Y National Safeguarding Policy Framework

Victorian Child Safe Standard	Policy section	Y National Safeguarding requirement area
1. Aboriginal cultural safety	9	Equity, Inclusion and Cultural Safety
2. Leadership, governance and culture	1, 2, 6, 16	Leadership, Governance and Child Safe Culture
3. Children's rights, participation and voice	7, 14	Children and Young People's Rights, Voice and Participation
4. Families and communities	8, 14	Families, Communities and Partnerships
5. Equity and diverse needs	9, 10, 14	Equity, Inclusion and Cultural Safety
6. Suitable and supported workforce	11, 12	Recruitment, Screening and Workforce Suitability; Training, Knowledge and Confidence
7. Child-focused complaints processes	7, 8, 14, 15	Reporting, Response and Safeguarding Concerns
8. Training and support for staff and volunteers	12	Training, Knowledge and Confidence
9. Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing	13, 14	Physical, Digital and Online Safety
10. Review of child safe practices	16, 17	Continuous Improvement, Monitoring and Assurance
11. Implementation of policies and procedures	2, 5, 6, 15, 17	Policies, Procedures, Accessibility and Local Implementation