

women*scircus

Policy: Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Last reviewed: 26 June 2022

Scheduled review date: 01 July 2023

Board approved date: 26 June 2022

Responsible persons: Steph Cox (General Manager)

Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Women's Circus acknowledges the Kulin Nation as the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, train and create and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters, communities and culture. We pay our respect to Elders past and present and through them to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Sovereignty was never ceded. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.

This Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy was approved by the Women's Circus Board on 26 June 2022. It demonstrates the strong commitment of management, staff and volunteers to child safety and wellbeing, and outlines how our organisation keeps children safe from harm, including child abuse.

1. Our Commitment to Child Safety and Wellbeing

Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in the Women's Circus leadership, governance and culture. All children who come to Women's Circus have a right to feel and be safe. We aim to create a child safe and child friendly environment where children feel safe, empowered, and have fun.

Children and young people's safety and wellbeing is everybody's responsibility.

Women's Circus commitment to child safety and wellbeing is based on the following principles:

- Promoting and protecting the best interests of children at all times
- Zero tolerance of child abuse
- Child safety and wellbeing is a shared responsibility between the organisation, all personnel and associates, its partners and the communities in which it works

Circus is an inherently dangerous activity and can cause injury. The Women's Circus take every precaution possible to mitigate the risk to physical harm and injury caused by circus activity.

2. Purpose

This Policy outlines how the Women's Circus prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and what steps we will take to do this.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all Women's Circus personnel (including permanent, casual and contract employees, volunteers and board members) involved in the organisation. This policy applies in all environments where Women's Circus provides services, including but not limited to classes, workshops and performances.

The Policy does not need to be signed by people engaged by or visiting the Women's Circus for less than one day, and/or who will have no contact with children. These people must be made aware of the Policy and the Women's Circus Child Safety Code of Conduct and be supervised by a Women's Circus staff member at all times (when children are present).

4. Definitions

Child abuse means:

- a sexual offence committed against a child
- an offence committed against a child under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic), such as grooming
- physical violence against a child
- causing serious emotional or psychological harm to a child
- serious neglect of a child.

Harm is damage to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child or young person, including as a result of child abuse by adults or the conduct of other children. 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.

Child/Children means a person who is under the age of 18 years.

Concerns and complaints

- A *concern* refers to any potential issue that could impact negatively on the safety and wellbeing of children.
- A *complaint* is an expression of dissatisfaction to the Women's circus related to one or more of the following:
 - our services or dealings with individuals
 - allegations of abuse or misconduct by a staff member, a volunteer or another individual associated with the Women's Circus
 - disclosures of abuse or harm made by a child or young person

- the conduct of a child or young person at the Women’s Circus
- the inadequate handling of a prior concern
- general concerns about the safety of a group of children or activity.

5. Child Participation and Empowerment

[Child Safe Standard 3 – Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously](#)

The Women’s Circus is not a child-centred organisation however we do want to ensure children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously. We want to empower the children who participate in our activities by listening to them and allowing them to have a voice in our community. We actively seek to include children’s views and ideas in our delivery of child-focused services including children’s classes and school workshops.

Women’s Circus classes promote connection, friendship, and foster support between participants. We do not tolerate bullying or abusive behaviour between children and take action if this occurs.

We respect the rights of children and provide them with information about their rights including the right to be safe at the Women’s Circus, as well as what they can do if they feel unsafe.

Information and training is provided to Women’s Circus staff and volunteers (who work with children) so they understand the rights of children, are skilled at engaging with children and helping them participate in decision-making and can recognise and act on the signs of child abuse and harm.

The Women’s Circus supports children’s participation in the following ways:

- Trainers undertake regular discussions with children, including child-led conversations on what makes them feel safe and unsafe.
- Consultation with children about any proposed significant changes to the physical environment, policies, procedures, programs that relate to them. Children’s views are collected by trainers, provided to management, and considered in the decision-making process.
- Information is provided to children and families about Women’s Circus operations, policies, staffing and programs and are made suitable for different age groups and diversity of the children. This information is provided both in digital and paper form and is easily accessible.
- Annual member surveys include specific questions related to children and families to enable them to contribute to organisational decision-making.

6. Involving families and communities

Child Safe Standard 4 – Families and communities are informed, and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing

Women's Circus recognises the important role of families and involves parents and carers when making significant decisions about their child. Parents, families and communities are welcome to provide feedback at any time through our contact email address and are encouraged to raise any concerns they have with us. The Women's Circus General Manager will respond to any concerns raised as quickly as possible and let the person with concern know our formal policies for complaints and reporting.

The Women's Circus provides information to families and community about our child safe policies and practices including through:

- Publishing this Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Child Safety Code of Conduct on our website.
- Publishing key organisational policies and information on our website including the organisation's governance and operations, complaints processes and disciplinary processes
- Including articles and information on child safety and wellbeing, and reminders about our policies and procedures, in our members newsletter.
- Posters or flyers highlighting key information available in the Women's Circus front/entry sitting room.

7. Cultural safety for Aboriginal children

Child Safe Standard 1 – Organisations establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued

The Women's Circus is committed to creating an environment where Aboriginal culture is celebrated, respected and valued and Aboriginal children, families and community members are welcomed and included.

Strategies to embed cultural safety for Aboriginal children include:

- An Acknowledgement of Country at the beginning of every class.
- Foster a welcoming environment, with the Aboriginal flag displayed at the entry of the space, as well as an Acknowledgement of Country sign.
- Consulting with families and members of the Aboriginal community to identify opportunities to promote Aboriginal culture and practices at the Women's Circus.
- Providing opportunities for children to share their cultural identity and express their culture during classes and workshops.
- Providing training for staff and volunteers on the strengths of Aboriginal culture and its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children.
- Promoting and implementing the Women's Circus Cultural Safety Action Plan.
- Celebrating NAIDOC Week and acknowledging significant events including National Sorry Day and National Reconciliation Week.

- Seeking feedback from Aboriginal children, families, and communities on their experience at the Women’s Circus, particularly how safe they feel expressing their identity including their culture.

8. Equity and Diversity

Child Safe Standard 5 – Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice

Central to the Women’s Circus values and practices is the championing and embedding of inclusivity, equity, and diversity. We value diversity and equity for all children.

To achieve this, we:

- Provide training for all, staff and volunteers on understanding diversity and how to support inclusion and cultural safety
- Welcome and support participation of all children, including children with disability, children of colour and of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, LGBTQIA+ children and First Nation children and their families.
- Offer participants and families through our enrolment forms the opportunity to provide information about themselves, including any specific needs to participate fully in our programs.
- Have zero tolerance of racism and other forms of discrimination and act when discrimination or exclusion is identified.
- Strive to reflect the diversity of our community through representation in our staff
- acknowledge and celebrate important cultural dates in our classes and through our online channels.
- Have a physical and online environment that actively celebrates diversity
- Commit to ensuring our facilities and all activities promote inclusion of children of all abilities.

9. Staff and Volunteers: Recruitment, Support & Training

Child Safe Standard 6 – People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice

Child Safe Standard 8 – Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training

9.1 Recruiting staff and volunteers

The Women’s Circus is committed to embedding child safety and wellbeing into our recruitment and screening processes for staff and volunteers. We only recruit staff and volunteers who are appropriate to engage with children and share our Women’s Circus values and commitment to child safety practices.

Women’s Circus has a robust recruitment and screening process for all staff and volunteers who have a role with children or have access to children’s personal information. This process includes:

- Requiring a working with Children Check and checking to make sure these qualifications are valid on a yearly basis.
- Completing at least two referee checks,
- Ensuring our interview plans incorporate behavioural-based interview questions that are specific to working with children.

9.2 Supporting and Training Staff and Volunteers

The Women's Circus is committed to ensuring that all leaders, staff and volunteers receive training to ensure they understand their responsibilities in relation to child safety and to support their engagement with children. This includes how to build physical, social, psychologically and culturally safe environments for children and young people.

The Women's Circus assists its leaders, staff and volunteers to incorporate child safety considerations into decisions and to promote a safe environment where children are empowered to speak up about issues that affect them.

All Women's Circus staff and volunteers who have a role with children or have access to children's personal information will complete child safety training prior to having unsupervised contact with children and in any case no more than one month from the commencement of their employment or appointment. These staff and volunteers will attend a refresher Child safety and wellbeing training session every two years. Training will be recorded in the Child Safety Training Action Plan.

This training will include:

- How to support colleagues who disclose harm.
- How to build culturally safe environments.
- How to recognise indicators of child harm including harm caused by other children and young people.
- How to effectively implement this Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and induction to the Child Safety Code of Conduct.

Staff and volunteers will be provided supervision as needed to support their engagement with children and for compliance with our Child Safety Code of Conduct and Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

The Women's Circus General Manager will conduct regular check-ins with trainers and staff who are working with children and involved in communicating to families to ensure the ongoing commitment to child safety and wellbeing.

10. Process, Procedures and Documentation

[Child Safe Standard 5 – Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice](#)

Child Safe Standard 7 – Processes for complaints and concerns are child focused

Child Safe Standard 9 – Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed

Child Safe Standard 11 – Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people

10.1 Risk Management

We recognise the importance of identifying and managing risks of child harm and abuse in the physical and online environments operated by the Women's Circus. The Women's Circus child and young people program are predominately set in the physical space, but if an online space is used the same level of care and risk management is undertaken.

Women's Circus personnel will undertake a child safety risk assessment on all programs and activities that have contact with children. The assessment will identify risks, classify any high-risk activities, and document the steps being taken to reduce or remove these risks.

Child Safety Risk Assessments should be undertaken at the program design and proposal stage and at all reporting intervals.

Effective child abuse prevention strategies will be incorporated in all Women's Circus program designs, activities and emergency responses.

Women's Circus personnel will undertake a risk assessment and have a risk management plan to address the risk of child abuse and harm on all programs and activities that have contact with children. The assessment should identify risks, classify any high-risk activities, and document steps being taken to reduce or remove these risks.

The risk management plan will be developed in consultation with our staff, volunteers, parent representatives and children. We will ensure any risk controls put in place balance the need to manage harm with the benefits of participating at The Women's Circus. The Audit & Risk sub-committee is responsible for approving the risk management plan.

Any contractors or other providers of services will always be supervised by a member of staff while working with us to ensure child safety. See also Code of Conduct below.

Effective child abuse prevention strategies will be incorporated in all Women's Circus program designs, activities and emergency responses.

10.2 Code of Conduct

The Women's Circus Child Safety Code of Conduct outlines acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in relation to children. A breach of the Code may result in termination of employment.

All personnel and associates of Women's Circus are required to sign the Policy and Code of Conduct agreeing to comply with the principles and standards they contain. All personnel and associates are encouraged to discuss this Policy and Code of Conduct at the commencement of their employment/engagement with Women's Circus if they have any questions or concerns.

The following measures can be applied for any Women's Circus staff or volunteer who breaches the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and/or Code of Conduct:

- Report to Police
- Internal investigation
- Meeting to discuss breach and opportunity for person to provide their account/understanding of the situation
- Further education on the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Formal warning and monitoring
- Suspension pending investigation
- Dismissal

Co-operation with any police investigation takes priority to an internal investigation or any other measure taken internally.

Any person who intentionally makes a false allegation or malicious allegation will face disciplinary action.

10.3 Child Safety complaint and reporting system

The Women's Circus has clear and accessible child-focused processes for complaints and concerns relating to child safety and wellbeing. These process and procedures are shared with children and young people, families, staff and volunteers, and are culturally safe.

All reports of child abuse and child safety concerns will be treated seriously, whether they are made by an adult or a child and whether they are about the conduct of an adult or a child. All complaints and child safety concerns will be responded to professionally, confidentially (where possible) and as quickly as possible and will meet specific legislative requirements.

If a complaint includes an allegation or incident of child abuse or harm, then staff and volunteers at the Women's must report it in accordance with the Child Safety Reporting Process/complaint handling policy.

The Women's Circus staff and volunteers are required to prioritise children's safety in any response and to report all potentially criminal conduct to Victoria Police.

The Women's Circus compliant process and procedures include:

- a Child Safety Reporting Process/complaint handling policy that includes information for staff and volunteers about how a complaint or child safety concern will be responded to.

- The reporting process in the Policy outlines obligations and responsibilities for reporting and managing any concerns about child abuse. It also protects personnel, volunteers and associates of Women's Circus from unfair processes should any allegations be made about them.
- An easy-to-understand complaints information sheet will be provided for children, families and the community to know about the complaint process and the supports available to those making a complaint and those involved in the complaint process.

Complaints can be emailed to gm@womenscircus.org.au or you can speak directly with the General Manager by appointment.

If there is concern for the immediate safety of a child, immediately call 000.

10.4 Information sharing and privacy

The Women's Circus share relevant information to promote the safety and wellbeing of children, where it is appropriate and in their best interests. The Women's Circus will keep information about complaints confidential, except where it is necessary to share information to respond properly to a complaint or to prioritise child safety. We may also need to share information about incidents or complaints with external authorities to comply with the law or to prioritise safety. More information is available in our complaint handling policy.

11. Review of child safe policies and practices

[Child Safe Standard 10 – Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved](#)

The Women's Circus will review all child safe practices and policies every 12 months. We also review relevant practices and policies in response to a child safety incident or 'near miss'. Findings from reviews will be reported to the people involved in our organisation and also inform our approach to continuous improvement of our child safety practices. Reviews are overseen by the General Manager and will be informed by consultation with children, families and staff.

12. Supporting documents and legislation

[Child Safe Standard 2 – Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture](#)

[Child Safe Standard 11 – Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people](#)

12.1 Supporting documents – Women's Circus child safety and wellbeing system

The following policies and procedures work together to support child safety and wellbeing across all of our operations:

- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Child Safety Reporting Process
- Complaint handling policy
- Grievance & Disciplinary Policy
- Discrimination, harassment and bullying Policy
- Child Safety risk management plan
- Child safety training plan
- Disability Action Plan
- Cultural Safety Action Plan

12.2 Supporting legislation

- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)* (including Child Safe Standards)
- *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)* (including reporting to Child Protection)
- *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)* (including Failure to Protect and Failure to Disclose offences)
- *Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic)* (including Part XIII – Organisational liability for child abuse)

Child Safety Code of Conduct

Whilst employed or engaged by or representing Women's Circus,

I will:

- Treat all children and young people with respect regardless of race, colour, gender, language, disability, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, birth or other status
- Provide a welcoming, inclusive and safe environment for all children, young people, parents/guardians, community members, and personnel of Women's Circus
- Not use physical or humiliating punishment on children or young people
- Encourage children, young people, parents/guardians, community members, partner organisation personnel, and Women's Circus personnel to speak up about issues that affect them
- Immediately report concerns or allegations for the safety or wellbeing of a child or young person, or breach of this Policy and Code of Conduct in accordance with Child Safety Reporting Process
- Ensure that, whenever possible, another adult is present when I am working with children or in contact with children involved in Women's Circus programs or activities
- Speak with the General Manager of Women's Circus about any concerns I have of my involvement in any situation where my words, actions or behaviour may be misinterpreted
- Speak with the General Manager of Women's Circus if I am involved in any situation which would be likely to have a negative impact on the reputation of Women's Circus
- Immediately disclose all charges, convictions and other outcomes of an offence which occurred before or occurs during my employment/engagement with Women's Circus that relates to child exploitation and abuse
- Use any computers, mobile phones, video cameras, cameras or social media appropriately, and never to exploit or harass children or young people or access child exploitation materials through any medium
- Ensure children/young people involved in research or consultation for Women's Circus participate in these activities voluntarily, are well informed of the process and have provided consent

And I will not:

- Use language that is offensive, discriminatory, demeaning, shaming, culturally inappropriate, abusive or of a sexual nature when speaking with or in the presence of a child or young person
- Engage in behaviour to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade a child or young person or otherwise emotionally or psychologically abuse a child or young person including exposing them to family violence
- Act in a sexually provocative manner or engage children in any form of sexual activity
- Physically abuse a child or young person
- Use social media to contact, access, solicit or befriend a child or young person involved in Women's Circus programs or activities and not place images of those children or young people on personal social media sites
- Hold, kiss, cuddle or touch a child or young person in an abusive, unnecessary or culturally insensitive way
- Condone or participate in behaviour with children or young people which is illegal or abusive
- Not spend time with children or young people involved in Women's Circus programs and activities outside work hours unless I live and work in the same community and come together with those children and young people in the context of my family, social and community life. If this is the situation, I will continue to comply with the Policy and Code of Conduct and be a positive role model and mentor for those children and young people and not discuss private/confidential information concerning them outside work hours.
- Discriminate against or act in favour of particular children or young people to the exclusion of others
- Do things for children involved in Women's Circus programs or activities of a personal nature that they can do for themselves such as toileting or changing their clothes

Use of children's images:

When photographing or filming a child or using children's images for work-related purposes I must:

- Obtain informed consent from the child and parent/guardian of the child before photographing or filming a child. As part of this I must explain how the photograph or film will be used

- Ensure photographs, films, videos and DVDs present children in a dignified and respectful manner

- Ensure images are honest representations of the context and facts

- Ensure file labels, meta data or text descriptions do not reveal identifying information about a child when sending images electronically or publishing images in any form

- Ensure a child is not subject to a legal order (i.e. Family Court, domestic violence order, child protection or criminal order) where the safety of the child or parent/guardian may be at risk or the privacy of the child compromised, if the identity and location of the child is revealed

Name: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Child Safety Reporting Process

Women's Circus must immediately report any suspected child abuse or misconduct involving children.

Where an allegation is made against Women's Circus personnel, Women's Circus must also make a report to the Commissioner for Children and Young People (CCYP).

This means personnel and associates must immediately report to the General Manager/CEO any concerns they have for the safety or wellbeing of a child.

Reports will be handled professionally, confidentially (to the extent possible) and as quickly as possible and will meet state-specific legislative requirements. Any person who intentionally makes a false allegation or malicious allegation will face disciplinary action.

If you make a report of suspected child abuse or misconduct to the General Manager/CEO, unless you reasonably believe the General Manager/CEO has reported your suspicion to Victoria Police, you have a legal obligation to also make your own report to Victoria Police.

If you believe a child is in immediate danger, call 000.

Who can report?

Child or young person; Parent/guardians/community members; Personnel, volunteers, representatives and associates of Women's Circus.

What to report?

- Allegations, suspicions, disclosures or observations of child abuse or exploitation;
- Concerns that the action or behaviour of personnel or associates of the Women's Circus may harm or put a child at risk of harm;
- Suspected or confirmed breaches of the Child Safety Policy and/or Code of Conduct by personnel or associates of Women's Circus; or
- Information received of criminal investigations or proceedings against personnel or associates of Women's Circus relating to child exploitation or abuse.

When to report?

Within 24 hours or as soon as practically possible.

Who to report to?

Women's Circus General Manager (gm@womenscircus.org.au) or alternatively to the Chair of the Women's Circus board (boardchair@womenscircus.org.au).

If you have reported suspected child abuse to the General Manager, unless you reasonably believe they have reported it to Victoria Police, you must also report it to Victoria Police.

If a child is at immediate risk of harm, call 000.

What will happen?

- General Manager will report suspected child abuse or other criminal conduct to Victoria Police immediately.
- General Manager will inform the Board within 24 hours of any serious report made to her under this policy.
- All parties' safety needs must be assessed and responded to – child/young person/family members/person against whom the report is made/personnel and associates.

Possible outcomes

- Report to Police and/or CCYP
- Internal and/or criminal investigation
- Dismissal
- Meetings to discuss breach and opportunity for person to provide their account/understanding of the situation
- Further education on the Women's Circus Policy and Code of Conduct
- Formal warning and monitoring
- Suspension pending investigation
- Report made to child protection statutory authority/government department
- Report made to community-based child protection committee or similar
- Referral made to local support/counselling organisation or service
- All parties' safety needs must be assessed and responded to –child/young person/family members/person against whom the report is made/personnel; and associates.

Statement to be Signed by all Women’s Circus Personnel, Associates and Representatives

I, (insert name) acknowledge that I have read and understand Women’s Circus’:

Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy;
Child Safety Code of Conduct; and
Child Safety Reporting Process.

I agree to comply with the Policy, Code of Conduct and Reporting Process.

I understand that a breach of the Policy, Code or Reporting Process may provide grounds for my employment/engagement with Women’s Circus to be terminated. I also understand that a breach of the Policy or Code could result in criminal prosecution.

I understand that it is my responsibility, as a person employed/engaged by Women’s Circus, to use common sense and avoid actions that are abusive or exploitative of children and young people or could be construed as such.

I authorise Women’s Circus to undertake any necessary inquiries, including criminal record checks and reference checks, as part of my appointment or recruitment process.

I confirm my willingness to participate Women’s Circus training sessions on child safety and wellbeing.

Name:
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Position:
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Signed:
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Date:
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