

SINGLETON HEIGHTS PRE-SCHOOL INC.



GOAL: Our service is committed to providing an environment that ensures children receive the care and protection necessary to ensure their safety, welfare and wellbeing. All Educators and volunteers of our service are committed to building and maintaining a child safe environment which is inclusive, transparent and promotes child participation, and ensures interactions and engagement with children are appropriate and safe.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION / LINKS:

ACT: Children (Education and Care Services National Law Application) 2010 Act: Section 165-167, **Child Protection (Working with Children) and Other Child Protection Legislation Amendment Act 2016, Child protection (Working with Children) Act 2012, The Freedom of Information Act 1989, Child and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act, 1998, Criminal Code Act 1995, Crimes Legislation Amendment (Sexual Offences Against Children) Act 2010, Fair Work Act 2009, Privacy Act 1998, Work Health and Safety Act 2011, Adoption Act 2000, Crimes Act 1900 (Grooming and Child Abuse Material)**

REGULATIONS: Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011: 84-85, 155, 273, Child protection (Working with Children) Regulation 2013, Child and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Regulation 2012,

NQS: 2.1, 2.3, 5.1, 5.2, 6.7, 7.3

POLICY:

CHILD SAFE STANDARDS

Introduction

The Child Safe Standards recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses into Child Sexual Abuse, provide a framework so organisations can create and adopt a culture, policies, procedures and strategies, to keep children safe from harm.

The Child Safe Standards:

- Help drive cultural change in organisations.
- Are principle-based and outcome-focused.
- Are flexible enough that they can be adapted by organisations of varying sizes and characteristics.
- Avoid placing undue burden on organisations.
- Help organisations address multiple risks.
- Balance caution and caring.
- Are a benchmark against which organisations can assess their child safe capability and set performance targets.
- Are of equal importance and are interrelated.

A child safe culture is supported by a set of values and practices that guide the attitudes and behaviour of all staff while good leaders champion these values and embed them in organisational governance. The following values are at the heart of any approach that prioritises children's safety:

- The best interests of children and their protection from harm is paramount.
- Child abuse is not tolerated and will not occur.
- Children's rights are understood and respected.
- Concerns about child safety raised by children and their parents and carers are acted on.
- Reporting abuse is not obstructed or prevented.

Definition of a Child Safe Organisation

Child safe organisations create cultures, adopt strategies and act to prevent harm to children, including sexual abuse. The Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners and Guardians define a child safe organisation as one that systematically:

- creates conditions to reduce the likelihood of children being harmed.
- creates conditions that increase the likelihood of identifying and reporting harm.
- responds appropriately to disclosures, allegations and suspicions of harm.

Standard 1: Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.

- The organisation publicly commits to child safety and leaders champion a child safe culture.
- Child safety is a shared responsibility at all levels of the organisation.
- Risk management strategies focus on preventing, identifying and mitigating risks to children.
- Staff and volunteers comply with a code of conduct that sets clear behavioural standards towards children.
- Staff and volunteers understand their obligations on information sharing and record keeping.

Standard 2: Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.

- Children are able to express their views and are provided opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their lives.
- The importance of friendships is recognised and support from peers is encouraged, helping children feel safe and be less isolated.
- Children can access abuse prevention programs and information.
- Staff and volunteers are attuned to signs of harm and facilitate child-friendly ways for children to communicate and raise their concerns.

Standard 3: Families and communities are informed and involved.

- Families have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of their child and participate in decisions affecting their child.
- The organisation engages in open, two-way communication with families and communities about its child safety approach and relevant information is accessible.
- Families and communities have a say in the organisation's policies and practices.
- Families and communities are informed about the organisation's operations and governance.

Standard 4: Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account.

- The organisation actively anticipates children's diverse circumstances and responds effectively to those with additional vulnerabilities.
- All children have access to information, support and complaints processes.
- The organisation pays particular attention to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disabilities, and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Standard 5: People working with children are suitable and supported.

- Recruitment, including advertising and screening, emphasises child safety.
- Staff and volunteers have Working with Children Checks.
- All staff, volunteers and students receive an appropriate induction and are aware of their child safety responsibilities, including reporting obligations.
- Supervision and people management have a child safety focus.

Standard 6: Processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse are child focused.

- The organisation has a child-focused complaint-handling system that is understood by children, staff, volunteers and families.
- The organisation has an effective complaint-handling policy and procedure which clearly outline roles and responsibilities, approaches to dealing with different types of complaints and obligations to act and report.
- Complaints are taken seriously, responded to promptly and thoroughly, and reporting, privacy and employment law obligations are met.

Standard 7: Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training.

- Relevant staff, volunteers and students receive training on the nature and indicators of child maltreatment, particularly organisational child abuse.
- Staff and volunteers receive training on the organisation's child safe practices and child protection.
- Relevant staff and volunteers are supported to develop practical skills in protecting children and responding to disclosures.

Standard 8: Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur.

- Risks in the online and physical environments are identified and mitigated without compromising a child's right to privacy and healthy development.
- The online environment is used in accordance with the organisation's Code of Conduct and relevant policies.

Standard 9: Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved.

- The organisation regularly reviews and seeks to improve and child safe practices.
- The organisation analyses complaints to identify causes and systemic failures to inform continuous improvement.

Standard 10: Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe.

- Policies and procedures address all Child Safe Standards.
- Policies and procedures are accessible and easy to understand.
- Best practice models and stakeholder consultation inform the development of policies and procedures.
- Leader's champion and model compliance with policies and procedures.
- Staff understand and implement the policies and procedures.

Living Our Organisational Culture

Living your organisation's culture is especially important for leaders but is required of all. A child safe organisation that has strong leadership and values children:

- Establishes and updates policies and procedures regularly.
- Leads by example and models appropriate behaviour.
- Looks for innovation and practices continuous improvement.
- Places the needs and safety of children at its heart.
- Values and empowers all children in its care and gives them a voice.

When a child knows they will be listened to, that they have a voice and that they can influence the culture of the organisation, they are more likely to speak up when something or someone is upsetting them. Empowering children in this way is an important step in keeping them safe.

Staff in child safe organisations understand that parents, carers and other important people in a child's life, have the primary responsibility for raising their children. A child safe organisation talks to, consults with and invites the participation of families, caregivers and the broader community, to promote the rights of children.

Child safe organisations facilitate open, two-way communication with families and communities. Organisations are more likely to foster a child safe culture if the surrounding community values children, and respects and upholds their rights.

A child safe organisation provides culturally safe and child-friendly services which take into account children's diverse circumstances. It recognises that some children are more vulnerable to abuse than others, or find it harder to speak up and be heard. Children have diverse needs, abilities and backgrounds and may be particularly vulnerable if they:

- are living with disability.
- come from specific religious or cultural backgrounds.
- are very young.
- have previously been exposed to trauma.
- feel vulnerable because of their gender identity or sexuality.
- come from diverse family backgrounds.
- live remotely.

Responsibilities of the Management Committee

All employers in child-related employment are required to comply with legislation designed to enhance the level and standard of child protection, through the creation of a child safe organisational culture. Through the creation, promotion and nurturing of the child safe culture organisations aim to deter offenders. To ensure the effective deterrent it is imperative that the Management Committee:

- Familiarise themselves with the legislation.
- Become familiar with the processes they will follow to ensure compliance.
- Become familiar with government agencies.
- Integrate the new child safe obligations into the processes they follow in managing employees, from recruitment, through to termination. The integration will be evident in things such as job descriptions, advertising vacant positions, developing and amending policies.
- Demonstrate a commitment to providing a child safe organisation.
- Have an established and consistent recruitment and selection process.
- Have clear behaviour guidelines and Codes of Conduct for stakeholders.
- Ensure on-going professional development of employees and volunteers is aligned to current practices and research.
- Promote effective supervision of children and adult interactions with children.
- Act on small breaches in procedure with appropriate disciplinary action.
- Ensure inappropriate conduct is reported to the appropriate authority and required investigations are implemented.
- Ensure there is an effective process for staff performance reviews.

Each of these actions are supported by the collaborative relationship between the Management Committee and Nominated Supervisor, who will be responsible for ensuring they are performed and communicated to the Management Committee.

In respect to current staff:

The Management Committee and Nominated Supervisor will apply good governance which ensures:

- Staff are aware of and have access to policies and procedures, and adhere to them.
- Staff have input into continuous improvement practices.
- Staff have access to ongoing fit-for-purpose training.
- Staff are educated about child protection, Child Safe Standards and the current legislation, Acts and Regulations:
- There are clear child safe policies and Codes of Practice for staff, children and families which are applied consistently. This includes clear procedures if and when a breach is identified.
- Child safe policies underpin day-to-day practice.
- The implementation of a comprehensive job description for each staff member, outlining their duties and responsibilities and which will include child protection and Child Safe components.
- The maintenance of a clear procedure for mandatory reporting.
- All staff, volunteers and age-appropriate students hold a current, cleared Working with Children Check. If under the age of 18, volunteers and students will complete the service child protection declaration.
- The Nominated Supervisor and all nominated Responsible Persons, have obtained the accredited Child Protection qualification.
- Policies and Codes of Practice are freely available to all stakeholders, and are discussed and reviewed regularly.
- All stakeholders are aware of their obligations if they suspect or witness harm to a child or children.
- A visual display within the Pre-School which outlines and demonstrates the organisation's commitment to child safe practices.
- The development of and adherence to an employee disciplinary policy for all breaches of conduct, including minor ones.
- Mentoring, support and guidance to encourage child safe best practices in the workplace.
- Engagement of all staff in performance appraisals, supporting the identification of any concerning behaviour.
- The offer of support for stakeholders, if they make complaints or raise concerns or allegations.

In respect to staff recruitment:

Legislation requires the Management Committee to apply good governance which includes:

- Familiarising themselves with the legislation.
- Registering with the relevant approved screening agency.
- Maintaining a clear procedure for employment screening, prior to employment.
- Ensuring that advertisements and / or information packs sent to applicants for positions advertised, state that the preferred applicants will be screened and asked to make disclosure to the Pre-School about whether they are a 'prohibited person'.
- Treating any information disclosed from screening in a fair way.
- Ensuring the education and training of all new Educators in relation to the relevant laws, acts, legislation and regulations. They will be given information during the induction process if required.
- Maintaining a comprehensive job description for each staff member outlining their duties and responsibilities, and which will include a Child Safe component.
- Ensuring each employee signs and receives a copy of their work agreement and position description.
- Ensuring employment advertising includes the organisation's Statement of Commitment to Child Safety.
- Ensuring induction packages for new staff include Codes of Conduct, Child Safe Policies and Complaint Handling Policies.
- Ensuring recruitment processes involve a range of interview questions, to establish staff suitability.
- Ensuring background and reference checks are being implemented and recorded.
- Ensuring records are kept of staff interview responses, reference checks and inductions.

In respect to the Working with Children Check:

A Working with Children Check is a prerequisite for anyone working in paid or voluntary child-related work in NSW. The process involves a National Police check and a review of findings of misconduct. The Pre-School is registered with the Office of the Children's Guardian and will obtain an online clearance before a volunteer, or new staff member, begins in the Pre-School. A copy of the clearance is held in a staff members personal file.

If a volunteer or student is under 18 years of age, and unable to apply for the "Working with Children Check", they will sign the Pre-School volunteer or student "Child Protection Declaration". By completing this form, they are declaring that they are not a prohibited person under the Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998.

All support service personnel and therapists are required to provide a "Working with Children Check" number.

In respect to an allegation regarding a staff member:

The Management Committee and Nominated Supervisor will:

- Report allegations, even if they are believed to be false, vexatious or misconceived.
- Investigate reportable allegations against their employees.
- Protect the privacy of the employee, maintaining confidentiality in respect to any investigation or other disciplinary process.
- Notify the NSW "Office of the Children's Guardian" of the allegation/incident, within 7 days.

- Notify the “Office of the Children’s Guardian” at 30 days, of the actions taken since the matter was notified, and the actions the service intends to take in relation to the investigation process.
- Submit an “Entity Report Form” to the “Office of the Children’s Guardian”, when the investigation is complete, along with all investigation findings.
- Ensure that any decision to terminate an employee as a consequence of a disciplinary process is fair and substantiated.
- Ensure that all policies and procedures are adhered to.

Documenting the Standard

Singleton Heights Pre-School displays and reinforces its commitment to child safety through the creation, review and improvement of related documentation. These documents include:

- The maintenance of a “Child Safe Policy” and “Child Protection Policy”.
- Organisational statement of commitment to child safety which is displayed in the foyer of the service.
- Codes of Conduct signed by all staff, volunteers, students and Management Committee members.
- Risk minimisation strategies which are documented and signed by all staff.
- Complaint handling, information sharing.
- A reporting policy.
- Posters and other information promoting child safety, which is shared during induction processes and with families.
- Meeting agendas and minutes that show child safety is a standing agenda item.

Responsibilities of the Nominated Supervisor

There are many ways to support professional development so staff receive ongoing support and advice about child safe practices:

- Regular team meetings where children’s safety is a standard agenda item.
- Encourage staff to ask questions, voice concerns or give feedback about the organisation’s child safe practices.
- Clearly state the importance of child safe protocols in the position descriptions of all staff.
- Develop and distribute child safe resources and information for staff.
- Conduct regular performance appraisals where you can provide and collect feedback from staff on their strengths and area of improvement.
- Encourage staff to complete relevant training.
- The Nominated Supervisor assumes the role of the Child Safety Officer.

Leaders Promote a Culture of Safety and Reporting:

- Development of clear procedures and expectations around child safety and ensuring these are followed by staff.
- Promotion of a culture where children are able to express their views and are provided opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their lives.
- The organisation is aware of and responds to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disability, children from CALD backgrounds and others who may have additional vulnerabilities.
- Leading a culture of continuous improvement in which all stakeholders are consulted in relation to the continuous improvement of procedures, practices, program and environment.
- Personal behaviour demonstrates child safe practices and acting as a role model in prioritising child safety.
- Ensure all new employees and Management Committee receive a copy of the “Child Safe Policy” during induction and that they have the opportunity to ask questions and clarify their responsibilities.
- Conduct and implement the risk assessment and management process, in consultation with all stakeholders.
- Professional development is prioritised by the service and provides staff with the knowledge, skills and confidence to prevent and identify abuse, and to respond to complaints.
- Incorporate risk management of child abuse into decision-making and actively monitor risks to child safety.
- Encourage day-to-day practices that prioritise child safety.
- A “Code of Conduct” is signed by all staff, volunteers, students and Management Committee members, and consultation during induction ensures that it has been understood.
- Creation of a “Child Safe Policy” and “Reportable Conduct Policy”, in consultation with all stakeholders, and ensuring the review of these as per the service policy review schedule, or when necessary.
- The service culture promotes reporting when necessary.
- Confidentiality is maintained.
- The required documentation is completed and forwarded to relevant agencies.
- The curriculum includes developmentally appropriate content and resources to teach children child safe principles and this is consistently reinforced.
- Ensure families know how, when and to whom complaints can be made. If an incident occurs, the Pre-School will provide families with relevant and appropriate information in a timely manner.
- Families and community members are encouraged to provide feedback on how the organisation keeps children safe, and this information is acted upon when necessary.
- The creation of a culture where complaints are taken seriously and all adults take responsibility for the safety of children.
- Leaders know the value of continuous monitoring of staff.

- Leaders and staff review critical incidents to identify the root cause of the problem, identify risks to the safety of children and make improvements.
- Leaders clearly explain that breaches of Codes of Conduct will result in disciplinary action.
- Staff are given support and information on what to report and how to report, including reports to external bodies.

Child Safety Contact Officer

The Nominated Supervisor is appointed the role of the “Child Safety Contact Officer” and is responsible for ensuring the safety of children, as well as recognising and responding to issues. This Officer will:

- Have formal training in identifying and responding to child abuse.
- Be experienced in managing complaints and allegations.
- Know child protection legislation relevant to their industry.
- Provide support and guidance on expectations of appropriate behaviour for staff interacting with children.
- Be proficient at educating or training staff, particularly in the area of child protection.
- Interact with children on an informal day-to-day basis.
- Accept the nominated role in writing.

Responsibilities of Educators and Staff

Ethical practice and service policy ensure Educators maintain a professional boundary between themselves and children/families. Educators and staff will:

- Maintain a child focus.
- Work within their Code of Conduct, position description and service policies.
- Link practice to the relevant Acts, Laws, Regulations, Code of Ethics and National Quality Standards.
- Be aware of how personal values/beliefs may impact on effective decision making.
- All primary contact Educators complete accredited Child Protection training and child safe training while all other Educators, and administrative staff, are also encouraged to complete the training. Educators are knowledgeable about the types of harm, grooming and reporting procedures.
- Become familiar with the “Child Safe Policy” and “Code of Conduct” and abide by these in their interactions and practices.
- Promote a culture where children are able to express their views and are provided opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their lives.
- Be aware of, and respond to, the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disability, children from CALD backgrounds and others who may have additional vulnerabilities.
- Listen to children and parents, considering and responding to their diverse needs.
- Ensure all stakeholders are consulted in relation to the continuous improvement of procedures and practices in the workplace.
- Engage in continuous professional development.
- Ensure Codes of Conduct are signed by all staff and steps taken to ensure that it has been understood.
- Report any behaviours of concern, completing a “Complaints Record Form”.
- Ensure confidentiality is maintained.
- Ensure the curriculum includes age-appropriate information. Information that describes how adults should behave is provided to children and this is consistently reinforced.
- Ensure that families know how, when and to whom complaints can be made. If an incident occurs, they provide families with relevant and appropriate information.
- Ensure the organisation pays particular attention to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disability and children from CALD backgrounds.

In Respect to Families

Staff in child safe organisations understand that parents, carers and other important people in a child’s life have the primary responsibility for raising their children.

A child safe organisation talks to, consults with, and invites the participation of families, caregivers, and the broader community to promote the rights of children. Open, two-way communication is practiced with families and communities.

A child focused complaint process supports children who are exposed to the risk of harm and encourages them to speak up. Children, families, and staff will be provided with the relevant information to make a complaint of child abuse. Child safe organisations respond by immediately protecting children at risk. Complaints are addressed promptly, thoroughly, and fairly.

All adults understand their reporting obligations, including to external authorities. Child safe cultures create an environment where staff can identify and report suspected harm of children.

Families and community members are encouraged to provide feedback on how the organisation keeps children safe, and this information is acted upon where necessary. This may occur through:

- Policy development and review
- Conducting and implementing the risk assessment and management process, in consultation with all stakeholders.

- Ensuring all stakeholders are consulted in relation to the continuous improvement of procedures and practices in the workplace.
- Informal discussions with families and formal meetings.
- Surveys distributed by the service
- Ensuring that families know how, when and to whom complaints can be made. If an incident occurs, families are able to access relevant and appropriate information.