



## Child Safe - Policy

**Policy Type:** Risk Management  
**Distribution:** Agency Wide  
**Section:** Human Resources  
**Previous Review Dates:** New,  
**Responsibility:** Child Safe Project Manager / Social Work  
**Endorsed by:** Director of Allied & Community Health

**Authorised by:** Signature: ..... Date: .....  
 Chief Executive Officer

### 1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE:

This policy guides WGHG staff, volunteers and identified contractors and students on how to behave with children in our organisation.

All of our staff, volunteers, identified contractors and students must agree to abide by our code of conduct which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children.

### 2. POLICY STATEMENT:

This policy is intended to empower children and young people within our organisation. WGHG involve children and young people when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say. WGHG promote diversity and tolerance in our organisation, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome. In particular we:

- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children and young people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- ensure that children and young people with a disability are safe and can participate equally.

Children and Young People have the same general human rights as adults but they also have specific rights that recognise their special needs as children. Childrens Rights are recorded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### 3. DEFINITIONS:

**Infant/Child/Young Person:** A person aged 0-17 years

**Identified Contractor** – Any contractor or service provide, who provide an on-site service (i.e. pharmacy) and/or any contractor who has access to and/or works on the premises, independently of WGHG staff.

**Physical Abuse** - Physical abuse consists of any non-accidental form of injury or serious physical harm inflicted on a child by any person. Physical abuse does not mean reasonable discipline though it may result from excessive or inappropriate discipline. Physical abuse can include beating, shaking, burning and assault with weapons.

Physical injury and significant harm to a child may also result from neglect by a parent or caregiver or within the context of family violence. The failure of a parent or caregiver to adequately ensure the safety of a child may expose the child to extremely dangerous or life threatening situations, which result in physical injury

and significant harm to the child. Physical abuse also includes Fabricated Illness Syndrome (previously Munchausen's Syndrome by Proxy).

**Sexual Abuse** - A child is sexually abused when any person uses their authority over the child to involve the child in sexual activity. Child sexual abuse involves a wide range of sexual activity including fondling genitals, masturbation, vaginal or anal penetration by a finger, penis or any other object, voyeurism and exhibitionism.

**Emotional Harm** - Emotional abuse occurs when a child is repeatedly rejected, isolated, frightened by threats or is experiencing family violence. It also includes hostility, derogatory name-calling and put-downs, or persistent coldness from a person, to the extent where the behaviour of the child is disturbed or their emotional development is at serious risk of being impaired.

**Neglect** - Neglect includes failure to provide the child with an adequate standard of nutrition, medical care, clothing, shelter or supervision to the extent where the health or development of the child is significantly impaired or placed at risk. A child is neglected if they are abandoned or left uncared for over unreasonable periods of time that is inconsistent with their age, stage and development.

**Grooming** - Grooming is a criminal offence and involves predatory conduct undertaken to prepare a child for sexual activity at a later time. Grooming occurs where an adult communicates by words or conduct with a child under 16 years or with a person who has care, supervision or authority for the child with the intention of facilitating the child's involvement in sexual conduct, either with the groomer or other adult.

**Exposure to Family Violence** - Exposure to family violence is a form of child abuse and should be reported to Child Protection. The effects on children exposed to family violence include emotional & psychological harm and socio economic impacts and the potential for physical harm.

## 4. PROCESS:

### 4.1 Training and supervision

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone in our organisation understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility.

Our organisational culture aims for all staff and volunteers, in addition to parents/carers and children to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. We train our staff and volunteers to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse. Each WGHG department has access to staff trained in Child Protection practices. Training is available online and mandatory for identified staff as per the Mandatory Training Policy, in addition face to face training is offered twice a year.

WGHG also support our staff and volunteers through ongoing supervision to: develop their skills to protect children from abuse; and promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the cultural safety of children from linguistically and/or culturally diverse backgrounds, and the safety of children with a disability.

New employees and volunteers will be supervised to ensure they understand our organisation's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse, as well as checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate. Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services, Victoria Police and the Commission for Children and Young People, under the Victorian Reportable Conduct scheme.

### 4.2 Recruitment

WGHG takes all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children. We develop selection criteria and advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities. Our organisation understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

WGHG actively encourage applications from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability.

All staff and volunteers are required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this Check. WGHG carry out reference checks and police record checks to ensure that we are recruiting the right people. If during the recruitment process a person's records indicate a criminal history then the person will be given the opportunity to provide further information and context.

#### **4.3 Fair procedures for personnel**

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and just to personnel. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form, including investigation updates. Investigations are conducted in line with the West Gippsland Healthcare Group Grievance / Disciplinary policy and the Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme, established by the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005.

If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to children and families on progress and any actions we as an organisation take. All records are securely stored.

#### **4.4 Privacy**

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be staff, volunteers, parents or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. We have safeguards and practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected. Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will have access to it.

#### **4.5 Legislative responsibilities**

Our organisation takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- **Failure to disclose:** Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to the police.
- **Failure to protect:** People of authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.
- Any personnel who are mandatory reporters must comply with their duties.

#### **4.6 Risk management**

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified. In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to children.

We have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks, which include risks posed by physical environments (for example, secure children's areas), and online environments (for example, no staff or volunteer is to have contact with a child in organisations on social media).

#### **4.7 Regular review**

This policy will be reviewed every two years and following significant incidents should they occur. We will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute. Where possible we do our best to work with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability. All incidents and risks relating to Children and Young People are reviewed by the Project Manager Child Safe and taken to the Child Safe Steering Group and Executive where action is required.

#### **4.8 Allegations, concerns and complaints**

Our organisation takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly. Our staff and volunteers are trained to deal appropriately with allegations.

We 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, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour. Where concerns are in relation to the organisation's leadership and/or senior staff, reports can be made to a variety of positions within WGHG, including HR, line management, Paediatric Social Worker, Child Safe Project Manager and the Chair of the Board. Any such concerns should be considered with regard to the WGHG Reportable Conduct Policy.

We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place. Reports regarding abuse/neglect should be made in accordance with the Vulnerable Children at Risk of Harm Policy.

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

- a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves)
- behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- observing suspicious behaviour.

## **5. REFERENCES:**

- WGHG Code of Conduct
- WGHG Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme policy
- WGHG Vulnerable children at risk of harm
- WGHG Grievance / Disciplinary Policy
- Victorian Child Safe standards
- WGHG Mandatory Training Policy
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.