



Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Section 1 - Purpose and Objectives

(1) This policy outlines what CFA is doing to prioritise child safety and wellbeing. It sets out CFA's expectations about child safe practices for all CFA employees, CFA volunteers, Secondees, labour hire contractors, and any cohort engaged by and/or representing CFA.

(2) This policy outlines the support in place to achieve these commitments and describes the approach CFA is taking to ensure all [Victorian Child Safe Standards](#) (the Standards) are met.

(3) This policy confirms the commitment of CFA's Board, Executive and senior leaders to child safety and wellbeing.

(4) This policy outlines how CFA leadership will continue to champion a positive and proactive child safe culture that values the engagement and contributions of young people, while recognising the unique safety risks across the broader organisation.

Section 2 - Scope

(5) CFA recognises that children's rights to safety and participation are embedded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and protected in Victorian legislation through the [Child Safe Standards](#). CFA will align and act in compliance with the established [Child Safe Standards](#) governed by the Commission for Children and Young People and with legislation that directly or indirectly impacts the safety of children.

(6) CFA embraces its obligations and responsibilities to act with integrity and transparency in continuously improving the organisation's child safety and wellbeing approach. CFA's approach will provide opportunities for children and young people to participate in decisions that affect them. CFA will have mechanisms in place to ensure it is responsive to the input of children and young people.

(7) All child safety concerns or allegations of child abuse, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, grooming, exposure to family violence and neglect, will be reported to the relevant authorities and investigated by CFA or their contracted agencies. CFA investigations that include allegations of criminal conduct will not progress until the police investigation has been completed. A child focused, immediate, and effective response that supports the safety and wellbeing, and protects privacy and confidentiality of all parties will be prioritised.

Section 3 - Policy

Application of policy

(8) This policy applies to all CFA employees, CFA volunteers, FRV Secondees, labour hire contractors, and any cohort engaged by and/or representing CFA.

(9) This policy applies in all CFA environments, both physical and online.

(10) This policy applies regardless of:

- a. where or when an interaction with a child occurs, whether on or outside CFA operated grounds, during or outside operational hours or in an online environment including through any form of technology;
- b. the age of the child;
- c. the consent of the child;
- d. the consent of parents/guardians and families; and
- e. any circumstances in which a child initiates an interaction or relationship with them.

Statement of commitment

(11) CFA is committed to creating safe and supportive environments for children and young people and has a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of child abuse. All CFA employees, CFA volunteers, FRV Secondees, labour hire contractors and any cohort engaged by and/or representing CFA have a legal and moral obligation to keep children and young people safe.

(12) As an organisation, CFA values the contribution of children and young people and creates opportunities for them to build their skills and confidence and take part in decision making.

(13) CFA is committed to the cultural safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and their families.

Approach

(14) CFA's approach to child safety and wellbeing is informed by the [Victorian Child Safe Standards](#). The legislation that creates the Standards is the [Child Wellbeing and Safety Act \(2005\) Vic](#). However, child safety and wellbeing is at the core of our values as a trusted community organisation.

(15) The Standards support organisations to promote the safety of children and young people by requiring them to put in place policies and procedures to prevent, report and respond to allegations of child abuse and harm.

A commitment to child safety and wellbeing

(16) CFA's child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, and behaviour statement is available to all CFA employees, CFA volunteers, Secondees, labour hire contractors, children, young people, parents and the community including any cohort engaged by and/or representing CFA.

(17) Leaders, employees, and volunteers in CFA champion and model a child safe culture, express support for keeping children safe, and act when they have concerns about children's safety.

(18) Child safety champions are deployed across the state to ensure a child safe culture is modelled at all levels of CFA.

(19) CFA's risk management approach is focused on identifying, preventing, and reducing the risk of child abuse and harm.

Zero tolerance to child abuse and neglect

(20) Children are entitled to be safe and feel safe and protected both in physical and online environments.

(21) Children have the right to be respected, listened to and have their particular needs addressed. The relationship between CFA members and a child requires unconditional trust and safety.

(22) Child abuse and/or arrangements that allow it to occur must never happen or be tolerated.

(23) Leaders, employees, and volunteers in CFA must be mindful of the inherent power imbalance that exists between

them and children. This imbalance may exist by virtue of the difference in age, maturity, physical size, life experience and position. Abuse arises from the misuse of authority or power. Any form of child abuse is never acceptable.

(24) To promote child safety and wellbeing, leaders, employees, and volunteers in the CFA must:

- a. take all reasonable steps to protect children from abuse;
- b. take disclosures of harm or abuse made by a child seriously;
- c. raise concerns with management if risks to child safety are identified;
- d. report and act on any concerns or observed breaches of this policy;
- e. participate in all compulsory training and professional development including training on child safety and wellbeing;
- f. treat all children with respect, regardless of race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, nationality, cultural background, financial situation, disability or other characteristics;
- g. consider the different needs of all children at CFA, support them to participate fully in programs and help them and their families feel included;
- h. never be racist towards anyone at CFA and report any instances of racism they become aware of;
- i. help CFA be a place where people of all cultures feel safe and included;
- j. listen to children and respond to them if they feel unsafe;
- k. value children's ideas and opinions;
- l. promote friendships and encourage children to support their peers;
- m. involve children in decisions about the activities they take part in at CFA and welcome the participation of parents and carers in these decisions;
- n. report any conflicts of interest (such as an outside relationship with a child) that may affect your ability to perform your role;
- o. respect the privacy of children and their families, including keeping all personal information confidential unless required by law to share it;
- p. inform parents and carers if there are situations that need to be safely managed but are outside the boundaries of this policy (such as driving a child to a different location or competition event); and
- q. uphold the rights of the child and always prioritise their needs;

Cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

(25) CFA will provide a welcoming and inclusive environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families, recognising each person is unique with their own characteristics, strengths, and challenges. CFA employees and CFA volunteers will be supported to understand the importance of cultural safety and what they need to do to contribute to it.

(26) CFA will actively support and facilitate the participation and inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families within the organisation encouraging expression of their culture and supporting them to enjoy their cultural rights.

(27) CFA has zero tolerance approach to racism and aims to promptly and properly address all concerns and complaints related to racism, cultural abuse, discrimination, and cultural safety.

Child participation and empowerment

(28) CFA values the contribution of children and young people and creates opportunities for them to build their skills and confidence and take part in decision making.

(29) CFA recognises that empowering children and young people increases their confidence so they will feel

comfortable raising concerns and making complaints or allegations of abuse.

(30) Protective behaviours training is available to all CFA young members. The training is designed develop the personal safety skills of children and young people to reduce their vulnerability to all forms of abuse.

(31) CFA will provide the opportunity for children and young people to help organise events, join advisory committees, help produce information guides and resources and be involved in the development of programs.

(32) CFA employees and volunteers have access to training in best practice for youth engagement.

Involving families and communities

(33) CFA recognises families are diverse and all are welcome at CFA brigades. We encourage parents and carers to ask questions about how CFA prioritises child safety.

(34) Information about CFA's approach to child safety is provided on the [CFA website](#).

(35) Families have access to CFA policies, procedures, codes of conduct, [behavioural standards](#), and the [child safety behaviour statement](#).

(36) Families have an opportunity to take part in decisions made by CFA that impact the safety and wellbeing of their child. Families and carers are provided with information about CFA when a child or young person in their care joins CFA.

Respecting equity, diversity and inclusion

(37) CFA welcomes and supports the participation of all children and young people including children and young people with a disability, from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those who are unable to live at home, LGBTIQ+, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and their families. The Youth Programs Team will provide support and advice on reasonable and appropriate adjustments that can be made to support the participation of children and young people who have different needs.

(38) A range of training and information on inclusion is available for all employees and volunteers. This includes toolkits targeted at Junior Leaders on how to include members with diverse needs.

(39) Intersectionality will be considered when developing programs for children and young people.

(40) CFA has a diversity and inclusion network that provides a place for like-minded members to connect and work towards creating an inclusive organisation where members can bring their whole self to CFA.

Ensuring that our employees and volunteers are suitable and supported

(41) All persons applying to CFA to be either an employee or volunteer are made aware of CFA's stance on child safety and the screening processes in place before they apply.

(42) All employees and volunteers are screened before commencing at CFA. This may include, but is not limited to, child safety interview questions, child safety referee questions, national police records check, Working with Children Check.

(43) Employee and volunteer induction includes information about the child safety and wellbeing policy, behaviour statement and procedure for reporting child safety concerns.

(44) During their induction, employees and volunteers are provided with knowledge of how to identify child abuse or issues of child safety and how to respond if they receive a disclosure of child abuse or issues of child safety.

(45) CFA has processes in place to continually monitor the suitability of employees and volunteers and act when required.

(46) All CFA employees, CFA volunteers and FRV Secondees are made aware of their responsibility to keep children and young people safe.

Child-focused complaint processes

(47) CFA encourages and welcomes the reporting of concerns or incidents and responds promptly, thoroughly, and fairly, and takes immediate action to protect children and young people at risk.

(48) CFA will provide children and young people access to information, support and complaints processes in ways that are culturally safe, accessible and easy to understand. Processes for handling child safety complaints and concerns prioritise the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

(49) A [child friendly complaint form](#) is available on the CFA website and young people are informed of the process to report incidents or concerns.

(50) CFA employees and CFA volunteers who are more likely to receive disclosures of abuse receive extra training in how to respond in a child-focused and culturally safe way.

(51) Breaches of the [CFA Child Safety Behaviour Statement](#) are taken seriously and addressed.

Employee and volunteer knowledge, skill and awareness

(52) The CFA child safety training module, '[Playing Your Part: Keeping Children and Young People Safe](#)', provides knowledge to employees and volunteers so they can recognise indicators of child harm and know how to respond to and report child safety issues.

(53) A range of other role-based training and resources are available to support our capacity to build culturally safe environments for children and young people in all their diversity.

(54) The [child safety pages](#) on Members Online provide information on CFA's child safe practices and the different training and resources available to members.

Safe physical and online environments

(55) CFA's risk management system is used to record and monitor actions that will prevent or reduce identified risks of child abuse and harm.

(56) Risk assessments and risk management plans must be completed and deemed acceptable for all new programs and systems that involve or impact children before they are implemented. Intersectionality must be considered when thinking about risks. Training is available to support this process.

(57) Risk assessments must be completed for all events where children and young people will be present. [Child safety risk assessment templates and guidance material](#) is provided on Members Online. Training is available to support this process.

(58) CFA online systems have safeguards in place to ensure data is protected and content is appropriate for the audience.

(59) The organisation has oversight of employees who have access to data that could be misused.

(60) Contractors must follow this policy and CFA's [Child Safety Behaviour Statement](#). Contractors who regularly attend

CFA premises or have access to CFA ICT systems including email, must have a current Working with Children Clearance.

Responding and reporting

(61) Employees, volunteers, Secondees, labour hire contractors, children, young people and parents who have concerns that a child may be subject to abuse, grooming or sexual misconduct are asked to contact the relevant authority (including Victoria Police) or CFA's Child Safety Officer by phoning 9262 8370 or by email: childsafetyofficer@cfa.vic.gov.au. Alternatively, the CFA Member Wellbeing Support Line is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week on 1800 959 232.

(62) Communications will be treated confidentially with a 'need to know' basis. Whenever there are concerns that a child is in immediate danger the police or emergency services should be called on 000.

Reviewing the implementation of the Child Safe Standards

(63) CFA's Child Safety Action Plan is regularly reviewed and updated when new opportunities for improvement are identified.

(64) CFA aims to continuously improve child safe practices through analysis of reported complaints, concerns, and incidents.

(65) CFA regularly seeks advice from peak bodies and collaborates with similar organisations while looking for improvement opportunities.

Documenting policies and procedures

(66) The [Child Safety Behaviour Statement](#) (code of conduct) outlines the behavioural expectations and responsibilities of employees and volunteers when children and young people are present.

(67) CFA's child safety and wellbeing policies and procedures are informed by thorough consultation with a wide range of stakeholders including engagement with employees, volunteers, children and young people and their families as well as subject matter experts from within and outside the organisation.

(68) CFA employees and volunteers are supported to follow the child safety and wellbeing policies and procedures through training, supervision, and ongoing review.

Breaches

Failure to comply with this policy

(69) The effect of non-compliance of this policy may result in a formal investigation of the circumstances and/or misconduct proceedings against employees and disciplinary proceedings against volunteers.

(70) Breaches of this policy may be dealt with through the CFA employee's or volunteer's line manager in the first instance.

(71) Breaches may be progressed and be dealt with in under CFA's Complaints Management Process or the relevant provisions of the applicable Enterprise Bargaining Agreement, Charters, Codes, Contracts, Agreements and CFA policies.

(72) Breaches that involve not reporting a child safety incident may be criminal in nature and may result in investigation and / or prosecution by the police.

Section 4 - Related Procedure

(73) [Child Safety and Protection Procedure](#)

(74) [Working with Children Checks – New CFA Engagements Policy](#)

(75) [Working with Children Clearance Adverse Notice - Employees Procedure](#)

(76) [Working with Children Clearance Adverse Notice – Volunteers Procedure](#)

Status and Details

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Glossary Terms and Definitions

"CFA member" - Refers to all CFA volunteers, officers, employees and secondees.

"CFA employee" - Any person who is directly employed by CFA, including those employees on a fixed term or casual employment contract.

"CFA volunteer" - An officer or member who receives no remuneration for their services in relation to a brigade but does not include an officer or member of an industry brigade.

"FRV Secondee" - An officer or employee of Fire Rescue Victoria made available to CFA under section 25B of the FRV Act.

"Labour hire contractor" - Personnel provided by a staffing agency for a fee. These personnel are employees of the agency and not CFA.

"Child" - A person under the age of 18.

"Young person" - A person under the age of 18.

"Child safe culture" - A child safe culture means an organisation has shared attitudes, values, policies and practices that prioritise the safety of children

"Cultural Safety" - Cultural safety is the positive recognition and celebration of cultures. It is more than just the absence of racism or discrimination and more than 'cultural awareness' and 'cultural sensitivity'. It empowers people and allows them to contribute and feel safe to be themselves.

"Equity" - Equity is a state of fairness in which all children are equal and can participate fully and safely in an organisation, regardless of their background, characteristics or beliefs. This requires that organisations understand that some children have different needs and may require different supports or assistance to feel safe, well and to participate fully.

"Intersectionality" - Intersectionality refers to the ways in which different aspects of a person's identity can expose them to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation. This may include gender, Aboriginality, sexual

orientation, gender identity, among other aspects of a person's identity.

"Inclusive environment" - Organisations with an inclusive environment: value all children respect their rights challenge all forms of discrimination understand and respond to the needs and capabilities of all children and their families, including Aboriginal children and their families adjust their approaches to ensure all children feel safe, welcome and can participate

"Wellbeing" - A positive state of physical, mental and emotional health. It generally means feeling safe, happy and healthy more than momentarily.

"Child Abuse" - Child abuse is defined by ill treatment or neglect including emotional, physical or sexual abuse or injury, or any physical or psychological damage that is detrimental to a child's well-being or is capable of resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's physical or mental health, survival, development or dignity. There are different types of child abuse, and many children experience more than one type. There are five broad categories of abuse - physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse including grooming, neglect and exposure to family violence.

"Physical abuse" - The intentional use of physical force against a child that results in, or is likely to result in, harm to the child's health, survival, or development. This includes behaviours such as hitting, beating, punching, kicking, shaking, biting, strangling, scalding, burning or assault with a weapon. In an organisational setting, it is characterised by physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of a child.

"Emotional abuse" - Characterised by behaviour and language which undermines the child's self-esteem, confidence and sense of worth. It may include repeatedly rejecting the child, isolating the child, persistent coldness and cutting them off from normal social experiences and relationships with others, terrorising through verbal assaults, insults, threatening or frightening the child or young person.

"Sexual abuse" - Occurs when a person involves children or young people in sexual activity. Sexual activity involves a wide range of behaviours such as fondling genitals, masturbation, penetration, exposing oneself, watching children in states of undress, exposure to pornography, taking and sharing inappropriate images or videos.

"Grooming" - Predatory conduct undertaken with the intention of involving the child in sexual activity. Grooming can be directed at the child, their family and carers to create relationships and situations where sexual abuse can occur. The definition of grooming includes online grooming. Grooming is a criminal offence.

"Neglect" - Includes both incidents or a pattern of failing to care for the child, to the extent that their needs are not met e.g. health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and living conditions. In an organisational setting, neglect occurs when staff or volunteers do not meet their obligations and responsibilities to keep a child safe and well.

"Exposure to family violence" - Involves a child living in an environment where a member of the family experiences any type of abuse including physical violence, threats, sexual assault, emotional and psychological torment, economic control or any behaviour that causes a person to live in fear.

"Sexual Misconduct" - Sexual misconduct includes a variety of sexualised behaviours against, with or in the presence of a child. These behaviours may not meet the threshold for a sexual offence but can still pose a significant risk to children. Behaviours could include inappropriate conversations of a sexual nature, comments that express a desire to act in a sexual manner, or in some cases, behaviour that crosses a professional boundary, such as having or seeking to establish an inappropriate or overly personal or intimate relationship with a child.