

3.2 Child Safety and Wellbeing 1/

VERSION NUMBER	4 (implemented 1 May 2023)		
DATE RATIFIED	26/04/2023	DATE FOR REVIEW	By no later than 1 July 2024

Policy Declaration

DNC is committed to empowering children as vital and active members of our community and our organisation. We involve them when making decisions about matters which affect them and are committed to their safety and our legal and moral obligations to act in their best interest. This policy identifies the importance of children and their safety in our organisation and guides us on how to behave with them.

Policy Description

Application:

This policy applies to all people who conduct work for, or are connected to, DNC in a paid or unpaid capacity, including staff, CoM Members, volunteers and all DNC users. It applies to a broad range of situations where interaction with a person under the age of 18 years (children) may occur including all activities in and organised by DNC which involve, result in or relate to contact with children.

It is important everyone is aware of DNC's child safety obligations, including understanding allegations of misconduct involving children can be made against a person even if the conduct occurred outside of their work.

Background:

The Victorian Government Child Safe Standards (The Standards) are compulsory minimum standards for organisations that provide services for children (or are used by children) to help protect them from harm.

Objectives:

Children are valued participants in DNC who bring insight and innovation. DNC recognises the Victorian Child Safe Standards and will incorporate practices and systems into DNC to ensure compliance with the standards. DNC recognises that children are vital members of our community and have a fundamental right to be safe, happy, and empowered.

Child Safe Standards

There are 11 Standards as follows:

Child Safe Standard 1 – DNC is a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children are respected and valued

We will ensure that:

- 1.1 A child's ability to express their culture and enjoy their cultural rights is encouraged and actively supported.
- 1.2 Strategies are embedded within DNC which equip all members to acknowledge and appreciate the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and understand its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- 1.3 Measures are adopted by DNC to ensure racism within DNC is identified, confronted and not tolerated. Any instances of racism are addressed with appropriate consequences.
- 1.4 DNC actively supports and facilitates participation and inclusion within it by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.
- 1.5 All DNC's policies, procedures, systems and processes together create a culturally safe and inclusive environment and meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

Child Safe Standard 2 – Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in DNC's organisational leadership, governance and culture

We will ensure that:

- 2.1 We make a public commitment to child safety.
- 2.2 A child safe culture is championed and modelled at all levels of DNC from the top down and bottom up.

2.3 Governance arrangements facilitate implementation of this policy at all levels.

2.4 A DNC Child Safe Code of Conduct provides guidelines for everyone on expected behavioural standards and responsibilities.

2.5 Risk management strategies focus on preventing, identifying and mitigating risks to children.

2.6 Staff and volunteers understand their obligations on information sharing and recordkeeping.

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

We will ensure that:

3.1 Children are informed about their rights, including to safety, information and participation.

3.2 The importance of friendships is recognised and support from peers is encouraged, to help children feel safe and be less isolated.

3.3 Where appropriate, children are provided with relevant sexual abuse related information in an age-appropriate way.

3.4 Staff and volunteers are attuned to signs of harm and facilitate child-friendly ways for children to express their views, participate in decision-making and raise their concerns.

3.5 DNC has strategies in place to develop a culture that facilitates participation and is responsive to the input of children.

3.6 DNC provides opportunities for children to participate and are responsive to their contributions, thereby strengthening confidence and engagement.

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

We will ensure that:

4.1 Families participate in decisions affecting their child.

4.2 DNC engages and openly communicates with families and the community about its child safe approach and relevant information is accessible.

4.3 Families and communities have a say in the development and review of the DNC's policies and practices.

4.4 Families, carers and the community are informed about DNC's operations and governance.

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

We will ensure that:

- 5.1 DNC CoM, staff and volunteers understand children’s diverse circumstances, and provide support and respond to those who are vulnerable.
- 5.2 Children have access to information, support and complaints processes in ways that are culturally safe, accessible and easy to understand.
- 5.3 DNC pays particular attention to the needs of children with disability, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those who are unable to live at home, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children.
- 5.4 DNC pays particular attention to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and provides/promotes a culturally safe environment for them.

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

We will ensure that:

- 6.1 Recruitment, including advertising, referee checks and staff and volunteer pre-employment screening, emphasise child safety and wellbeing.
- 6.2 Relevant staff and volunteers have current working with children checks or equivalent background checks.
- 6.3 All staff and volunteers receive an appropriate induction and are aware of their responsibilities to children, including record keeping, information sharing and reporting obligations.
- 6.4 Ongoing supervision and people-management are focused on child safety and wellbeing.

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

We will ensure that:

- 7.1 DNC has an accessible, child-focused complaint handling policy which clearly outlines: the roles and responsibilities of leadership, staff and volunteers; approaches to dealing with different types of complaints; breaches of relevant policies or the Code of Conduct; and obligations to act and report.
- 7.2 Effective complaint handling processes are understood by children, families, staff and volunteers, and are culturally safe.
- 7.3 Complaints are taken seriously, and responded to promptly and thoroughly.

7.4 DNC has policies and procedures in place that address reporting of complaints and concerns to relevant authorities, whether or not the law requires reporting, and co-operates with law enforcement.

7.5 Reporting, privacy and employment law obligations are met.

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

We will ensure that:

8.1 CoM, staff and volunteers are trained and supported to effectively implement DNC's child safety and wellbeing policy.

8.2 CoM, staff and volunteers receive training and information to recognise indicators of child harm including harm caused by other children.

8.3 CoM, staff and volunteers receive training and information to respond effectively to issues of child safety and wellbeing and support colleagues who disclose harm.

8.4 CoM, staff and volunteers receive training and information on how to build culturally safe environments for children.

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

We will ensure that:

9.1 CoM, staff and volunteers identify and mitigate risks in the online and physical environments without compromising a child's right to privacy, access to information, social connections and learning opportunities.

9.2 The online environment is used in accordance with DNC's Code of Conduct and child safety and wellbeing policy and practices.

9.3 Risk management plans consider risks posed by DNC settings, activities, and the physical environment.

9.4 Facilities and services contracted from third parties will have procurement policies that ensure the safety of children.

Child Safe Standard 10 – Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved

We will ensure that:

10.1 DNC regularly reviews, evaluates, and improves child safe practices.

10.2 Complaints, concerns and safety incidents are analysed to identify causes and systemic failures to inform continuous improvement.

10.3 DNC reports on the findings of relevant reviews to CoM members, staff and volunteers, community, families and children.

Child Safe Standard 11 – Policies and procedures document how DNC is safe for children

We will ensure that:

11.1 Policies and procedures address all Child Safe Standards.

11.2 Policies and procedures are documented and easy to understand.

11.3 Best practice models and stakeholder consultation informs the development of policies and procedures.

11.4 Leaders champion and model compliance with policies and procedures.

11.5 Staff and volunteers understand and implement policies and procedures.

Related Policies and Procedures:

- Code of Conduct and Ethics Policy
- Child Safe Code of Conduct Policy
- Recruitment and Appointment of Staff Policy
- Induction Policy
- Appropriate Use of Technology Policy
- Feedback and Grievance Policy
- Incident Reporting and Response Policy
- Safe Workplace Policy
- Strategy, Business, and Risk Policy
- Child Safety Action Plan
- Staff Training Register

3.1.1 Child Safety and Wellbeing Procedures

To ensure we embed a child safe culture at DNC child safety is an ongoing process of training and information sharing, including the following actions:

Children’s Participation

- Our community engagement activities will include opportunities for discussions with children, including child-led conversations on what makes them feel safe and unsafe.
- A suggestion box in the foyer with suggestions assessed and acted on where appropriate. Children are provided with feedback on their suggestions.
- Consultation with children about any proposed significant relevant changes to the physical environment, policies, procedures, programs or staffing. Children's views are collected by staff, provided to management and considered in the decision-making process.
- Display a public commitment to child safety in public areas around DNC, including a commitment to the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Information provided to children and families about DNC operations, staffing and programs is suitable for different age groups and diversity of the children. Child safety information sessions will be offered where needed.
- Run annual place-based events, designed by children for children, with our local schools and community organisations including Children's Week activities.
- Work with young learners to develop learning programs designed to meet their needs and be delivered in a safe environment.
- Volunteer opportunities will include opportunities for children to participate in a safe and supportive environment.
- Celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in the DNC physical environment with art and garden plantings designed by Aboriginal children.

Involving Families and Communities

- 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.
- Publish this Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Child Safe Code of Conduct on our website, placing copies in public areas and providing hard copies on request.
- Include articles and information on child safety and wellbeing, and reminders about our policies and procedures in our marketing and promotional materials.

Creating culturally safe environments for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families

- Include an Acknowledgement of Country at CoM and other DNC meetings.
- Consult with families and members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to identify opportunities to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and practices at DNC.

- Provide opportunities for children to share their cultural identity and express their culture, including through community activities.
- Provide training for staff and volunteers on the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Celebrate NAIDOC Week acknowledging significant cultural events.
- Provide opportunities for feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities on their experience at DNC.

Valuing Diversity

- Provide training for all CoM members, 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 from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, LGBTIQ children and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.
- Offer students 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 take action when discrimination or exclusion is identified.
- Deliver programming that reflects the diversity of our students, their interests and cultures.
- Strive to reflect the diversity of our community through representation in our staff and CoM members.
- Acknowledge and celebrate important cultural dates in our activities.
- Have a physical and online environment that actively celebrates diversity.
- Commit to ensuring our facilities and online activities promote inclusion of children of all abilities.

Recruiting and Screening Staff and Volunteers

- Recruit staff, CoM and volunteers who are appropriate to engage with children.
- Require a Working with Children Check, Police Checks and referee checks for all CoM, staff and volunteers who have a role with children or have access to children's personal information.
- Position descriptions will include a child safety statement, and a zero tolerance towards racism with an expectation to act statement on incidents of racism.

- Require staff to have appropriate qualifications for their roles and check to make sure these qualifications are valid.

Supporting staff and volunteers

- Incorporate child safety considerations into decisions impacting children and their families.
- Develop a Child Safe Training Action Plan which is reviewed annually.
- Mandated annual child safety training for leaders, staff and volunteers which is recorded in the DNC Training Register.
- Cultural diversity and other types of diversity training for leaders, staff and volunteers which is recorded in the DNC Training Register.
- Issues or concerns about behaviour with children will be raised immediately and addressed in line with our Child Safe Code of Conduct, complaint handling policy and disciplinary policy.

Child Safety Person

- The Manager is the Child Safety Person with responsibility for responding to any child safety related complaints or concerns.
- DNC staff will receive child safety training, so can act as a child safety person in the absence of the Manager.
- Photos and names of the Child Safety Persons are displayed on our noticeboard.
- If a person does not feel comfortable making a report to a child safety person, they may report their concern to the CoM Chair.

Disclosure of abuse or harm

DNC is committed to developing a culture of reporting and training for staff to understand their obligations when a child makes a disclosure of abuse or harm. If staff feel uncomfortable with following the Child Safe Procedure for any disclosure, they should discuss this with the Manager who will manage the conversation and disclosure with them.

If a child discloses an incident of abuse or harm to you:

- Try to separate them from the other children discreetly and listen to them carefully.
- Let the child use their own words to explain what has occurred.
- Reassure the child that you take what they are saying seriously, and it is not their fault and that they are doing the right thing.
- Explain to them that this information may need to be shared with others, such as with their parent/carer, specific people at DNC, or the police.

- Do not make promises to the child such as promising not to tell anyone about the incident, except that you will do your best to keep them safe.
- Do not leave the child in a distressed state. If they seem at ease in your company, stay with them.
- Provide them with an incident report form to complete, or complete it together, if you think the child can do this.
- As soon as possible after the disclosure, record the information using the child's words and report the disclosure to the Manager in the first instance and if not available to police or child protection.
- Ensure the disclosure is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely.

If a parent/carer says their child has been abused in your organisation or raises a concern:

- Explain that DNC has processes to ensure all abuse allegations are taken very seriously and you will need to take any concerns to the Manager for action.
- Ask about the wellbeing of the child.
- Allow the parent/carer to talk through the incident in their own words.
- Advise the parent/carer that you will take notes during the discussion to capture all details.
- Explain to them the information may need to be repeated to authorities or others, such as the DNC's management or the police or child protection.
- Do not make promises at this early stage, except that you will do your best to keep the child safe.
- Provide them with an incident report form to complete or complete it together.
- Ask them what action they would like to take and advise them of what the immediate next steps will be.
- Ensure the report is recorded accurately, and that the record is stored securely.

Child protection

If you witness criminal activity contact Victoria Police 000.

In the event that any person is concerned that the health and wellbeing of a child is threatened, they will report the situation to a DNC staff member, who must report it to the Manager.

The Manager will respond to concerns of child abuse in a manner which:

- Protects the rights of the child.
- Protects the safety of staff.
- Protects the role and reputation of DNC in our community.

The Manager will utilise DNC Incident Response and/or Disciplinary procedures as appropriate to the situation. Inappropriate behaviour towards children may result in a warning, termination of employment, or exclusion from the DNC.

Record keeping and information sharing

- All child safety complaints, concerns, incidents and near misses will be recorded in the incident reporting system.
- A separate child-focused complaint handling process for children which includes guidance on how to make a complaint, the process for raising a child safety concern, a description of the different types of complaints / concerning behaviours and obligations regarding privacy and confidentiality.
- Records which may assist with the investigation of a complaint or safety concern will be identified and kept as part of the record of an investigation.
- Records will be kept even if an investigation does not substantiate a complaint.
- Record and keep the outcome of any investigations, and the resolution of any complaints. This includes findings made, reasons for decisions and actions taken.
- Records will be stored securely and kept by DNC for at least 5 years.
- DNC may share relevant information to promote the safety and wellbeing of children, where it is appropriate and in their best interests.
- DNC 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 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.

Risk management

- Conduct regular risk assessments and have a risk management plan to address the risk of child abuse and harm at DNC.
- The risk management plan will be developed in consultation with our staff, volunteers, parent representatives and children. Copies will be available from the main office.
- The CoM is responsible for approving the risk management plan.
- Contractors or other providers of services will always be supervised by a member of staff while working with us (where children are present) to ensure child safety.

- DNC requires children aged 12 and under must be accompanied by a responsible adult (e.g. parent guardian or teacher), unless appropriate risk management strategies have been documented and implemented.
- Raise awareness of the risks and dangers of the online environment with children sharing information and training, where appropriate, about cyber safety.

Non-compliance with this policy and the Child Safe Code of Conduct

DNC will enforce this policy, the Child Safe Code of Conduct and any other child safety and wellbeing policies. Potential breaches by anyone will be investigated and may result in restriction of duties, suspension or termination of employment or engagement or other corrective action. More information can be found in our disciplinary policy.

Review

DNC will review all child safe practices and policies at least every two years. The Manager will conduct a review of how effectively DNC is delivering child safety and wellbeing. The input of people involved with DNC will be sought as part of this review. 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 CoM and will be informed by consultation with children, families and staff.

1/ reference source : Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre v2 Approved 15 March 2023