

OFFICE OF THE CHILD SAFETY COMMISSIONER

PROCEDURES

CHILD SAFETY POLICY

These guidelines are available for perusal by all employees of the Office of the Child Safety Commissioner.

All members of the public may view these guidelines free of charge during normal office hours at any OCSC Office. The Guidelines can also be viewed at the OCSC website:

<http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/>

Overview

Our commitment to child safety

All children who have contact with OCSC staff, whether directly or indirectly, have a right to feel and be safe. The Mission, Vision and Values of our office reflect our commitment to safety, and emphasise that the best interests of those children we have contact with are always our first priority. We aim to be a child safe and child friendly organisation that ensures children both feel and are safe and valued.

Why the OCSC has developed a Child Safety Policy

All children have the right to grow, develop, play, learn and work safely within our community. Ignoring issues of child safety increases the risk of harm to children. All organisations whose staff or volunteers have regular contact with children are encouraged to develop and implement a child safety policy. This is one of the core messages in Australia's ground breaking bipartisan approach for increasing the safety of children in their dealings with community service organisations, the *National Framework: Creating Safe Environments for Children- Organisations, Employees and Volunteers*.

In fulfilling the legislative functions under the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*, OCSC staff can have regular contact (both directly and indirectly) with children, some of whom are very vulnerable. Given these functions, it is important for our office to demonstrate its commitment to child safety and to have a robust and carefully implemented child safety policy.

The development of this policy is consistent with our responsibilities under the Victorian *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* which provides in section 17(2) that:

“Every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in his or her best interests and is needed by him or her by reason of being a child.”

The policy is also consistent with our other legal obligations including those under the Victorian *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* which provides that children have a right to be safe when visiting or working in a workplace.

How has the policy been developed?

The development and implementation of this policy has been informed by our *Guide for Creating a Child-safe Organisation*, which reflects core components of the National Framework, and is built on our Mission, Vision and Values and the principles of the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*.

Guided by the process outlined in the Guide, staff of the OCSC contributed to the development of the policy and achieved a shared commitment to ensuring it remains a living document.

Best practice requires reflection and review and so this policy and the procedures that flow from it will be monitored and reviewed regularly. The next review will be completed by March 2008.

Who must comply with this policy?

This policy applies to all staff of the OCSC. The term “staff” is intended to cover all people employed or engaged by the OCSC to undertake activities that include contact with children (including consultants, researchers, and volunteers). A more detailed Child Safety Procedures manual has been developed to assist staff in complying with the requirements of this policy.

How we will protect children

Listen to children

As an advocate for children, we recognise the importance of ensuring the voices of children are heard in shaping the policies and resources we develop. We seek the views of children through formal processes of consultation as well as through visiting children in a range of settings including educational facilities, residential care and juvenile justice facilities.

Value diversity

We value diversity and do not tolerate any discriminatory practices. Staff are provided with opportunities to engage in cultural awareness and human rights training.

Provide a safe environments and activities

We recognise the importance of careful planning to ensure activities and events we organise are safe for children. We have developed procedures including a safety checklist and have appointed a child safety co-ordinator.

We recognise our obligation to ensure we provide a safe environment for all staff and visitors to our office, including children. Training is provided on OH&S issues and all staff are actively encouraged to identify any potential hazards to children and to take action to control any risks.

Protect privacy and confidentiality

As a core component of protecting children, we place considerable importance on safeguarding the privacy and confidentiality of information provided to us about particular children and their families, through honouring and respecting its sensitive and personal nature. We have developed a privacy policy and procedures regarding the collection, use and storage of information.

Carefully recruit and screen staff

We apply the best practice standards in the recruitment and screening of staff. All prospective staff are required to undergo safety screening in accordance with a detailed safety screening policy, which includes undergoing a check in accordance with the *Working with Children Act 2005*.

Provide support for staff

We seek to attract and retain the best staff. We provide support and supervision so people feel valued, respected and fairly treated. We have developed a Code of Conduct to provide guidance to our staff.

Act on any concerns about the conduct of our staff

The OCSC will listen to and act on any concerns children, or their parents/carers or others may raise with us about the conduct of our staff in their interactions with children. We have developed a process to address any concerns or complaints people may have about the conduct of our staff in their interactions with children. This process is outlined in the attached diagram.

The Child Safety Commissioner, Mr Bernie Geary (Ph: 8601 5885) or Mr Ray Carroll (Ph: 8601 5818) can be contacted in regard to responding to any concerns raised about the conduct of OCSC staff in their interactions with children. In addition, anyone wishing to make a complaint about the OCSC can also consider using other complaints handling bodies including: contacting police, making a complaint to the Ombudsman or, by making a complaint under the *Whistleblowers Protection Act 2001* (policies in relation to which can be found on the OCSC website at <http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/legislation.htm>).

OCSC Mission, Vision and Values

The Mission, Vision and Values of the OCSC all reflect our strong commitment to ensuring the “best interests of children” will always be our first priority.

OCSC Mission, Vision and Values

Mission

The Child Safety Commissioner – promoting and improving the safety and wellbeing of all Victorian children.

Vision

Victorian children – seen and heard

Values

Focus on the safety of children

We aim to ensure the safety of children is placed at the centre of government, community and family decision making.

Respect

We listen to children and advocate on their behalf through:

- valuing every child while putting the most vulnerable first; and
- acknowledging the special needs of Indigenous children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (in particular children of newly arrived immigrants), children with a disability, and children living with parents with a disability.

Leadership

We seek to influence by:

- listening, consulting and collaborating while always maintaining our independence;
- basing our story on evidence and sound data;
- being bold and brave in our advocacy; and
- becoming a model of the child-safe practices we encourage for others.

Quality and accountability

We encourage:

- reflection and learning;
- a commitment to research; and
- looking forward while acknowledging history and building on past achievements.

Integrity and impartiality

We act with integrity at all times, without fear or favour.

Code of Conduct for interactions with children

The OCSC staff have developed the following Code of Conduct to guide their work with children.

DO:

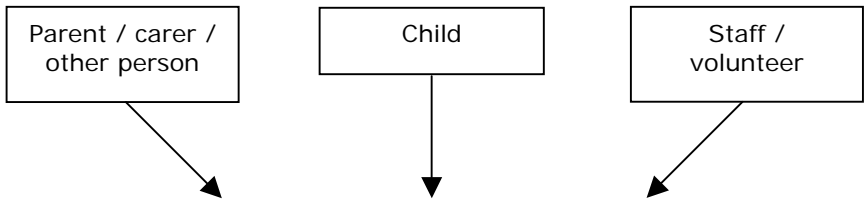
- ✓ Follow the Child Safety Policy and the values of the OCSC and report and act on any breaches.
- ✓ Welcome all children and include them in activities where appropriate.
- ✓ Conduct yourself in a manner consistent with the values of the OCSC and provide a positive role model for children and those who care for them.
- ✓ In the messages you convey (whether written or spoken) and the activities you organise or in which you participate, use language and ways of relating that affirm the worth, dignity and rights of children.
- ✓ Treat children and young people with respect, listen to and value their ideas and opinions.
- ✓ Respect cultural, religious and political differences.
- ✓ Carefully plan all activities involving children to ensure they are appropriate to the child's safety, developmental needs and life experiences.
- ✓ Respect the privacy of children and their families and only disclose information to people who have a need to know.

DO NOT:

- ✗ Use prejudice, oppressive behaviour or language with children.
- ✗ Discriminate on the basis of age, gender, race, culture, vulnerability or sexuality.
- ✗ Initiate unnecessary physical contact with children or do things of a personal nature that children can do for themselves.
- ✗ Develop 'special' relationships with specific children for your own needs.
- ✗ Show favouritism through the provision of gifts or inappropriate attention.
- ✗ Make sexually suggestive comments to a child, even as a joke.
- ✗ Meet alone with a child. Always ensure another adult is present when conducting one-to-one interviews.
- ✗ Take a child to your home, or encourage meetings outside official OCSC events.

Making a complaint

WHO CAN REPORT



WHAT TO REPORT

Any Child Safety concerns relating to the **conduct of OCSC staff** including:

- allegation, suspicion or observation of abuse / harm;
- breach of Code of Conduct;
- breach of privacy or confidentiality;
- environmental safety issues.

HOW

Verbal report, letter, email, telephone call, meeting

TO WHOM

Child Safety Commissioner Bernie Geary (03 8601 5884) or Ray Carroll (03 8601 5818)

WHAT NEXT

The person who receives the concern/complaint about the OCSC staff member will:

- Offer support to child, parents, person who reports and accused staff member/volunteer;
- Initiate internal processes to ensure safety of the child, clarify the nature of the complaint, commence disciplinary process (if required); and
- Decide, in accordance with legal requirements and duty of care, whether the matter should be/ must be referred to Police or Child Protection service and make referral as soon as possible if required.

OUTCOME

Investigation, outcome decided, relevant staff, volunteers, parents and child notified of outcome of investigation. Policies, procedures updated where necessary.