

Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Statements of Commitment to Child Safety and Wellbeing

- Safe Steps is committed to providing a child safe environment and has zero tolerance of any form of violence or abuse perpetrated against children and young people.
- We are committed to providing a child safe environment where the safety of children and young people is promoted.
- We are committed to the best interests of the child; to investigating any concerns, disclosures, allegations, or suspicions of harm; and will respond to and report allegations of child abuse in accordance with our policies and procedures and legal obligations.
- We are committed to ensuring that children and young people can actively participate in decisions that effect their safety and wellbeing.
- We are committed to being a Child Safe Organisation that recognises, respects, and promotes children's rights.
- We are committed to training and educating our workforce on the Child Safe Standards, children's safety, reporting child abuse allegations, and practices for keeping children and young people safe.
- We will ensure our practitioners are trained to recognise children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right and to respond accordingly, including engaging with children and young people themselves. Some perpetrator's behaviour is specific to children, which recognises that children experience some unique risk factors, and that their risk must be assessed separately from adult victim survivors.

Terms and Definitions

<p>Abuse and Harm</p>	<p>Is defined as any action, or lack of action that significantly harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development.</p> <p>Abuse is the intentional harm done to a child through mistreatment or ill-treatment or failing to prevent harm.</p> <p>Types of abuse include physical, verbal, sexual, psychological, abandonment and image-based abuse. Child abuse can be a single incident or several incidents that take place over time.</p>
<p>Children and Young People</p>	<p>In Victoria, under the <i>Children Youth and Families Act 2005</i>, a child or young person is a person under 18 years of age.</p> <p>Under the MARAM Framework, ‘children’ refers to people under the age of 18 years who have experienced family violence, including infants and unborn children. Where both children and young people are separately referenced, as per the MARAM Framework, ‘children’ refers to people aged between 0 and 11 and ‘young people’ refers to those aged 12 to 25.</p>
<p>Child Safe Standards</p>	<p>There are 11 compulsory Child Safe Standards in Victoria, with which Safe Steps has a legal obligation to comply.</p> <p>The Standards are administered by the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP).</p> <p>Non-compliance with the Standards can result in civil consequences including enforceable undertakings and publication orders of non-compliance details, and criminal penalties for failure to comply with notices and directions by the CCYP and sector regulators.</p>
<p>Duty of Care</p>	<p>Safe Steps staff have a Duty of Care to support and protect the children and young people with whom they are in contact.</p> <p>When staff form a belief based on reasonable grounds that a child or young person has been harmed or is at risk of harm, they are required to take action to protect the safety and wellbeing of that child or young person.</p>
<p>Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS)</p>	<p>FVISS enables authorised organisations and services to share information to facilitate assessment and management of family violence risk to children and adults.</p> <p>The aims of the Scheme are to keep victims safe and hold perpetrators to account. These aims are achieved by sharing information, usually regarding the perpetrator’s background. For example, when perpetrators are repeat offenders, or choosing to use violence against several partners, this information can be shared often for the first time.</p> <p>FVISS builds capability for multidisciplinary teams and a multi- agency response to safety planning and risk assessment for victim- survivors.</p>

MARAM	<p>The Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) sets out the responsibilities of different workforces in identifying, assessing, and managing family violence risk across the family violence and broader service system.</p> <p>The MARAM is legislated under the <i>Family Violence Protection Act 2008</i> (Vic). It aims to increase the safety and wellbeing of Victorians by ensuring that prescribed organisations can effectively identify, assess and manage family violence risk, and keep perpetrators in view and held accountable for their actions.</p> <p>MARAM guides information sharing using the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) and the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) wherever family violence is present.</p>
Reportable Conduct Scheme	<p>The Reportable Conduct Scheme imposes new obligations on heads of organisations that are within the scheme. This includes requirements to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have in place systems to prevent child abuse and, if child abuse is alleged, to ensure allegations can be brought to the attention of appropriate persons for investigation and response • ensure that the Commission is notified and given updates on the organisation’s response to an allegation. <p>The Reportable Conduct Scheme does not replace the need to report allegations of child abuse, including criminal conduct and family violence to Victoria Police. CCYP Reportable Conduct Scheme information sheets</p>
Safeguarding	<p>Protecting the welfare and human rights of people who are connected with Safe Steps and its work, particularly people who may be at risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation.</p> <p>Safeguarding is part of a charity’s primary Duty of Care.</p>

Required Behaviour

We must:

- Not use inappropriate, harassing, abusive, sexually suggestive, grooming, discriminatory, disrespectful, demeaning, or culturally insensitive language or behaviour when interacting with children or young people, or when in the presence of children or young people.
- Not exploit or harass children or young people in any way.
- Avoid engaging in unauthorised personal contact with children, including through social networking sites.
- Avoid developing special relationships that could be perceived as favouritism or grooming behaviours.
- Ensure that children and young people are not subjected to physical or emotional harm caused by other children and young people.
- Actively ensure a safe environment for children and young people.

Failure to Disclose

Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. It is a crime for any adult in Victoria who has a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 not to report that information to police. This obligation applies unless an adult has a reasonable excuse for not doing so including a fear for their safety or where the information has already been disclosed to police.

A convicted person faces up to three years imprisonment.

Failure to Protect

It is a criminal offence for a staff member in a position of authority who becomes aware that an adult associated with an organisation poses a risk of sexual abuse to a child who is under the care, authority, or supervision of the organisation, and has the power or responsibility to reduce or remove that risk, or negligently fails to take all reasonable steps to do so.

A convicted person faces up to five years imprisonment.