

# Child Safety Policy

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| <b>Policy Owner:</b>       | Head of People & Culture, MCRI | <b>Policy Year &amp; Version:</b> | August 2024, v4.0 |
| <b>Executive Sponsor:</b>  | Chief Operating Officer        | <b>Date Approved:</b>             | August 2024       |
| <b>Approval Authority:</b> | Chief Operating Officer        | <b>Next Review Date:</b>          | August 2026       |

## Overview and Purpose

Children are at the heart of everything we do. We ensure that our activities are provided in an environment that is caring, nurturing and safe for all children and young people under 18. MCRI and VCGS have **zero- tolerance towards abuse and neglect** of children. This policy supports our approach to keeping children and young people safe in all that we do.

### Scope and Application to Personnel

This Policy applies to both salaried and non-salaried employees of Murdoch Children's Research Institute ("MCRI") and includes employees of the Victorian Clinical Genetics Services ("VCGS"), collectively "the Institute". It extends to all Board members, Staff, Contractors, Volunteers, Students, Honorary and Affiliate appointments, Implementing Partners, Collaborators and to any other person who is notified that this Institute Policy applies to them.

This Policy applies to all activities and environments that personnel may be due to their Institute related duties.

## Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

The Institute is committed to the safety of children and young people and takes a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of child abuse, exploitation, and harm. Child safety is prioritised in our decision-making at all levels of the Institute. The Institute works to support our employees, and all other representatives, to understand and enact their child safety responsibilities. We promote the active participation, and collaboration of children and young people across our research, programs, and safeguarding strategies, while ensuring respect for their safety, views, culture, and diversity is considered at every stage of involvement.

## Policy Principles

### Best interests of the child

The Institute is committed to upholding the rights of children and young people. Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Convention forms the basis of children's rights, and the foundation of child safety and child protection legislation around the world.

The Best Interests of the Child is one of the four overarching principles of the UNCRC. The Institute ensures that the best interests of the child is a primary consideration in all projects, activities and actions concerning or in any way impacting the children and young people we engage with.

### Zero tolerance approach to child abuse and exploitation

The Institute takes a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of child abuse, exploitation, and harm. A zero- tolerance approach requires all personnel to respond to and report all concerns for a child's safety. It means, that as an entity, the Institute is committed to implementing risk management frameworks that minimise the opportunity for harm to children, ensures personnel know how to identify and respond to children at risk of harm and hold a continuous improvement mindset across all aspects of our safeguarding approach.

## Shared responsibility

The safeguarding of children and young people is the responsibility of all Institute personnel. All personnel are expected to operate, always, to the highest standards of behaviour with, toward and around children and young people, and immediately report any concern for the safety of a child or young person. The Board, Executive and all People Leaders model and champion a safeguarding culture and support the proactive safeguarding of children and young people. No one who falls under the scope of this Policy is exempt from responding to and reporting harm or a risk of harm to a child.

## Procedural fairness

The Institute ensures procedural fairness is applied when making decisions impacting a person's rights or interests, including across responses to, and investigations into concerns of child abuse and exploitation.

## Policy Commitments

The Institute has zero tolerance towards the abuse of children and young people. We create a safe environment and minimise the risk of child exploitation and abuse through:

### Ensuring children are aware of their rights and empowered to speak up about their safety:

The involvement of children and young people in our research and activities must:

- bring them no harm;
- be voluntary and informed, considering their age, maturity, and capacities;
- be responsive to their individual needs, recognising that a child's characteristics, experiences, culture, and context may impact their understanding of and response to the Institute's child safety practices;
- be meaningful and ethical;
- recognise and address power imbalances;

Throughout their involvement with the Institute, children and young people are encouraged to:

- express their culture and enjoy their cultural rights
- feel safe to speak up and trust that they will be heard
- behave with courtesy and consideration for others
- ask questions to clarify their rights, participate in any relevant decision making and provide feedback to the Institute

### Robust recruitment and screening processes:

The Institute implements robust recruitment screening processes that focus on ensuring safe and appropriate people are engaged with the Institute. Recruitment and screening mechanisms are important for screening out people who might seek to use the Institute to harm children and young people, or whose past actions indicate an unacceptable risk of such harm.

### Thorough child safety risk management:

The Institute ensures the regular assessment, management, and review of child safety risks across the organisation, including with our partners, collaborators, and affiliates. The Institute considers and assesses child safety risks across all projects, and activities that include direct or indirect contact with children. Documented risk management plans are reviewed and monitored in accordance with the Institute's Risk Management Policy, Procedure, and the Child Safety Procedure.

The Institute works with collaborators to ensure compliance with this policy and the Child Safety Procedure.

### Immediate reporting is mandatory

The Institute requires all personnel to report suspected or actual child safety incidents, policy, or procedure breaches in accordance with the Child Safety Reporting Procedure, including:

- Disclosures or complaints of harm by children, young people, or adults
- Breaches of the Child Safety Policy, Child Safety Procedure and/or the Institute's Code of Conduct.
- Concerns, allegations, suspicions, or observations of inappropriate behaviour by the Institute's people and collaborators
- Any additional information relating to an incident that has already been reported.

When managing child safety incidents, confidentiality is always required. When responding to incidents involving or related to the safety of children, the best interests of the child and procedural fairness are considered in all aspects of our decision making.

### Education, training and support for personnel

Building the child safety capacity of personnel supports the creation and maintenance of child safe environments. We communicate our commitment internally through our recruitment, induction, child safety training, learning and development, team meetings and by ensuring all relevant individuals have access to this Policy and the Child Safety Procedures.

### Diversity, equity and inclusion is fundamental to creating child safe environments

We value and respect equity, diversity, and inclusion for children and young people by recognising and responding to the individuality of the children and young people we interact with, including their strengths and vulnerabilities. Our approach to child safety understands that the barriers to safety are shaped by those strengths and vulnerabilities.

*For more information on the actions that the Institute takes to implement these commitments, please see the Child Safety Procedure.*

## Responsibilities and Key Accountabilities

Each person in the Institute must understand and manage the child safety and wellbeing risks within their responsibility when making decisions. It is the responsibility of each team member or representative of the Institute to:

- Understand and comply with this policy, and all other relevant policies and procedures
- Complete all induction and ongoing child safety training as required
- Ensure that content of digital images and videos is appropriate and appropriate consent is obtained
- Behave in line with the Institute's Code of Conduct and the Child Safety Procedure's Standards of Behaviour
- Seek the guidance of their manager if they are unclear about anything related to this policy; and
- Act if they or another person breach this Policy or become aware of a child or young person experiencing abuse or harm.

Some Institute members have additional responsibilities as outlined in the table below:

| Position  | Responsibility  |
|-----------|---|
| Board     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain oversight over the effectiveness of the Child Safety Policy and Procedure</li> </ul>  |
| Executive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Endorse this policy and promote commitment to the policy and procedure</li> <li>• Communicate with teams about the importance and expectations of child safety initiatives</li> <li>• Ensure adequate resources are allocated to develop, implement and improve child safety across the Institute</li> </ul> |

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| <b>People Managers</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure team members, contractors and other stakeholders within the Manager's team's responsibility understand their obligations, are capable and supported to meet them</li> <li>• Ensure these people undertake child safe training at induction and refresh knowledge at least bi-annually</li> <li>• Ensure appropriate recruitment, screening and employment practices for the Institute's Personnel and representatives that their team inducts</li> <li>• Communicate with their teams about the importance and expectations of child safety initiatives</li> <li>• Support stakeholders and team members involved in matters of concern, incidents or breaches of the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person as required</li> </ul>                           |
| <b>Child Safety Officer (Head of People and Culture, MCRI)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accountable owner of this Policy with responsibility to develop, implement, review, maintain and enforce the Child Safety Policy and Procedure</li> <li>• Act as a key contact for the Child Safe program and as the Child Safety Compliance Officer</li> <li>• Respond to any child safety related complaints, lead the investigation of breaches and incidents within reporting procedures, legislative and DFAT requirements</li> <li>• Establish and maintain compliant record-keeping and reporting practices</li> <li>• Provide oversight of the training program</li> <li>• Immediately report all allegations of child exploitation or abuse to law enforcement, child protection authorities and donors in line with the Child Safety Reporting Procedure</li> </ul> |
| <b>People and Culture team</b>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct all relevant pre-employment checks or equivalent for all employees and accordance with the pre-employment screening and Child Safety Procedures</li> <li>• Ensure the suitability of employees who will be working closely with children is assessed during interviews and in reference checks</li> <li>• Ensure all Working with Children Checks and National Police Checks are up to date as required</li> <li>• Support the investigation of breaches and incidents as required</li> </ul>   |
| <b>All People</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comply with the Child Safety Policy and Procedure at all times</li> <li>• Report any concerns, incidents or policy and procedure non-compliance in line with the Child Safety Reporting Procedure</li> </ul>  |

## Dispute Resolution and Breaches

All instances or complaints of child abuse must be reported and are responded to in line with the Child Safety Procedure. If a person is deemed to have breached this policy, or poses an unacceptable risk to children, that person must not be allowed to work with children.

The Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) is the oversight body for the Child Safe Standards that Victorian organisations providing services or facilities to children must achieve. Concerns about the implementation of the Child Safe Standards can be raised with the CCYP, where persons are not satisfied with their response from the Institute.

## Enquiries

This Policy is available on our website and intranet. For further information please contact the People and Culture team on [peopleandculture@mcri.edu.au](mailto:peopleandculture@mcri.edu.au) or the Institute Child Safety Compliance Officer, the Head of People and Culture, MCRI.

## Compliance with the Policy

If the Institute has reason to believe that a person or collaborator subject to the policy has failed to comply with it, it will investigate the circumstances. If it is found that this person has failed to follow the policy, this may lead to disciplinary action up to and including termination of their relationship with the institute.

## Definitions

Child abuse refers to an act and/or omission which endangers a child's health, wellbeing and/or development. For the purposes of this policy, child abuse includes:

- **Emotional abuse:** Emotional or psychological abuse occurs when a child does not receive the love, affection, or attention they need for healthy emotional, psychological, and social development.
- **Exposure to family violence:** Family violence is behaviour by a person towards a family member that may include physical violence or threats, verbal abuse, emotional or psychological abuse, sexual abuse, financial and social abuse. Exposing a child to family violence, which includes seeing, hearing, or experiencing that behaviour in any way is harmful to children and constitutes child abuse.
- **Grooming:** Grooming is predatory behaviour designed to prepare a child for sexual abuse. Many perpetrators of sexual offences against children purposefully create relationships with children, their families, and carers to establish the conditions necessary for them to abuse the child.
- **Neglect:** Neglect is persistent failure or deliberate denial to provide the child with the necessities of life.
- **Physical abuse:** Physical abuse occurs when a person subjects a child to non-accidental physically aggressive acts. The abuser may inflict an injury intentionally or inadvertently because of physical punishment or the aggressive treatment of a child.
- **Sexual abuse:** Sexual abuse occurs when an adult or a person of authority (e.g. older) involves a child in any sexual activity.
- **Sexual exploitation:** Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse in which a person(s) of any age takes advantage of a power imbalance to force or entice a child into engaging in sexual activity in return for something received by the child and/or those perpetrating or facilitating the abuse.

A full list of definitions can be found in Appendix 2 of the Child Safety Procedure.

## Related Documents and Procedures

- [Child Safety Procedure \(Internal\)](#)
- Further related policies and procedures are listed in the Child Safety Procedure linked above

## Related Legislation and Industry Codes

### United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Convention forms the basis of children's rights, and the foundation of child safety and child protection legislation around the world.

### **Australian Principles for Child Safe Organisations**

In 2019, the leaders of each State and Territory endorsed the 10 National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. The Principles were a key recommendation from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2013-2017). The principles are designed to work together to form an organisational culture and systems that place the safety of children at their core. The Principles can be found [here](#).

### **State and Territory Child Safety Standards**

Some states and territories have implemented legislated standards in relation to the maintenance of child safe organisations.

- [Victorian Child Safe Standards](#)
- [NSW Child Safe Standards](#)
- [Tasmanian Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework](#)

### **Screening Legislation**

Each Australian State and Territory have screening requirements for employees and volunteers who work with children and young people, including Working with Children and Working with Vulnerable People Checks. People and Culture ensure all screening requirements are fulfilled including State and Territory requirements found below:

#### [Pre-Employment and Volunteer Screening Checks](#)

### **Child Protection and Reporting Legislation**

Each Australian state and territory has implemented specific legislation, across both mandated and voluntary reporting of child abuse and harm.

#### [State and Territory Child Protection Legislation](#)

All personnel must report child safety concerns along the Institute's Child Safety Reporting Procedure. The Institute will support personnel to report to law enforcement and/or Child Protection authorities.

Some personnel may be classed as **mandatory reporters** in their State or Territory and have a legal responsibility to report concerns of child abuse and neglect.

Please note, legislative changes have come across Australian states and territories that make it a **criminal offence for an adult to fail to report certain forms of child abuse**. Please review the legislation found at the above link to ensure you understand your ethical and legal reporting obligations.

#### [State and Territory Reporting Contacts](#)

The above link includes the contact details for each State and Territory's statutory Child Protection authority.

### **Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Child Protection Policy**

The Institute is an Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) partner and applies the [9 Minimum Standards for Child Protection](#) across all projects that engage with or have contact with children and young people.

### **ACFID Code of Conduct**

The Institute is a signatory to the [ACFID Code of Conduct](#), including commitments to advance the safeguarding of children and young people.