

PURPOSE

Sorrento Community Centre, including Sorrento Early Learning is committed to developing and implementing a child safe and child friendly system. It embraces a clear and well communicated commitment to, and responsibility for, the safety and wellbeing of all children attending our Centre, where children with whom we have contact are safe and feel safe, and are able to actively participate in the activities at Sorrento Community Centre.

Statement of Commitment:

The Board has a stated aim: *to create a safe, respectful, family environment where parents are welcomed and children are nurtured and challenged, and where they are known and valued for their uniqueness. (Sorrento Early Learning Handbook)*

The Centre has zero tolerance to child abuse; we recognise the importance of, and a responsibility for, ensuring our organisation provides a safe, supportive and enriching environment which respects and fosters the rights and wellbeing of children in our care.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Promote the safety of children
- Protect children and prevent any opportunities for child abuse or harm to occur
- Understand how to avoid or better manage risky behaviours and situations
- Emphasise the processes that are in place to respond to, and report all allegations of child abuse
- Comply with our obligations as a Child Safe organisation, under law through the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Justice, and as administered by the Commission for Children and Young People.

Scope of this Policy: This policy sets out the requirements that the staff, contractors, volunteers, and authorised persons engaged by Sorrento Community Centre must follow in providing a child safe and child friendly environment

OUR VISION FOR SORRENTO EARLY LEARNING

Our vision is to aspire for excellence in the provision of early childhood services through the creation of a safe, extended family environment and the development of a community of learners where educators, parents and other adults are committed to the children's education and wellbeing.

BROAD GUIDELINES FOR THIS POLICY

The seven (7) Child Safe standards, in which the National Principles are embedded, are the bedrock of our Child Safe Policy. These are:

Standard 1: Governance and Leadership

Sorrento Early Learning, part of Sorrento Community Centre, has a strong governing board. Management of all day to day operations are through the Centre Manager in the first instance, who, in turn, delegates responsibility to the Early Learning Team Leader and her team of educators work to ensure that child safety is a focus within our organisation.

Standard 2: Clear Commitment to Child Safety

It is the responsibility of all staff, students, volunteers, and contractors to protect the rights of children; ensuring that Duty of Care responsibilities are met, and we respect, embrace, and support the diversity of children. The Centre aims to clearly communicate this widely to staff, volunteers, children, families and the community.

Standard 3: Code of Conduct

The Centre has a Code of Conduct which is reviewed annually, and all staff and volunteers are required to read and sign this document annually.

Standard 4: Human Resource Practice

The Centre aims to have a highly visible child safe culture.

Working with Children Checks, and National Police Checks where appropriate, are part of a pre-employment process, for both paid staff and volunteers. We have a strong and robust recruitment and screening process where key selection criteria require candidates to consider their understanding of children's rights and needs, potential staff and volunteers are screened, and referees consulted.

All roles, paid and unpaid, have a position description attached to them, and people in these roles are held to account. We understand that whilst Working with Children Checks and Police Checks are useful tools as part of a pre-employment screening, they are not the only source of information to be relied upon.

Standard 5: Responding and Reporting

At the Centre we recognise that the safety of children is everyone's responsibility. We ensure that people are aware of their duty of care and legal responsibilities, and we encourage children, staff and volunteers to speak up when they are concerned.

We act appropriately on concerns and complaints, and keep and store securely accurate records of reports, concerns and complaints. See below for 'Procedure for Reporting'.

Standard 6: Risk Management and Mitigation

Sorrento Community Centre operates within a risk management framework that is designed to reduce the likelihood of harm and aiming to eliminate any circumstances that expose children to risk. In consultation with staff, students, and volunteers, it is regularly reviewed and revised when necessary.

Standard 7: Empowering Children

At Sorrento Community Centre we believe that children have a right to be heard and have their concerns and ideas taken seriously, particularly on matters that affect them – including how to keep them safe. We recognise that when children can participate and feel their contributions are valued, they are more likely to speak up when harmed or feeling unsafe.

PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING

All suspected or alleged child abuse must in the first instance be reported to the Early Childhood Team Leader and/or the Centre Manager, as per the reporting procedures.

At the Centre, we encourage children, staff, and volunteers to speak up if they feel unsafe or concerned. All concerns and complaints will be acted on accordingly, and we keep accurate records which are stored securely.

If you see something, feel something, say something! In the first instance, report to the Team Leader if the child in danger is enrolled in the Early Learning program. If the person reporting is not satisfied with the response and actions of the Team Leader, they must report to the Centre Manager.

If a child is in danger and not enrolled in the Early Learning program, the person should report their concerns direct to the Centre Manager

After a brief internal investigation, the Team Leader or Centre Manager will report suspected criminal child abuse to the police or child protection as soon as possible. If a child is in immediate danger, a call will be made to triple zero (000).

Details to provide when making a report to Child Protection (note: even if the reporter does not have all the necessary information, the report will still be made).

Personal Details	The parents, carers, child's name, age, and address
Indicators of Harm	The reason for believing that the injury or behaviour is the result of abuse or neglect
Reason for reporting	The reason the call is being made at this time
Safety assessment	Assessment of immediate danger to the child or opportunity for further harm
Description	Description of the injury, behaviour observed, or disclosure made by the child
Location of Child and Parent/Carer	The current whereabouts of the child and their parent/care
Other services	Knowledge of other services involved with the family
Family information	Any other information known about the family
Cultural characteristics	Any specific cultural or other details that may assist.

A detailed account of the report, including time, date, circumstances, and description will be written as soon as possible after the incident and prior to making the report; the sooner the better. It will be kept on file in a secure storage area.

Who Reports?

Under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (CYFA), the only groups currently required (i.e. mandated) to make a report to child protection are doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers (including early childhood teachers), principals, police, out of home care workers (excluding voluntary foster and kinship carers) early childhood workers, youth justice workers and registered psychologists.

A report must be made to Child Protection if a reporter forms a belief on reasonable grounds that a child needs protection from physical injury or sexual abuse. To form a belief, the reporter must be aware of matters and hold any opinions in relation to those matters that lead them to reasonably believe a child needs protection.

It is not necessary to have the permission for parents/caregivers to make a report; nor do they need to be informed that a report is being made. A reporter's identity will remain confidential under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 unless the reporter chooses to inform the family of the report to Child Protection themselves and/or consent is given by the reporter to their identity as the reporter being disclosed. (A Magistrate decides whether they require this information to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child.) If a report is made in good faith, the reporter cannot be held legally liable, regardless of the outcome of the notification.

It is the Child Protection Worker's responsibility to then assess and, where necessary, further investigate if a child is at risk of immediate or significant harm.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Responsibility of Board Members

- Adhere to the Code of Conduct
- Promote internal and external discussions on a culture of child safety
- Promote understanding and practices of cultural safety

Responsibility of Centre Manager

- Adhere to the Code of Conduct
- Ensure Policies and Procedures are current and address the risks of child abuse
- Support and address allegations of child abuse by staff, volunteers, or contractors
- Ensure the Staff Handbook includes employer and employee responsibilities in relation to allegations of child safety; that this is highlighted in staff induction and staff are aware of and adhere to procedures
- Facilitate learning on cultural safety and procedures
- Ensure contact details for Department of Health and Human Services Child Protection, Child FIRST and Safe Steps are clearly displayed on staff noticeboard
- Ensure organisations we work with understand our policy
- Seek feedback on our practices

Responsibility of Team Leader, Sorrento Early Learning

- Ensure staff are aware of and adhere to strategies and procedures to ensure a child safe environment
- Coach staff on recognising signs of abuse or neglect and the procedures they should follow if a child in their care displays behaviour or physical signs that could indicate abuse has taken place
- Ensure staff are aware of current legislation and reporting requirements relating to child safety and that a system of reporting and recording of suspicious incidents is in place
- Ensure staff understand and adhere to the Code of Conduct
- Ensure new staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities during induction process

- Encourage discussion and learning about child safety and managing risks
- Seek external feedback on our practices from authorised sources
- Report any concerns of abuse

Responsibility of Educators, Staff, Volunteers and Contractors

- Adhere to Code of Conduct and policies and procedures
- Be aware of current legislation and reporting requirements relating to child safety and know the system of reporting and recording of suspicious incidents that is in place
- Participate in the development of child safe practices
- Identify any cultural safety knowledge gaps and actively seek training
- Observe any unusual behaviour, changes in behaviour and physical signs that may indicate child abuse
- Report and record any concerns of abuse in the first instance to the Early Learning Team Leader. If not satisfied with the response or actions of the Team Leader then report to the Centre Manager as soon as possible

DEFINITIONS

Aboriginal	The term Aboriginal refers to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander People.
Child safety concern	<p>A child safety concern is any concern relating to the physical, emotional, or cultural safety of a child with whom the Commission has contact, either directly or indirectly. It includes, but is not limited to, allegations or suspicions of child abuse.</p> <p>A child safety concern may include, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure to a child of inappropriate content within the work environment • Inappropriate or special relationships developing between an adult and a child (that may indicate grooming behaviour) • Inadequate staff-child supervision • Feelings of discomfort about interactions between an adult and a child • Concerns about a physical environment that poses a risk for children (including health and hygiene) • Concerns about a child being denied their right to culture and identity or other discriminating practice • Any action or inaction that demonstrates non-adherence to the Centre's Code of Conduct <p>Child safety concerns, including suspected child abuse, may be identified through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A suspicion or belief that abuse or harm has occurred or is likely to occur • A disclosure made by a child, their parent, an external agency, or any other person

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations of concerning changes in a child's behaviour or presentation • Observations of concerning behaviour about a person's conduct towards or in the presence of a child
Child abuse	<p>Defined as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual abuse and grooming • Physical abuse or violence • Serious emotional and psychological abuse • Medical neglect • Physical or emotional serious neglect • Sexual exploitation (including pornography and prostitution) <p>All suspected or alleged child abuse must be reported to the appropriate authorities (as per the reporting procedure referred to under related policies and other documents)</p>
Children's rights	<p>Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have several rights, including the right to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be treated fairly • Have a say about decisions affecting them • Live and grow up healthy • Have people who do what is best for them • Know who they are and where they come from • Believe what they want to believe • Privacy • Find out information and express themselves • Be safe no matter where they are • Be cared for and have a home • Education, play and cultural activities • Help and protection if they need it
Reasonable belief	Reasonable belief, or belief on reasonable grounds is not the same as having proof but is more than mere rumour or speculation
Duty of Care	Sorrento Community Centre staff, students, volunteers, and contractors have a duty of care to protect the safety, health and wellbeing of children in our care. If a person has concerns about a child, they should take immediate action
Indicators of harm	The presence of a single indicator, or even several indicators, does not prove that abuse or neglect has occurred. However, the repeated occurrence of an indicator, or the occurrence of several indicators together, should alert educators to the possibility of child abuse and neglect.

Related policies and other documents:

Children's Health and Safety Policy and Procedure April 2020

Behaviour Management Policy and Procedure April 2020

Privacy Policy April 2020

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Victorian standard)

Child Wellbeing and Safety Regulations 2007

Children, Youth and Families Act 2005

Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006

National Quality Standard 2011 Quality Area 2.2 'Each child is protected'.

Children's Services Act 1996 and Children's Services Regulations 2009

Department of Education and Training - www.education.vic.gov.au

Policy Control Data

Approved by Sorrento Community Centre

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Next Review Date: