

CHILD SAFETY POLICY

ABOUT VICSRC

VicSRC is the peak body representing school-aged students in Victoria. We exist to empower all student voices to be valued in every aspect of education.

VicSRC is led by a team of 15 secondary school aged students ([VicSRC Student Executive Advisory Committee](#)) that make decisions collaboratively with a group of six adults ([VicSRC Board of Trustees](#)) about how VicSRC operates, what programs it offers and how it hears from students about what changes need to be made in education.

A team of [staff members](#) put these decisions into action with consistent advice from the Student Executive Advisory Committee.

POLICY STATEMENT

VicSRC will not tolerate any form of abuse of children and young people.

All VicSRC representatives are expected to take reasonable steps to prevent and report child abuse or harm to ensure that all children and young peoples' right to safety and participation is being upheld. The rights of children and young people are upheld internationally by the United Nations' [Convention of the Rights of the Child](#).

VicSRC implement the Victorian [Child Safe Standards](#) which aim to prevent children and young people from experiencing harm and abuse within organisations. This includes physical violence, sexual offences, grooming, serious emotional/psychological abuse and/or neglect. The Standards outline expectations and minimum requirements of cultural safety, physical safety, empowerment and equity that organisations must adhere to in order to reduce the risk of child abuse and to uphold children and young peoples' right to safety and participation

As part of these standards, all staff and volunteers commit to:

- Prevent the abuse or harm of children and young people in our care by identifying risks early and removing and reducing these risks;
- Take all allegations and concerns about abuse seriously and respond to them consistently, in line with our policies and procedures;
- Act in accordance with the VicSRC Code of Conduct which outlines expected and prohibited behaviours;
- Comply with all legal requirements, including reporting suspicions of abuse to police and/or child protection.

POLICY SCOPE

Who the Policy applies to.

Everyone at VicSRC must follow this Policy, including all Board of Trustee members, Executive Committee members, staff, other volunteers, interns and trainees. This Policy refers to this group of people as VicSRC representatives.

VicSRC also works with contractors, consultants, and third-party organisations in a range of capacities. While not all provisions of this Policy apply to these individuals and groups in the same way as they do to VicSRC representatives, many principles and expectations still apply. Where this is a variation in how this Policy applies to these parties, it will be clearly specified throughout.

POLICY DEFINITIONS

Definitions of key terms used in this policy

Adult	Any person over the age of 18 years
Child and young person	In this Policy we use child and young person to mean any person under the age of 18. This is aligned with Victorian Legislation. ¹ However, in general terms when VicSRC refers to young person in its programming or strategic documents, we mean people aged 12-25 years.
Child Abuse ²	Child Abuse includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a sexual offence committed against a child• grooming for sexual conduct with a child under the age of 16 under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)• physical violence against a child• causing serious emotional or psychological harm to a child• serious neglect of a child.
Complaint ³	An expression of dissatisfaction to an organisation related to one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the organisation's services or dealings with individuals• allegations of abuse or misconduct by a staff member, a volunteer or another individual associated with the organisation• disclosures of abuse or harm made by a child• the conduct of a child at the organisation• the inadequate handling of a prior concern • general concerns about the safety of a group of children or activity.
Cultural Safety. ³	Cultural safety is the positive recognition and celebration of cultures. It is more than just the absence of racism or discrimination and more than 'cultural awareness' and 'cultural sensitivity'. It empowers people and enables them to contribute and feel safe to be themselves.

¹ Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)

² Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)

³ SNAICC: Keeping our Kids Safe: https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/210501_8_Keeping-Our-Kids-Safe.pdf

Harm

Damage to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child, including as a result of child abuse by adults or the conduct of other children. It includes physical, sexual, emotional and psychological harm. Harm can arise from a single act or event. It can also be cumulative, that is, arising as a result of a series of acts or events over a period of time.⁴

Reporting obligations

Voluntary and Mandatory Reporting

If a VicSRC representative forms any reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse, they can report directly to Child Protection.

While VicSRC representatives are not mandatory reporters⁵ of child abuse, VicSRC encourage any representative to make a voluntary report to the Victorian Department of Child Protection.

'Failure to disclose'

All adults in Victoria legally must report to police any 'reasonable belief' that a sex offence has been committed by an adult against a child under the age of 16, unless they have a 'reasonable excuse', or another exemption not to disclose. Failure to do so is a criminal offence punishable by up to 3 years imprisonment. For more information about the 'failure to disclose' offence, including the types of sex offences that must be reported, exemptions and what may be considered a 'reasonable excuse', please read this Department of Justice and Regulation [fact sheet](#).

'Failure to Protect'

It is also a criminal offence in Victoria for those who work or volunteer within organisations providing care, supervision or authority for children to 'fail to protect' children and young people from the risk of sexual abuse by others associated with the organisation.

An offence will be committed when:

1. A person in authority knows that someone associated with their organisation poses a risk of committing a sexual offence against a child under the age of 16; and
2. They had the authority to reduce or remove the risk; and
3. They negligently failed to do so.

The maximum penalty is 5 years' imprisonment. For more information about the 'failure to protect' offence, please read the Department of Justice and Regulation [fact sheet](#). (For further advice about these offences, please contact The Department of Justice on (03) 8684 0000 or the Commission for Children and Young People on 1300 782 978).

For allegations/disclosures that involve other misconduct or policy breaches.

If the report involves misconduct or policy breach that does not amount to criminal conduct, the report will undergo an internal investigation.

⁴ A Guide for Creating a Child Safe Organisation; Commission for children and Young People Victoria

⁵ In Victoria certain professions are mandated by law to report any reasonable belief that a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect and their parent has not or is unlikely to protect them from the harm.

POLICY

What are the rules and overall guiding principles or standards the Board has set?

Children and young people's rights to safety and participation

We aim to deliver programs, activities and environments that are safe, inclusive and welcoming to children and young people from all backgrounds, cultures, lived experiences and abilities. We actively work to engage with and empower all children and young people involved with our organisation, through regular consultation and participation processes.

Valuing diversity

We celebrate diversity across our organisation. In particular, we promote the equal participation and cultural, emotional and physical safety of children and young people who are often marginalised. This includes but is not limited to children and young people who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, from refugee or migrant backgrounds, who are LGBTIQA+, and/or have a disability.

Recruiting staff and volunteers

VicSRC screens and assesses all staff and volunteers against child safety standards, including rigorous background, identity and reference checks, Working with Children Checks and National Police Record checks in accordance with VicSRC's WWCC Policy and WWCC Procedure. VicSRC will always confirm the validity of WWCC before contracting third party individuals, organisations or consultants, and will never engage a person who does not have a satisfactory WWCC.

Our commitment to Child Safety and our screening requirements are included in all advertisements and job descriptions. Our employment contracts include child safety terms and conditions.

Supporting staff and volunteers

VicSRC provides support and supervision so our staff and volunteers feel valued, respected and fairly treated. We provide guidance on child safety via our:

- Child Safe Code of Conduct.
- Child Safe Reporting Procedure

All staff and volunteers are expected to adhere to these documents. We provide relevant training and supervision to staff and volunteers to help them understand their responsibilities and how to recognise and respond to signs of abuse or neglect and how to report any concerns they have about children and young people, without fear of repercussions.

To further support high quality, equitable and ethical work with children and young people, all staff and volunteers are expected to follow the [Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector](#).

Child Safety Training

Induction requirements

All VicSRC representatives are required to undertake mandatory Child Safety Induction training within 4 weeks of commencing with the organisation. Our Child Safety Training consists of online modules

and a 1.5 hour workshop with the Child Safety Officer. Both the online modules and workshop are to be reviewed annually and kept up to date with current legislation and best practice. Modules include:

- What is child safety
- Victorian Child Safe Standards & Principles
- What does child safety look like at VicSRC?
- Reporting abuse and neglect

University placement students undertake the same online modules and receive a tailored induction.

Minimum standards for further training

On top of the mandatory induction training, VicSRC staff and volunteers are required to undertake regular upskilling in Child Safe practice. This includes keeping up to date on Child Safety best practice.

Minimum standards for further training are as follows:

- Upskilling should occur at least once (1) per year in addition to any mandatory induction training required
- Further training in child safe practice should address either -
 - Broad updates and/or revision of the Child Safe Standards, relevant legislation, or current best practice, or
 - Specific upskilling in areas which may become relevant to the work of individual staff members or the team more broadly (for example, child safety risk management, identifying and responding to child abuse, child safety for LGBTIQ+ young people or those experiencing homelessness).
- These trainings can be delivered either externally by experts in the relevant field, or internally by the appropriate staff member and under the supervision of the Child Safe Officer. Any further training delivered internally must be subject to review and scrutiny to ensure it remains aligned with legislation and best practice.
- VicSRC also support and train staff to understand how to work meaningfully with people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, lived experiences and abilities. This includes training in:
 - Aboriginal cultural safety
 - LGBTIQ+ inclusion
 - Working with people from refugee and migrant backgrounds
 - Disability inclusion
- VicSRC maintain training records ensuring that all representatives undertake required annual training relevant to their role.

Performance Appraisal and Supervision

VicSRC is committed to embedding child safety into all aspects of our organisational culture, including regular performance appraisal and supervision practices. These mechanisms are critical in supporting staff and volunteers to meet their child safety obligations and uphold ethical standards in their work with children and young people.

- **Annual Performance Appraisals:** All staff participate in an annual performance appraisal process. As part of this review, each individual's understanding and implementation of child safety responsibilities is assessed. This includes compliance with legislative and organisational child safety requirements, reflection on professional boundaries, and identifying any development or support needs relating to child safety.
- **Regular Supervision:** All staff and volunteers engage in regular supervision, occurring fortnightly to monthly depending on role and risk level. Each supervision session includes mandatory prompts to discuss child safety and ethical practice. These conversations provide an opportunity to reflect on concerns, reinforce responsibilities, and raise any issues or uncertainties in a supportive and accountable setting.

These processes ensure continuous improvement, early identification of risks, and a strong culture of accountability and safety across the organisation.

Duty of Care

VicSRC holds a clear duty of care for all children and young people who participate in our programs, events, and activities, whether in-person or online. This includes ensuring their safety and wellbeing while they are under our supervision, and taking reasonable steps to prevent harm, abuse, or neglect.

What is Duty of Care?⁶

Duty of care is a legal and ethical responsibility to take reasonable action to protect children and young people from foreseeable harm. Under the *Wrongs Act 1958* (Vic) relevant organisations that exercise care, supervision or authority over children have a duty of care to prevent the physical or sexual abuse of a child by an individual associated with the relevant organisation. For further information: [Betrayal of trust fact sheet: The new organisational duty of care to prevent child abuse | Department of Justice and Community Safety Victoria](#)

This applies to all adult representatives of VicSRC whenever children and young people are:

- Participating in a VicSRC-run program, event, or activity,
- Being transported by VicSRC,
- Interacting with VicSRC staff or volunteers, whether formally or informally,
- Engaging with VicSRC online or through digital platforms.

Duty of care is a shared responsibility. All staff and volunteers must act in accordance with this policy and raise any concerns with the Child Safety Officer.

⁶ *Wrongs Act 1958* (Vic) that applies to organisations.

Risk Management

To ensure VicSRC meets its duty of care, all programs and activities are assessed to identify child safety risks that are specific to the program or activity. Any identified risk is assessed, and mitigation strategies are put in place and monitored by a responsible staff member.

VicSRC has permanent risk mitigation strategies in place for safety in the physical and online environments.

Safety in Programs and Activities

VicSRC commits to:

- Maintaining safe adult-to-child supervision ratios appropriate to the activity, age group, and environment.
- Ensuring at least two adults are present whenever engaging with a child or young person, wherever possible (1:2 ratio minimum is required – 1 staff to 2 children and young people or 2 staff to 1 child or young person).
- Ensuring staff and volunteers are rostered and clearly briefed to provide supervision during high-risk times, such as free time at camps, transport, or transitions between venues.
- Making supervision expectations clear to all staff, volunteers, and Executive Committee members, and incorporating these into training, risk assessments and briefing documents.

Overnight and Offsite Activities

Where young people are staying overnight under VicSRC supervision (e.g. Induction Camp, residential programs), additional measures will be taken to manage risk, including:

- Risk assessments tailored to the site, activity, and cohort.
- Sleeping arrangements and adult proximity aligned with gender inclusion and safety principles.
- VicSRC provide detailed pre-departure information packs to children and their parents/guardians. These packs include specific safety information about the activity, the names and roles of staff on duty during the overnight stay, and clear guidance on how to raise concerns or complaints.
- Emergency and incident protocols clearly outlined and communicated.

Online Safety

VicSRC recognises that online environments are an integral part of our work with children and young people, particularly through meetings, workshops, communication tools, and youth-led advocacy campaigns. As such, we are committed to ensuring that online engagement is safe, inclusive, and free from harm.

Online Platforms and Tools

VicSRC uses a variety of platforms to connect with children and young people, including:

- Zoom, Microsoft Teams or equivalent for video meetings,
- Email and shared documents (e.g. Google Workspace, SharePoint),
- Messaging tools (e.g. Slack – where approved),

- Social media platforms for public engagement.

Risk assessments will be conducted for all new online initiatives involving children and young people, considering:

- Nature of the platform and privacy controls,
- Age and vulnerability of participants,
- Purpose and duration of interaction,
- Opportunities for misconduct or unsupervised communication.

Child Safety in Online Engagement

To ensure young people's safety and wellbeing in digital settings, VicSRC commits to the following principles:

1. Supervision and visibility:

- Where possible, more than one staff member is present in all online meetings with children and young people.
- VicSRC aims to avoid one-on-one interactions between staff/volunteers and children or young people where possible. If they occur (e.g. in mentoring, sensitive conversations, or digital communication):
 - The adult must inform another staff member or the Child Safety Officer,
 - Clear boundaries and professional conduct are maintained.
 - Meeting notes should be recorded.
 - The meeting is recorded where appropriate and consent is provided by all parties.

2. Clear expectations:

- All young people will receive an online safety agreement or participation expectations when joining an online program.
- Staff will open each program with a reminder of online conduct expectations (e.g. language, camera use, respectful interaction).

3. Privacy and data security:

- No recording of online sessions without informed consent from young people.
- All platforms must be secure and use password-protected links where possible.
- Personal information will be protected in accordance with VicSRC's privacy policies.

4. Responding to incidents online:

- Any disclosure made via chat, email, or direct message must be taken seriously and reported following the Child Safety Reporting Procedure.
- Inappropriate online behaviour (e.g. bullying, discriminatory language, unsolicited contact) will be addressed promptly and may result in removal from the platform or escalation to relevant authorities.

5. Social media and informal contact:

- Staff and volunteers must not initiate or engage in personal contact with children and young people on personal social media accounts.
- Any use of organisational accounts for engagement with children and young people must follow VicSRC's social media policy and be supervised by at least one other adult.

VicSRC is committed to continually reviewing our online engagement practices in line with emerging best practices and the voices of young people.

Reporting a child safety concern or complaint

All staff and volunteers are expected to follow VicSRC's Child Safe Reporting Procedure, which includes making an internal report to the VicSRC Child Safety Officer of any disclosures, concerns, complaints or individual observations of child abuse or harm.

Julia Baron (VicSRC CEO) is our organisation's designated Child Safety Officer, with the specific responsibility of responding to any child safety concerns or complaints made by children or young people, their parents or any VicSRC representative. Julia can be contacted on 0411 679 050.

If a complaint is to be made against the Child Safety Officer, complaints will be responded to by the VicSRC Board Chair, Simone Gianelli. Simone can be contacted on 0447 462 624.

Internal investigation

VicSRC will conduct an internal investigation for all reports about child abuse, harm or misconduct that have occurred within VicSRC. If the matter has been reported to the Police, VicSRC will seek their permission before commencing internal investigation processes. If the matter has been reported to the Children's Commission, VicSRC will ensure that the Commission is kept updated on the progress and outcome of the investigation.

Staff and volunteers under investigation may be stood down or excused on leave during the investigation. The alleged victim should also be referred to an appropriate service for ongoing support.

CONSEQUENCES FOR BREACHING OR FAILING TO IMPLEMENT THIS POLICY

VicSRC will enforce this Policy and the associated Child Safety Code of Conduct. Substantiated breaches by any VicSRC Representative 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.

MONITORING, REVIEW AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

VicSRC recognises that creating safe environments for children and young people requires ongoing attention, reflection and learning. We are committed to regularly reviewing and improving our child safety systems and procedures, including how we receive, record and respond to concerns.

Review Schedule

The Child Safety Officer will coordinate an annual review of all child safety procedures, including this Code of Conduct, in consultation with staff, children and young people (including the Executive Committee), the Board of Trustees, and external advisors as needed. The review will incorporate analysis of incidents or risks, and feedback from children and young people.

A review will also be conducted following:

- A serious child safety incident,
- Changes in relevant legislation or standards,
- Significant organisational changes (e.g. digital program expansion).

Changes will be clearly communicated to all staff and volunteers, and updates will be reflected in induction materials.

Incident and Risk Analysis

All incident reports, including near misses and unsubstantiated disclosures, will be reviewed quarterly by the Child Safety Officer to identify emerging risks, gaps in training, or opportunities to improve environments and support systems.

De-identified data may be shared with the Board and relevant program staff to inform improvements to:

- VicSRC representative recruitment data
- Staff and volunteer training
- Risk management planning
- Event and environment design
- Online platform safety

Child and Youth Involvement

Children and Young people engaged in VicSRC programs will be invited to contribute feedback on their experience of safety and their confidence in the Code of Conduct expectations through surveys, facilitated consultations, or peer-led review processes.

RELATED

What other VicSRC policies, procedures, guides and templates are associated with this policy or procedure? If something is not in this policy/procedure, it might be in one of them.

CH 1.1 - Child Safe Code of Conduct

CH 1.2 - Child Safe Reporting Procedure and Incident Report

VicSRC's disciplinary procedures

REFERENCES

What resources were used to create this policy, for example, example or other organisations' policies, legislation, government advice?

[CCYP | Child safe principles](#)

[Department of Health and Human Services Victoria | Child Safe Standards \(dhhs.vic.gov.au\)](#)

[Youth Affairs Council Victoria | Code of Ethical Practice \(yacvic.org.au\)](#)

[Failure to disclose offence | Department of Justice and Community Safety Victoria](#)

[Failure to Protect – Department of Justice and Community Safety](#)

Legislation

Children, Youth and Families Act 2005

Crimes Act 1958

Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment (Child Safe Standards) Act 2015

Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012

Failure to disclose forms part of the Victorian Crimes Amendment (Protection of Children) Act 2014

Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic) (including Part XIII – Organisational liability for child abuse)