

Inner North Centre for Mental Wellbeing Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

January 2025

Inner North Centre for Mental Wellbeing (IN) acknowledges the Wurundjeri People, the Traditional Owners of the land on which we operate. We acknowledge and respect their contributions, experience and knowledge as First Nations people. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present.

This Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy demonstrates the strong commitment of management, staff, contractors and volunteers to child safety and wellbeing, and how our organisation keeps children safe from harm, including child abuse.

Commitment to child safety

All children who engage with IN, either in person or online, have a right to feel and be safe. The welfare of the children in our care will always be our first priority and we have a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse and harm. We aim to create a child safe and child-friendly environment where children feel safe while participating in mental health assessment and support.

Purpose

This Policy outlines how IN prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and what steps we will take to do this.

Scope

This policy applies to all staff, contractors, volunteers, management, children and other individuals involved in our organisation. This policy applies to all activities – assessment, therapy, group classes and training conducted by IN.

Definitions

Management refers to the Director of IN and any employees with delegated responsibilities in the management of the psychological practice.

Child abuse means:

- a sexual offence committed against a child
- an offence committed against a child under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic), such as grooming
- physical violence against a child
- causing serious emotional or psychological harm to a child
- serious neglect of a child.

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

Child/Children means a person who is under the age of 18 years.

Concerns and complaints A concern refers to any potential issue that could impact negatively on the safety and wellbeing of children. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction to IN related to one or more of the following:

- our services or dealings with individuals
- allegations of abuse or misconduct by a staff member, a contractor, a volunteer or another individual associated with IN
- disclosures of abuse or harm made by a child or young person
- the conduct of a child or young person at IN
- the inadequate handling of a prior concern
- general concerns about the safety of a group of children or activity.

Role of Management

Management has the role of making sure IN prioritises children's safety and that action is taken when anyone raises concerns about children's safety.

Management will champion and model a child safe culture at IN. We encourage anyone involved with the organisation to report a child safety concern. Management will work to create a positive culture around reporting so that people feel comfortable to raise concerns.

Everyone at IN has a role in identifying and managing risks of child abuse and harm. Management will make sure that staff, contractors and volunteers are conducting risk assessments and taking action to manage risks in accordance with this policy. They will also ensure that appropriate child safety training for staff and volunteers is identified and completed.

Management will conduct an annual review of how effectively IN is delivering child safety and wellbeing. The input of people involved with IN will be sought as part of this review.

Children's empowerment and participation

IN provides mental health support to children. We actively seek to include children's views and ideas in our planning and delivery of services.

We respect the rights of children and provide them with information about their rights including the right to be safe at IN. We actively seek to understand what makes children feel safe in our organisation. We regularly communicate with children about what they can do if they feel unsafe here, or in other settings.

IN values the voices of children and will act on safety concerns raised by children or their families. IN supports children's participation in the following ways:

- Regular discussions with children, including child-led conversations on what makes them feel safe and unsafe.
- Consultation with children about any proposed significant changes to the physical environment, policies, procedures, programs or staffing.
- Information provided to children and families about IN operations, staffing and programs are made suitable for different age groups and diversity of the children.

Families and communities

IN recognises the important role of families and involves parents and carers when making significant decisions about their child, subject to confidentiality. Parents, families and communities are welcome to provide feedback at any time through our contact email address (info@yourinnorth.com.au) and are encouraged to raise any concerns they have with us.

IN provides information to families and community about our child safe policies and practices including through:

- publishing this Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Code of Conduct on our website
- including information about our child safety approach in the client registration process

Creating culturally safe environments for all Aboriginal children and their families

IN is committed to creating environments where Aboriginal culture is celebrated and Aboriginal children, families and community members are welcomed and included. Strategies to embed cultural safety for Aboriginal children include:

- an Acknowledgement of Country at all group sessions and training
- providing opportunities for children to share their cultural identity and express their culture, in one-on-one sessions with their clinician and in group settings
- supporting children who wish to explore their culture, including consulting with their family and relevant Aboriginal organisations
- providing training for staff and volunteers on the strengths of Aboriginal culture and its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children
- seeking feedback from Aboriginal children, families and communities on their experience at IN, particularly how safe they feel expressing their identity including their culture.

Valuing diversity

IN value diversity and equity for all children. To achieve this, we:

- provide training for all staff, contractors and volunteers on understanding diversity and how to support inclusion and cultural safety
- welcome and support participation of all children, including children with disability, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those who are unable to live at home, LGBTIQ children and Aboriginal children and their families
- offer students and families through our registration forms the opportunity to provide information about themselves, including any specific needs to participate fully in our programs
- have zero tolerance of racism and other forms of discrimination and take action when discrimination or exclusion is identified
- commit to ensuring our facilities promote inclusion of children of all abilities.

Code of Conduct

IN has a Child Safe Code of Conduct. Staff, contractors, volunteers and management must comply with the Code of Conduct at all times. Breaches of the Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action including termination of a person's involvement with the organisation.

Recruiting staff and volunteers

IN puts child safety and wellbeing at the centre of recruitment and screening processes for staff, contractors and volunteers. We only recruit those who are appropriate to engage with children.

We require a Working with Children Check, Police Checks and referee checks for all staff, contractors and volunteers who have a role with children or have access to children's personal

information. We require staff to have appropriate qualifications for their roles and check to make sure these qualifications are valid.

Supporting staff and volunteers

IN is committed to ensuring that all staff, contractors and volunteers receive training to ensure they understand their responsibilities in relation to child safety and to support their engagement with children. IN assists staff, contractors and volunteers to incorporate child safety considerations into decisions and to promote a safe environment where children are empowered to speak up about issues that affect them.

Staff, contractors and volunteers will receive supervision to support their engagement with children and for compliance with our Code of Conduct and Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

Issues or concerns about behaviour with children will be raised immediately and addressed in line with our Code of Conduct and complaint handling policy.

Complaints and reporting

All reports of child abuse and child safety concerns will be treated seriously, whether they are made by an adult or a child and whether they are about the conduct of an adult or a child. All complaints and child safety concerns will be responded to promptly and thoroughly.

IN has a Concerns and Complaints Policy that includes information for staff, contractors and volunteers about how a complaint or child safety concern will be responded to.

If a complaint includes an allegation or incident of child abuse or harm, then staff, contractors and volunteers at IN must report it in accordance with the complaint handling policy. IN staff, contractors and volunteers are required to prioritise children's safety in any response and to report all potentially criminal conduct to Victoria Police. Staff, contractors and volunteers may be subject to actions to support child safety including:

- being stood down during an investigation or terminated following an investigation
- having their duties altered so they do not engage with children at IN
- removing their access to IN IT system and facilities.

Complaints can be emailed to info@yourinnernorth.com.au

If there is concern for the immediate safety of a child, immediately call 000.

Record keeping

IN is committed to making and keeping full and accurate records about all child-related complaints or safety concerns.

All child safety complaints, concerns, incidents and near misses will be recorded in the incident reporting system.

Records which may assist with the investigation of a complaint or safety concern will be identified and kept as part of the record of an investigation. Records will be kept even if an investigation does not substantiate a complaint.

We will record and keep the outcome of any investigations, and the resolution of any complaints. This includes findings made, reasons for decisions and actions taken.

Records will be stored securely and kept by IN for at least 45 years.

Risk management

IN conduct regular risk assessments and have a risk management plan to address the risk of child abuse and harm. The risk management plan will be developed in consultation with our staff, contractors, volunteers, parent representatives and children. We will ensure that any risk controls put in place balance the need to manage harm with the benefits of participating in mental health treatment.

Non-compliance with this policy and the Code of Conduct

Management of IN will enforce this policy, the Code of Conduct and any other child safety and wellbeing policies (see list below). Potential breaches by anyone will be investigated and 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.

Review

Every two years or sooner if legislation requires.

Supporting legislation

- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)* (including Child Safe Standards)
- *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)* (including reporting to Child Protection)
- *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)* (including Failure to Protect and Failure to Disclose offences)
- *Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic)* (including Part XIII – Organisational liability for child abuse)