

WK - CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

At Wonder Kidz, we hold our children's care, safety, and well-being as a central and fundamental responsibility of our programs. Wonder Kidz has a moral, legal, and mission-driven responsibility to create a nurturing environment where our children are respected, and they are safe and feel safe.

Wonder Kidz has zero tolerance for child abuse and stands against all forms of child abuse, including but not limited to sexual, physical, emotional, severe, or psychological abuse and/or serious neglect.

Aspects of child abuse and maltreatment include:

Physical Harm involves any non-accidental injury to a child or young person by a parent or caregiver. The injury may be bruises, cuts, burns, fractures, bites, shaking and throwing.

Sexual Harm occurs when an adult or someone more significant and/or older than the child uses power or authority over the child or young person to involve the child in sexual activity. Physical force is sometimes applied, and often intimidation, threats and engaging a child in “keeping secrets is used to prevent a child from disclosing the abuse. Child sexual abuse involves a wide range of sexual activity. It may include fondling of the child's genitals, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or any other object, or exposure to pornography.

Emotional/Psychological Harm occurs when a child or young person is repeatedly rejected, frightened by threats, or exposed to domestic violence. This may involve a severe lack of appropriate nurturing, scapegoating or verbal abuse, such as name-calling or being put down by the parent or caregiver to the extent that it affects the child's physical, emotional, and intellectual growth and development.

Environmental Neglect This is failure to provide the child with the necessities of life, such as food, clothing, shelter, and supervision, to the extent that the child's physical health and development are at risk.

POLICY RATIONALE

This policy applies to leaders, staff, children on placement, and parents/guardians whose child/ren are attending or who wish to enrol their child/ren in Wonder Kidz services. Wonder Kidz has a moral and legal responsibility to ensure that all our children are safe in our care.

Wonder Kidz believe that:

- People caring for children must act in the child's best interests and take all reasonable steps to ensure the child's safety and well-being.
- All children have the right to feel safe and are always safe.
- Practice will be based on a partnership approach and shared responsibility for children's safety, well-being, and development.
- All children will be allowed to reach their full potential and participate in society irrespective of their family circumstances and background.

Wonder Kidz is committed to the following:

- Establishing, maintaining, and strengthening a child-safe environment
- Developing and maintaining an open and aware culture where children feel valued, respected, and cared for.
- Supporting the rights of the child
- Fulfilling their duty of care by protecting children from any reasonable, foreseeable risk of injury or harm.
- Promoting children's development and well-being.

POLICY OBJECTS

- To ensure a safe environment and minimise the risk of (PREVENT) abuse of children enrolled at Wonder Kidz
- For the reporting of child abuse or suspicion of child abuse.

PROCEDURES

Management is responsible for:

- Identifying the potential risks of child abuse at Wonder Kidz.
- Developing and implementing effective strategies to prevent child abuse.
- Ensuring staff recruitment and induction supports the implementation of this policy.
- Ensuring appropriate training and education for staff in recognising child abuse, symptoms of child abuse, what to do and how to respond.
- Ensuring clear procedures are in place for reporting suspicions of child abuse and managing complaints.
- Regularly involving parents/guardians, staff, and children in developing a child-safe environment.
- Protecting the rights of children and families and encouraging participation in any decision-making to the greatest extent possible.
- Offering support to the child, family, and staff in response to concerns or reports relating to the safety and well-being of a child in any Wonder Kidz service.
- Implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/guardians and staff.
- Child Safety screening of Wonder team: All Wonder team, including subcontractors, must adhere to child safety screening laws about the jurisdiction they will be engaged in. There are different requirements for child safety screening documentation and evidence, including exemptions, across all Australian states and territories:

Victoria: <https://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au/organisations/organisation-obligation>.

The Wonder team are responsible for the following:

- Maintaining a professional role with children, with clear boundaries that protect everyone from misunderstandings, perceptions, or a violation of the professional relationship.
- Undertaking training on child protection awareness, including processes for reporting and managing concerns and/or incidents, in line with the appointed role. This includes mandatory child protection awareness training in some states.
- Being aware of the signs and symptoms of abuse to a child.
- Reporting any concerns, as soon as practicable, of suspected or discovered harm to a child to the Service supervisor on the day the problems or child disclosures are noted.
- All educators must report any concerns that a child may be exposed to harm or neglect directly to the service supervisor on duty. However, they must still notify the Manager to ensure Wonder Kidz meet their regulatory requirements.
- Cooperating with other services or professionals to work in the child and family's interests.
- Ensuring that families are made aware of the support services available to them and of the benefits these services can provide, especially to those families in most need of assistance.
- Acknowledging and respecting children's identity, right to privacy, circumstances, and cultural identity, and being responsive to the child's needs.
- Educating and empowering children to talk /express about events and situations that make them uncomfortable (using their preferred communication tool).
- Maintaining confidentiality
- Reduce the circumstances where a child may be alone with one educator
- Complying with the Interactions with Children policy of the service.

The parents/guardians are responsible for the following:

- Reporting observations and/or concerns about potential child abuse or neglect situations to the service supervisor on duty.
- Participate in the Wonder Kidz parents' frequent feedback surveys, events, and parents' meetings and keep open communication that is conducted to assess whether the policy has achieved its values and purposes.

Creating a Child-Safe Organization

Supporting the principles of creating a child-safe organisation, the Wonder Kidz team will implement the following practices to ensure our environment is safe and nurturing.

1. The organisation welcomes children and their families/guardians:

- Staff readily interact with children in an age-appropriate and respectful way.
- Children are treated as individuals, and staff strive to understand each child's particular interests and needs.

- Staff encourage the children's participation.
- Children are supported and comforted appropriately, consistent with the child's wishes.

2. The organisation recognises that children are vulnerable:

- Staff accept their role to protect children involved with their service.
- Staff accept there is a difference in power between a child and an adult.
- The service maintains appropriate staff-to-child ratios.
- Policies are in place to minimise the risk of one-to-one situations with a child.
- Equipment and activities appear appropriate for the activity and age of the children.
- Information about children is treated confidentially.

3. The organisation recognises that children with special needs, including a disability, are among the vulnerable groups:

- All staff relate to all children respectfully and developmentally appropriately.
- Policies are in place to guide the physical and psychological care requirements of all children.
- Staff readily interact with children in an age-appropriate and respectful way.
- Policies are in place to minimise the risk of one-to-one situations with a child.

4. The organisation actively encourages the participation of Aboriginal children:

- Staff acknowledge and show respect for Aboriginal culture, encouraging positive cultural identity (of the local area in which the service is located).
- Program planning includes regular experiences that encourage diversity for all children and consideration of the cultural heritage of others.
- Families are encouraged to identify their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage at enrolment through a question on the child's enrolment record or at the specific service their child/ren attends.

5. The organisation recognises and responds to the needs of children from diverse cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds:

- Cultural diversity is welcomed and celebrated.
- Activities offered represent the local community's cultural and religious mix.

- Staff acknowledge and show respect for diversity.
- Families are encouraged to identify their cultural heritage at enrolment through a question on the child's enrolment record or at the specific service their child/ren attends.

Child Protection Risk Assessment

Risk assessment means identifying the potential for child abuse within our service and taking steps to reduce its possibility. It is crucial to create awareness among all staff of possible risks to children from abuse and how to implement strategies to protect them from those risks and misuse.

Signs or indicators of harm

- Physical signs, optional, sexual, and emotional abuse or neglect may include but are not limited to bruises, burns, sprains, bites, cuts, fractures, frequent hunger, malnutrition, poor hygiene, and inappropriate clothing.
- Behavioural signs of physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect may include but are not limited to wariness or distrust of adults, fear of parents and going home, fear when other children cry or shout, excessively friendly to strangers, very passive and compliant, headaches or stomach pains, displaying sexual behaviours that are unusual for the child's age, frequent rocking, sucking and biting, difficulty sleeping, withdrawn, aggressive and demanding, highly anxious, delayed speech, acting like a much younger child, often being tired and falling asleep.
- Disclosures by the child or others.
- Reporting made by other associated agencies (i.e., the school where the service is located)
- Records about child safety complaints are stored following the Record Keeping (including Confidentiality of Records) policy.
- Records contain information about the action taken, any internal investigation, and reports made to statutory authorities or professional bodies.
- All staff know the need to report serious child protection matters to external authorities. Privacy is maintained, and the information is only written to appropriate persons.
- The physical and sexual abuse of children are crimes and are reported to the police.
- A report can be made, even if they do not have all the necessary information.
- Permission is not required from the parents; they do not need to be notified that a report has been made.

Forming a professional judgement:

Making objective observations and forming a professional judgement are based on the following:

- Warning signs (or indicators) of harm or potential harm observed or inferred for information.
- Knowledge of child development and sensory triggers.
- Knowledge of any support currently being received by the family.
- Consultation with colleagues and other professionals.
- Professional obligations and duty-of-care responsibilities.
- Established protocols.
- Individual service processes.

- Legal requirements, such as mandatory reporting.

How to make a notification

- Staff will discuss any observation/disclosure with the Service Director.
- The Service Director will contact the regional Child Protection office immediately.
- Staff can also report to the regional child protection office anytime.
- In an emergency, outreach crisis response, the Child Protection unit operates twenty-four hours.
- Provide the following information:
 1. The child's name, date of birth and address
 2. The parent's name, date of birth, address, and telephone number
 3. If the family identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
 4. The reason for believing that the injury or behaviour results from abuse or neglect.
 5. The reason why the call is being made at this point.
 6. An assessment of immediate danger to the child/ren (information may be sought on the whereabouts of the alleged abuser/s)
 7. A description of the injury or behaviour observed.
 8. Knowledge of other services involved with the family
 9. Any other information about the family, such as siblings in the home
 10. Any specific cultural background, language barriers or disability circumstances.
- A notification should still be made, even if the notifier does not have all the necessary information
- A child protection Support staff will determine whether the child or young person's described circumstances fall within the legal definition of a child needing protection.
- A decision will be made as to the urgency of the situation.
- The notifier will be informed as to the progress of the investigation as soon as possible
- The police will become involved in cases of sexual or physical abuse allegations.

The notifier may have an ongoing role, including:

- Acting as a support person for the child or young person.
- Attending a case conference.
- Participating in case-planning meetings.
- Continue to monitor the child's behaviour.
- Observing/monitoring the conditions on a protective court order that may relate to access or contact with a parent/guardian.
- Liaising with other professionals and child protection Support staff concerning a child or young person's wellbeing.
- Providing written reports for case-planning meetings or court proceedings about the child's well-being or progress.

A notification record for Wonder Kidz records of all the above information is to be maintained.

Background and legislation

Protecting Children with special needs, one of the most vulnerable groups in society is a shared responsibility between the family, the general community, the police, the government, and professionals working with children. It involves ensuring that all children are safe, their needs are met and minimising the possibility of child abuse. Each adult has a significant role in ensuring the safety and well-being of children and young people, including responding appropriately when an allegation has been made.

Each state in Australia may provide individual information about managing reports and suspicions of child abuse in early childhood education and care services. On a National Level, all persons in day-to-day charge of an early childhood service must have child protection training (individual State requirements apply). All other educators must know their roles and responsibilities in child protection. This includes the existence and application of the current child protection laws and any obligations they may have under the law.

In Victoria,

The Community Care Division of the Victorian Government’s Department of Health and Human Services refers to a publication known as Protocol Between Child Protection and Children’s Services (2004). This directs educators to numerous resources for the reporting processes, including the PROTECT guide.

References:

Australian Childhood Foundation: www.childhood.org.au	Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998
Choose with Care (Building Child Safe Organisations), an information and training program: www.childwise.net.au	ACECQA National Quality Framework Resource Kit (2012)
Office of the Child Safety Commissioner: www.ocsc.vic.gov.au	Quality Area 1 – Educational Program and Practice.
Protocol between Child Protection and Children’s Services 2004, Community Care Division Victorian Government Department of Human Services	Quality Area 2 – Children’s health and safety
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child	Education and Care Services National Law Act (2010), Section 167
Victorian Child Safe Standards	Education and Care Services National Regulations (2011), Regulation 84
Safe from Harm, the role of professionals in protecting children and young people: www.education.vic.gov.au	Child Protection Act 1999 (QLD)
Responding to Child Abuse, DHS Children, Youth & Families publication	Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 (QLD)

Working with children: www.justice.vic.gov.au/workingwithchildren

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