



# Child Safety Policy

## 1. Introduction

This Child Safety Policy is prepared to ensure children are safe at all HBWC events and activities and to provide guidance to office bearers, committee members, staff and volunteers about the standards and procedures that they must follow. This policy is modelled upon the [Landcare Victoria Inc. Child Safety Policy](#) (including the related Code of Conduct) approved by the Board of Landcare Victoria Inc. on 12 August 2022 and adopted by the Hobsons Bay Wetlands Centre Inc. (HBWC) Committee of Management on 29 November 2022.

The policy conforms to the requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards issued by the Commission for Children and Young People that came into force on 1 July 2022 (**Attachment 1**).

Among the organisations explicitly required to adhere to the Child Safe Standards are charities and not-for-profit organisations. HBWC falls into this category.

## 2. Scope and application

This policy and the related Code of Conduct are mandatory for Landcare Victoria Inc. Member Groups unless the Member Group has itself reviewed its policy and procedures since the introduction of the 2022 Victorian Child Safe Standards and the Member Group policy meets or exceeds the requirements of this policy and the related Code of Conduct.

HBWC is a member of Landcare Victoria Inc., and will apply the policy, as relevant, to its events and activities.

Under the Act, a Child is a person who is under the age of 18 years.

## 3. Our commitment to child safety

- HBWC is committed to child safety.
- We want children to be safe, happy, and empowered.
- We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers.
- We are committed to the safety, participation, and empowerment of all children.
- We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures.
- We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously.
- HBWC is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early and removing and reducing these risks.
- HBWC have practices to reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing committee members, staff and volunteers.

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- HBWC is committed to regularly training and educating our committee members, staff and volunteers on child abuse risks.
- We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability.
- We have specific policies and procedures in place that support our committee members, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.

If you believe a child is at immediate risk, phone 000.

## 4. Our children

This policy is intended to empower children, who are vital and active participants at HBWC. We involve them when making decisions about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say.

We promote diversity and acceptance at HBWC, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome. In particular, we:

- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children
- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate equally

## 5. Our staff and volunteers

This policy guides our staff and volunteers on how to behave with children at HBWC. All staff and volunteers must agree to abide by our Code of Conduct which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. All staff and volunteers, as well as children and their families, are given the opportunity to contribute to the continuing development and update of the Code of Conduct. The HBWC Code of Conduct is provided at **Attachment 2** and aligns with the 2022 Child Safe Standards at **Attachment 1**.

## 6. Training and supervision

Training and education are important to ensure that everyone at HBWC understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility.

Our organisational culture aims for all board members, staff, volunteers, families, and children to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. We train our office bearers, staff, and volunteers to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

We also support our office bearers, staff, and volunteers through ongoing supervision to develop their skills to protect children from abuse and promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds, and the safety of children with a disability.

New office bearers, staff and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand HBWC's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse. This will include checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate (please refer to the HBWC Code of Conduct for information about appropriate

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behaviour). Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

## 7. Recruitment

We take all reasonable steps to employ skilled staff, contractors, and volunteers to work with children. We develop selection criteria and advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legal responsibilities. HBWC understands that when recruiting office bearers, staff, and volunteers, we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

We carry out reference checks and police record checks to ensure that we are recruiting the right people. If during the recruitment process a person's records indicate a criminal history, then the person will be given the opportunity to provide further information and context.

## 8. Fair procedures for staff and volunteers

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and reasonable to all staff and volunteers. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form. All records are securely stored. If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to children and families on progress and actions we as an organisation take.

## 9. Privacy

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be staff, volunteers, families, or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it and who will have access to it. This is intended to protect reporters and to ensure that all members of HBWC are comfortable to disclose any allegations or concerns in relation to child safety without repercussions.

## 10. Legislative responsibilities

HBWC takes its legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- **Failure to disclose:** All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to Victoria Police
- **Mandatory reporting:** Any office bearers/committee members, staff or volunteers who are mandatory reporters (doctors, nurses, midwives, teacher, principals and police officers) must comply with their duties
- **Failure to protect:** People of authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so
- **Reportable conduct:** In addition to the chairperson of HBWC, the CEO of Landcare Victoria Inc. must be made aware of any allegations of physical and sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, significant emotional or psychological harm or significant neglect by an employee or volunteer

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towards a child. We are also legally required to notify the Commission for Children and Young People of the allegation

- **Duty of care:** If a child is abused by an individual associated with our organisation, our organisation is presumed to have breached its duty of care unless it can prove that it took 'reasonable precautions' to prevent the abuse in question

## 11. Risk management

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified. In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our children.

We have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks which include risks posed by physical environments and online environments.

## 12. Allegations, concerns, and complaints

HBWC takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our office bearers, committee members, staff and volunteers are trained to deal with allegations appropriately.

We work to ensure all children, families, board members, staff and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour.

We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place. If an adult has a reasonable belief that an incident has occurred, then they must report the incident. Factors contributing to reasonable belief may include:

- a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves)
- behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- observing suspicious behaviour

## 13. Regular review

This policy will be reviewed every two years and following significant incidents if they occur. We will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute. Where possible we will do our best to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

## 14. Code of Conduct

Each Member Group of Landcare Victoria Inc. is required to have a documented code of conduct which covers child safety, bullying, sexual harassment and respect. As a member of Landcare Victoria Inc., HBWC has adopted the Landcare Victoria Inc. code of conduct and will apply the code, as relevant, to its events and activities.

The HBWC Code of Conduct is provided at **Attachment 2** and aligns with the 2022 Child Safe Standards at **Attachment 1**.

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## 15. Further information

Further information about the Child Safe Standards can be found on the [Child Safety page](#) on the Commission for Children and Young People's website.

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# Attachment 1

## The Child Safe Standards

### **Child Safe Standard 1**

Relevant entities establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued.

### **Child Safe Standard 2**

Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.

### **Child Safe Standard 3**

Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.

### **Child Safe Standard 4**

Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.

### **Child Safe Standard 5**

Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.

### **Child Safe Standard 6**

People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.

### **Child Safe Standard 7**

Processes for complaints and concerns are child focused.

### **Child Safe Standard 8**

Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.

### **Child Safe Standard 9**

Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.

### **Child Safe Standard 10**

Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved.

### **Child Safe Standard 11**

Policies and procedures document how the relevant entity is safe for children and young people.

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## Attachment 2

### Child Safety Code of Conduct

All staff, contractors, volunteers, office bearers and committee members of HBWC are required to observe child safe principles and expectations for appropriate behaviour towards and in the company of children, as noted below.

A copy of the Code of Conduct must be provided to all HBWC office bearers, committee members, employed staff and any other members that may be involved in organising events and activities. The Code must be made freely available to all members of HBWC.

**All personnel of HBWC are responsible for supporting the safety, participation, wellbeing, and empowerment of children by:**

- adhering to the HBWC Child Safety Policy at all times / upholding HBWC statement of commitment to child safety at all times
- taking all reasonable steps to protect children from abuse
- treating everyone with respect
- listening and responding to the views and concerns of children, particularly if they are telling you that they or another child has been abused and/or are worried about their safety or the safety of another
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children (for example, by never questioning an Aboriginal child's self-identification)
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children with culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds (for example, by having a zero tolerance of discrimination)
- promoting the safety, participation and empowerment of children with a disability (for example, during personal care activities)
- ensuring as far as practicable that adults are not left alone with a child
- reporting any allegations of child abuse to the Chairperson of HBWC (or another committee member if the Chairperson is the focus of the allegation) and to the CEO of Landcare Victoria Inc, and ensure any allegation is reported to the police or child protection
- reporting any child safety concerns to the Chairperson of HBWC or the CEO of Landcare Victoria Inc.
- if an allegation of child abuse is made, ensure as quickly as possible that the child(ren) is/are safe
- encouraging children to 'have a say' and participate in all relevant organisational activities where possible, especially on issues that are important to them

**Staff and volunteers must not:**

- develop any 'special' relationships with children that could be seen as favouritism (for example, the offering of gifts or special treatment for specific children)
- exhibit behaviours with children which may be construed as unnecessarily physical (for example inappropriate sitting on laps. Sitting on laps could be appropriate sometimes, for example while reading a storybook to a small child in an open plan area)
- put children at risk of abuse (for example, by locking doors)
- do things of a personal nature that a child can do for themselves, such as toileting or changing clothes
- engage in open discussions of a mature or adult nature in the presence of children (for example, personal social activities)

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- use inappropriate language in the presence of children
- express personal views on cultures, race or sexuality in the presence of children
- discriminate against any child, including because of culture, race, ethnicity or disability
- have any online contact with a child or their family (unless necessary, for example providing families with e-newsletters)
- ignore or disregard any suspected or disclosed child abuse

By observing these standards, you acknowledge your responsibility to immediately report any breach of this Code to the chair of HBWC and to the CEO of Landcare Victoria Inc.

Any allegation of a breach of this Code of Conduct will be investigated under the HBWC Complaints Policy.

**If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse, report the matter to the Police (Phone 000).**

**Acknowledgment of Code of Conduct**

Committee members, office bearers, employees and event/activity organisers should sign this document as a record of their acknowledgement that they are familiar with the Code of Conduct. *The Code of Conduct applies to all committees, members, and staff whether or not it is specifically acknowledged.*

I ..... acknowledge that I have read the HBWC Inc. Child Safety Code of Conduct.

I understand that if I breach the Code of Conduct, I will face disciplinary action that could lead to termination of employment, being asked to leave the Committee, step down as a HBWC representative or any consequences under State or Commonwealth law.

I agree to abide by the Code of Conduct.

<b>Role</b>	
<b>Signature</b>	
<b>Date</b>	