

## 1.0 Child Safe Environments Policy

### Policy Rationale

This policy provides a set of clear guidelines to strengthen safety for all children attending our programs. The policy has taken into account the Victorian Child Safe Standards in relation to supporting efforts to drive cultural change to protect children from abuse. This policy provides standards for:

- Creating safe environments in which children can participate in all aspects of programs and experiences in safety and comfort.
- Ensuring all staff members have adequate knowledge of risk identification, safety and emergency procedures for supervision and advocacy of children in our care.
- Ensuring all staff understand and comply with policies and procedures for reporting concerns of child safety as per legislations and regulations.

### Policy Statement

The Empathy Initiative has a moral and legal responsibility to ensure that all children in our care are safe. We support and respect all children, families, staff, and volunteers. We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the cultural safety of children from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds, and to provide safe environments for children with disability. The Empathy Initiative has committed to be a child safe organisation.

In actioning this commitment, The Empathy Initiative has established robust policies designed for the safety of children. The Empathy Initiative regularly reviews and updates these policies and accompanying procedures and staff training.

In line with our stance against child abuse, The Empathy Initiative will treat all child abuse, allegations and/or child safety breach seriously. The Empathy Initiative staff and volunteers are aware of expectations and consequences as outlined in this policy.

The Empathy Initiative supports the seven child safe standards and promotes these with staff, families and children. These seven standards being:

- Standard 1: Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements.
- Standard 2: A child safe policy or statement of commitment to child safety.
- Standard 3: A code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children.

- Standard 4. Screening, supervision, training, and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel.
- Standard 5. Process for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse.
- Standard 6. Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse.
- Standard 7. Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children.

### **Our children**

This policy empowers children to be vital and active participants in our organisation. We involve them when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say. We promote diversity and tolerance in our organisation, and welcome people from all walks of life and cultural background.

In particular we:

- Promote the cultural safety, participation, and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torre Strait Islander children
- Promote the cultural safety, participation, and empowerment of children from CALD backgrounds.
- Ensure that children with disability are safe and can participate equally as far as practicable.

### **Our staff and volunteers**

This policy informs our staff and volunteers of The Empathy Initiative's expectations in interacting and caring for children. All of our staff and volunteers must agree to abide by our Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct clearly specifies the expected standards all The Empathy Initiative staff and volunteers must adhere to when working with children. All The Empathy Initiative staff members wear an easy to recognize The Empathy Initiative uniform so all children can quickly and confidently identify staff.

### **Training and supervision**

The Empathy Initiative has a deep commitment to staff and volunteer training. We acknowledge that training and education is a critical component to ensuring all staff and volunteers understand that child safety is everyone's responsibility. The Empathy Initiative culture encourages all staff, volunteers, parents, carers and most of all, children, to feel confident and comfortable to discuss any allegations of child abuse and/or child safety concerns. The Empathy

Initiative's staff and volunteer training programs include the identification and appropriate responses, as well as risk mitigation strategies, of child abuse. The Empathy Initiative support staff and volunteers through ongoing supervision to:

- develop skills necessary for the protection of children in our care from abuse.
- promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children; promote the cultural safety of children from CALD backgrounds; and the safety and inclusion of children with disability.

New employees and volunteers are supervised to ensure The Empathy Initiative's commitments to the message of child safety being everyone's responsibility is a lived commitment. Supervision of new staff and volunteers also allows monitoring of behaviours towards children and on-going learning to increase safety and appropriate interactions (please refer to The Empathy Initiative's Code of Conduct). The Empathy Initiative's commitment means that any behaviour threatening the safety of children will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Victoria Police (VicPol), depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

### **Recruitment**

The Empathy Initiative exercises all reasonable precautions in employing skilled professionals to work with children. We develop selection criteria and advertise roles in a manner demonstrating our commitment to child safety and our ethical and legislative responsibilities as an organisation. The Empathy Initiative is very clear before and during the recruitment process that our staff and volunteers have ethical as well as legislative obligations to children. All people engaged in child-related work, including volunteers, are required to hold and provide evidence of a current Working with Children Check.

### **Fair procedures for personnel**

The safety and wellbeing of children is The Empathy Initiative's primary concern. We are also fair and just to staff and volunteers. The decisions The Empathy Initiative make regarding recruiting, assessment of incidents and/or exercising disciplinary action, will always occur via transparent processes and will be based on evidence. The Empathy Initiative records all allegations of abuse and/or safety concerns via incident reporting forms. All records are securely and confidentially stored. Where allegation/s of abuse and/or safety concern/s are raised, The Empathy Initiative provides information and updates to families and children as appropriate on all progress and any actions The Empathy Initiative as an organisation exercises.

## **Privacy**

All personal information considered or recorded respects the privacy of all individuals, be they staff, volunteers, parents or children, unless there is a risk to a persons' safety. The Empathy Initiative have procedures and practices to ensure all personal information is protected and confidentially stored. The Empathy Initiative believes that everyone is entitled to know how information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will have access to it. The Empathy Initiative acts in a transparent and fair manner throughout all processes.

## **Legislative responsibilities**

The Empathy Initiative prioritises our legal responsibilities and believe these to be of the utmost seriousness. These legislative commitments include:

- Failure to disclose: Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. 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 the police.
- 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.
- Any personnel who are mandatory reporters must comply with their duties.

## **Risk management**

All Victorian organisations are required to protect children where risks are identified (see information about failure to protect above). In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, The Empathy Initiative proactively manages risks of abuse to our children. The Empathy Initiative implements risk management strategies including the identification, assessment, appropriate response, and immediate and on-going risk mitigation strategies to minimise child abuse and risks. Risks to children are noted and managed. These include risks posed by physical environments (for example, any doors that can lock), and online environments (for example, no staff or volunteer is to have contact with a child from our programs on social media).

## **Regular review**

This policy is reviewed every year and/or following significant incidents if they occur. The Empathy Initiative is an inclusive organisation welcoming local

Aboriginal communities, Culturally And Linguistically Diverse communities and people with a disability.

### **Allegations, concerns and complaints**

The Empathy Initiative treats all allegations seriously and commits to thorough and swift investigation procedures. The Empathy Initiative staff and volunteers are trained to deal appropriately with allegations. We work to ensure all children, families, staff, and volunteers are familiar with procedures of action including reporting of all identified abuse or inappropriate behaviours. The Empathy Initiative believes everyone has a responsibility to report allegations of abuse where there is reasonable belief that an incident took place (see information about failure to disclose above). The Empathy Initiative acknowledges a response is required where:

- 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.
- Suspicious behaviour is observed.

### **Procedures**

- Staff members actively supervise all children attending The Empathy Initiative programs. Staff members ensure appropriate positioning both indoors and outdoors to ensure maximum supervision for children in our care. (S 165)
- Staff members ensure that all children are made aware of area boundaries and program supervision procedures if applicable.
- Staff members guide program experiences and ensure children are supervised, supported and safe.
- The Empathy Initiative management assess the suitability of the physical environment prior to The Empathy Initiative's program facilitation.
- Staff members will complete an OH&S check prior to the program to ensure that hazards, risks, and concerns are noted and appropriately addressed. Staff members encourage children to be mindful of the program environment and the equipment. Staff members assist in maintaining a space that is as safe as possible.

- Staff members discuss expectations with children in the form of behavioural expectations including being responsible, respecting their environment and other children and reporting any concerns they may have.
- Staff members provide current Working with Children Checks to ascertain fitness and propriety of staff members.
- The Empathy Initiative provides an environment that is free from the use of tobacco, illicit drugs and alcohol for all staff and children. All staff and volunteers at each service comply with and uphold the tobacco, illicit drugs, and alcohol-free environment.

## References

- ACECQA National Quality Framework Resource Kit (2012)
- Quality Area 2 – Children’s health and safety
- Quality Area 7 – Leadership and Service Management
- Education and Care Services National Regulations (2011) R 84
- Education and Care Services National Law Act (2010) S 168(2)(h), S 165

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