



Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Trek Learning Centre acknowledges that we gather, work, learn and play on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

This Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy was approved by the Board of Directors on 12/05/2020. It demonstrates the strong commitment of management, staff and volunteers to child safety and wellbeing, and how Trek Learning Centre keeps children safe from harm, including child abuse.

1. Purpose

This Policy outlines how Trek Learning Centre prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, and the steps we will take to do this.

It informs our community of everyone's obligations to act safely and appropriately towards children and young people, guiding our processes and practices for the safety and wellbeing across all areas of our work.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, contractors, Board of Directors, children, young people and other individuals involved in our organization referring to their conduct both within and outside of work irrespective of whether they work with or have direct contact with children or young people.

3. Definitions

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/Young Person 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 Trek Learning Centre related to one or more of the following:

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

4. Commitment to Child Safety

Trek Learning Centre is a child safe organisation which welcomes all children, young people and their families.

We are committed to providing environments where children and young people are safe and feel safe, where their participation is valued, their views respected, and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives. Our child safe policies, strategies and practices are inclusive of the needs of all children and students.

We have no tolerance for child abuse and take proactive steps to identify and manage any risks of harm to students in our school environments.

We promote positive relationships between children, young people and adults and between children, young people and their peers. These relationships are based on trust and respect.

We take proactive steps to identify and manage any risk of harm to children and young people in our environment. When child safety concerns are raised or identified, we treat these seriously and respond promptly and thoroughly.

Particular attention is given to the child safety needs of Aboriginal children and young people, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children and young people with disabilities, those unable to live at home, children and young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) and other children and young people experiencing risk or vulnerability. Inappropriate or harmful behaviour targeting children and young people based on these or other characteristics, such as racism or homophobia, are not tolerated at Trek Learning Centre, and any instances identified will be addressed with appropriate consequences.

Child safety is a shared responsibility. Every person involved in Trek Learning Centre has an important role in promoting child safety and wellbeing and promptly raising any issues or concerns about a child's safety.

We are committed to regularly reviewing our child safe practices, and seeking input from our children, young people, families, staff, and volunteers to inform our ongoing strategies.

This policy applies to all programs, activities and projects conducted by Trek Learning Centre.

5. Roles and Responsibilities:

Child Safety Contact Officer:

- are suitably trained and experienced who can provide advice on child safety matters and reporting requirements.
- Trek Learning Centre Child Safety Contact Officers are displayed onsite.

Board of Directors:

- ensure effective child safety and wellbeing governance, policies, procedures, codes and practices are in place and followed
- model a child safe culture that facilitates the active participation of children, young people, families and staff in promoting and improving child safety, cultural safety and wellbeing
- enable inclusive practices where the diverse needs of all children and young people are considered
- reinforce high standards of respectful behaviour between children, young people and adults, and between peers
- promote regular open discussion on child safety issues within the organisation including at board meetings and staff/volunteer meetings
- facilitate regular professional learning for staff and volunteers (where appropriate) to build deeper understandings of child safety, cultural safety, children and young people wellbeing and prevention of, and responding to abuse
- create an environment where child safety complaints and concerns are readily raised, and no one is discouraged from reporting an allegation of child abuse to relevant authorities.

Staff and volunteers:

- participate in child safety and wellbeing induction and training provided by Trek Learning Centre, and always follow the organisation's child safety and wellbeing policies and procedures
- act in accordance with our Child Safety Code of Conduct
- identify and raise concerns about child safety issues in accordance with our Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures
- ensure children and young people's views are taken seriously and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives
- implement inclusive practices that respond to the diverse needs of children and young people.

6. Policy Principles

This Policy is underpinned by the National Principles for Child Safe Organizations, which now align with the updated Child Safe Standards.

Child Safety Code of Conduct

Our Child Safety Code of Conduct sets the boundaries and expectations for appropriate behaviours between adults and children / young people. It also clarifies behaviours that are not acceptable in our physical and online environments.

We ensure that children and young people attending Trek Learning Centre know what is acceptable and what is not acceptable so that they can be clear and confident about what to expect from adults in the organisation.

The Child Safety Code of Conduct also includes processes to report inappropriate behaviour.

Establishing a culturally safe environment

Trek Learning Centre are committed to establishing an inclusive and culturally safe organisation where the strengths of Aboriginal culture, values and practices are respected.

Our staff and volunteers consider how every child and young person can have a positive experience in a safe environment. For Aboriginal students, we recognise the link between Aboriginal culture, identity and safety and actively create opportunities for Aboriginal children, young people, and the Aboriginal community to have a voice and presence in our planning, policies, and activities.

Strategies to embed cultural safety for Aboriginal children include:

- supporting children and young people 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 and young people

Student empowerment

Trek Learning Centre actively work to listen to and empower children and young people who come in contact with the organisation. We work to create an inclusive and supportive environment that encourages children, young people and families to contribute to our child safety approach and understand their rights and their responsibilities.

Respectful relationships between adults, children and young people are reinforced and we encourage strong friendships and peer support in the organisation to ensure a sense of belonging. We do not tolerate bullying or abusive behaviour and take action if this occurs.

Trek Learning Centre respect the rights of children and young people, giving them the skills and confidence to recognise unsafe situations with adults or other children / young people and to speak up and act on concerns relating to themselves or their peers. We ensure children and young people who attend Trek Learning Centre know who to talk to if they are worried or feeling unsafe and we encourage them to share concerns with a trusted adult at any time.

Trek Learning Centre when gathering information in relation to a complaint about alleged misconduct or abuse of a child, listen to the complainant's account and take them seriously, check our understanding of the complaint, support the student and keep them (and their parents and carers, as appropriate) informed about progress.

Trek Learning Centre support children, young people and their family'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.

Family and Community Engagement

Trek Learning Centre recognise the important role of families and communities have in monitoring and promoting children and young people’s safety and wellbeing and helping to raise any concerns. Trek Learning Centre involves parents and carers and other relevant parties when making significant decisions about their child.

Parents, families and communities are welcome to provide feedback at any time through contacting Trek Learning Centre CEO or the Board of Directors either by phone or email, and are encouraged to raise any concerns they have with us.

To support family and community engagement Trek Learning Centre provide accessible 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 information pack
- PROTECT Child Safety posters are displayed across the premises

Diversity and equity

As a child safe organisation, we celebrate the rich diversity of our children, young people, families and community, promoting respectful environments that are free from discrimination. Our focus is on wellbeing and growth for all.

We recognise that every child and young person has unique skills, strengths and experiences to draw on.

We pay particular attention to individuals and groups of children and young people in our community with additional and specific needs. This includes tailoring our child safety strategies and supports to the needs of:

- Aboriginal children and young people
- children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- children and young people with disabilities
- children unable to live at home or impacted by family violence
- children and young people who identify as LGBTIQ+.

To achieve diversity and equity for children and young people who attend Trek Learning Centre we:

- provide training for all Board of Director members, staff and volunteers on understanding diversity and how to support inclusion and cultural safety
- welcome and support participation of all children and young people, including those with disability, children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds,

those who are unable to live at home, LGBTIQ children / young people and Aboriginal children, young people and their families

- have zero tolerance of racism and other forms of discrimination and take action when discrimination or exclusion is identified

Suitability and Support of Staff and Volunteers

Trek Learning Centre puts child and young people safety and wellbeing at the centre of recruitment and screening processes for staff and volunteers. We only recruit staff and volunteers who are appropriate to engage with children. Members of the Board of Directors must also be screened.

When engaging staff to perform child-related work, we:

- sight, verify and record the person's Working with Children clearance
- collect and record:
 - proof of the person's identity and any professional or other qualifications
 - the person's history of working with children
 - references that address suitability for the job and working with children.

All newly appointed staff and volunteers will be expected to participate in the induction program where they receive:

- the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy (this document)
- the Child Safety Code of Conduct
- the Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures and
- any other child safety and wellbeing information that Trek leadership considers appropriate to the nature of the role.

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

All staff engaged in child-connected work will be supervised appropriately to ensure that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate.

Inappropriate behaviour towards children and young people will be managed swiftly and in accordance with our Code of Conduct, complaint handling policy and disciplinary policy. Child safety and wellbeing will be paramount.

Complaints and reporting processes

Trek Learning Centre fosters a culture that encourages staff, volunteers, children, young people, parents to raise concerns and complaints. This makes it more difficult for breaches of the code of conduct, misconduct or abuse to occur and remain hidden.

We have clear pathways for raising complaints and concerns and responding and this is documented in our Complaint Policy.

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

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

Child safety knowledge, skills and awareness

Ongoing training and education are essential to ensuring that staff and volunteers understand their roles and responsibilities and develop their capacity to effectively address child safety and wellbeing matters.

In addition to the child safety and wellbeing induction, our staff and volunteers will participate in a range of training and professional learning to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to maintain a child safe environment.

Managing risks to child safety and wellbeing

Trek Learning Centre recognise the importance of identifying and managing risks of child harm and abuse in our physical and online environments.

To ensure safety and wellbeing of children and young people risks are managed through child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures and practices, and code of conduct including facilities and services we contract through third party providers.

We will ensure any risk controls put in place balance the need to manage harm with the benefits of participating in Trek Learning Centre.

Review of child safety practices

Trek Learning Centre have established processes for the review and ongoing improvement of our child safe policies, procedures, and practices.

We will:

- review and improve our policy every 2 years or after any significant child safety incident
- analyse any complaints, concerns, and safety incidents to improve policy and practice

Record keeping

Trek Learning Centre acknowledge good record management is a critical element of child safety and wellbeing, and are committed to making and keeping full and accurate records about all child-related complaints or safety concerns.

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 in accordance to Government guidelines.

Information sharing

Trek Learning Centre may share relevant information to promote the safety and wellbeing of children, where it is appropriate and in their best interests.

Information about complaints confidential, except where it is necessary to share information to respond properly to a complaint or to prioritise child safety. We may also need to share information about incidents or complaints with external authorities to comply with the law or to prioritise safety. More information is available in our complaint handling policy.

Related policies and procedures

This Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy is to be read in conjunction with other related policies, procedures, and codes. These include our:

- Code of Conduct
- Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures
- Complaints Policy
- Volunteers Policy

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)