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Cottage by the Sea

QUEENSCLIFF

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CHILD SAFETY AND WELLBEING POLICY

Purpose

This Policy outlines Cottage by the Sea Queenscliff Inc's (**Cottage by the Sea**) commitment to child safety and wellbeing and establishes the minimum standards expected of all Board members, employees, volunteers, contractors and visitors.

The purpose of this Policy is to:

- promote a culture of safety, wellbeing and empowerment for children and young people;
- comply with the Victorian Child Safe Standards and National Principles for Child Safe Organisations;
- establish clear responsibilities for safeguarding children;
- support reporting and response to child safety concerns; and
- ensure the best interests of children remain the paramount consideration in all decisions affecting them.

This Policy should be read together with the Child Safety Code of Conduct, the Child Safety Procedures Manual and Annexure A, which maps the Victorian Child Safe Standards to the relevant sections of this Policy.

Policy Statement

Cottage by the Sea is committed to providing safe, inclusive and empowering experiences for children and young people. The safety, wellbeing and best interests of Children are the paramount consideration in all organisational decision-making, program delivery and operational practices.

All Children have a right to be safe from harm and Child Abuse. The welfare of Children participating in Cottage by the Sea programs is a priority. Cottage by the Sea aims to create an environment where Children are safe and receive appropriate care and support. Cottage by the Sea has zero tolerance to Child Abuse and will treat all allegations of Child Abuse and Child Safety concerns seriously.

Every person associated with Cottage by the Sea shares responsibility for protecting Children and promoting their safety and wellbeing.

Scope

This Policy applies to Board members, employees, volunteers, contractors, secondees, labour hire personnel and work experience participants (**Personnel**).

Definitions

Child or **Children** means a person under the age of 18 years.

Child Abuse includes:

- **Psychological abuse (also known as emotional abuse)** which includes bullying, threatening and abusive language, intimidation, shaming and name calling, ignoring and isolating a child, and exposure to domestic and family violence.
- **Physical abuse** which includes physical punishment, such as pushing, shoving, punching, slapping and kicking, resulting in injury, burns, choking or bruising.
- **Sexual abuse** which includes involving a Child in sexual activity that they do not understand, cannot consent to, or that is against accepted community standards. Sexual abuse includes, but is not limited to, grooming, sexual exploitation, sexual touching of any part of the body whether clothed or unclothed, exposure to sexual conduct, child abuse material, preparing or encouraging a child to engage in sexual activity, persuading, forcing or coercing a child to engage in sexual activity, and sex of any kind with a child.
- **Grooming** is a process where a person manipulates a child or group of children and sometimes those looking after them, including parents, carers, teachers and leaders. They do this to establish a position of 'trust' so they can then later sexually abuse the child.
- **Serious neglect** of a Child.

Child Abuse may be perpetrated by an adult or Child to Child (peer abuse).

Child Safe Standards means the Victorian Child Safe Standards for Child Safe Organisations. Annexure A summarises each Standard and identifies where it is addressed in this Policy.

Child Safety, in the context of this Policy, means measures to protect Children from Child Abuse, neglect or any form of cultural, emotional, psychological or physical harm.

Designated Child Protection Officer is the person responsible for establishing and implementing processes for responding to and reporting suspected Child Abuse in accordance with the Reportable Conduct Scheme, mandatory reporting requirements (where applicable) and other applicable reporting requirements around Child Safety. The Designated Child Protection Officer is Belinda Saya.

National Principles means the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations published by the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Personnel includes all employees, volunteers, secondees, board members, students and contractors.

Reasonable Belief is more than suspicion. There must be some objective basis for the belief. However, it is not the same as having proof and does not require certainty.

Policy Requirements

1. Diversity, inclusion and cultural safety

Cottage by the Sea supports equity and inclusion and recognises that some Children may be more vulnerable to Child Abuse than others. Cottage by the Sea recognises and respects that Children who participate in Cottage by the Sea programs come from a diverse range of circumstances. Cottage by the Sea aims to provide programs that are tailored and appropriate for the diverse needs of Children who attend Cottage by the Sea.

Cottage by the Sea is committed to providing culturally safe and inclusive environments for Children, including:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children;
- Children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds;
- Children living with disability;
- LGBTQIA+ Children; and
- all Children experiencing vulnerability.

Racism, discrimination and exclusionary behaviour will not be tolerated.

Cottage by the Sea respects and values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and understands the importance of culture and community to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children.

Cottage by the Sea will establish and maintain a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children are respected and valued:

- Children are encouraged and actively supported to express their culture and enjoy their cultural rights;
- Personnel are supported to understand the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children;
- racism is identified, confronted and not tolerated, with appropriate consequences applied;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Children are actively supported to participate and be included; and
- policies, procedures, systems and practices are reviewed to ensure they create a culturally safe and inclusive environment.

2. Child Safety Culture

Cottage by the Sea will maintain a culture where:

- Child Safety is embedded in leadership, governance and organisational culture;
- Children are listened to and taken seriously;
- Children are informed of their rights;
- safeguarding risks are actively identified and managed.

3. Participation and Empowerment

Cottage by the Sea recognises that Children are more likely to raise concerns when they feel confident, valued, empowered, and heard. Cottage by the Sea is committed to listening to the needs of Children and involving them in decisions surrounding their participation in Cottage by the Sea programs, in an age-appropriate manner.

Children are encouraged to:

- express their views;
- raise concerns;
- participate in decisions affecting them;
- understand their rights and available supports.

Concerns raised by Children will be responded to promptly and respectfully.

4. Families and Communities

Cottage by the Sea recognises the important role that families and communicates play in keeping Children safe. Cottage by the Sea will inform and involve families and communities in promoting Child Safety by providing accessible information about this Policy, the Child Safety Code of Conduct, reporting pathways and opportunities to provide feedback on Child Safety practices.

5. Safe People

Cottage by the Sea requires all Personnel to hold a valid Victorian Working with Children Check, and provide a national police check prior to commencing employment or engagement with Cottage by the Sea.

Recruitment and appointment of employees, position descriptions and job advertisements will clearly demonstrate Cottage by the Sea's commitment to Child Safety and the requirement to hold or obtain a valid Working with Children Check and provide a national police check.

6. Safe Environments

Cottage by the Sea will maintain safe physical and online environments by:

- conducting regular risk assessments;
- implementing supervision requirements;
- maintaining professional boundaries;
- restricting private online communication with children;
- applying controls around photography, recording and personal devices.

7. Reporting Concerns or Complaints about Child Safety

All Personnel must familiarise themselves, understand and follow the Child Safety Reporting Procedure as set out in the Child Safety Procedures Manual.

Complaints and concerns processes will be accessible, child-focused, culturally safe and trauma-informed. Children, families and Personnel will be supported to raise concerns without fear of adverse consequences.

8. Education and Training

All Personnel will receive induction and ongoing education appropriate to their role, including Child Safety responsibilities, recognising and responding to harm, mandatory and other reporting obligations, cultural safety, trauma informed practice, professional boundaries, child empowerment, online safety, and the Child Safety Code of Conduct.

9. Record Keeping, Review and Continuous Improvement

All Child Safety concerns, allegations, incidents, complaints and near misses, external notifications and follow-up actions must be documented and retained securely.

Records will be maintained in accordance with legal and organisational requirements and used to support continuous improvement.

Cottage by the Sea will regularly review the effectiveness of this Policy and related Child Safety systems, using incident data, complaints, feedback from Children and families, risk assessments, audit findings and changes in legal or regulatory requirements to drive continuous improvement.

10. Documented Child Safety Policies and Procedures

This Policy is supported by documented procedures, forms and related policies that describe how Cottage by the Sea prevents, identifies, responds to and reports Child Safety risks, concerns and incidents. These documents will be accessible to Personnel and reviewed periodically to ensure they remain current and effective.

Consequences of Non-Compliance

Any breach of this Policy may result in:

- disciplinary action;
- termination of employment, engagement or volunteer involvement;
- notification to an external body as required by law.

Policies / Information

- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Risk Management Framework
- Privacy Policy
- Complaints Handling Policy
- Volunteer Management Policy

Procedures

The Child Safety Procedures Manual support this Policy:

Forms

- Child Safety Concern Report Form
- Incident and Accident Report Form

Annexure A

Victorian Child Safe Standards for Child Safe Organisations

No.	Victorian Child Safe Standard	Relevant policy section	How the Policy addresses the Standard
1	Organisations establish a culturally safe environment in which Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued.	1. Diversity, inclusion and cultural safety	Requires culturally safe and inclusive practices, support for cultural expression, active inclusion, understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, and action against racism.
2	Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.	Purpose; Policy Statement; 2. Child Safety Culture	Confirms zero tolerance of Child Abuse, shared responsibility for Child Safety, Board-approved expectations and active management of safeguarding risks.
3	Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.	2. Child Safety Culture; 3. Participation and Empowerment	Requires Children to be listened to, informed of their rights, supported to raise concerns and involved in decisions in an age-appropriate way.
4	Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.	4. Families and Communities	Requires accessible information about the Policy, Code of Conduct, reporting pathways and opportunities to provide feedback.
5	Equity is upheld and diverse needs are respected in policy and practice.	1. Diversity, inclusion and cultural safety	Commits to equity and inclusion, recognises heightened vulnerability, tailors programs to diverse needs and does not tolerate discrimination or exclusion.

6	People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values.	Scope; 5. Safe People; 8. Education and Training	Applies to all Personnel, requires valid Working with Children Checks, embeds Child Safety in recruitment and requires induction and ongoing role-appropriate education.
7	Processes for complaints and concerns are child-focused.	Definitions; 7. Reporting Concerns or complaints about Child Safety; 9. Record Keeping, Review and Continuous Improvement	Requires accessible, child-focused, culturally safe and trauma-informed complaints processes, clear reporting expectations and secure documentation of concerns and follow-up actions.
8	Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe.	8. Education and Training; 7. Reporting Concerns or complaints about Child Safety	Requires induction and ongoing education on responsibilities, recognising and responding to harm, reporting obligations, cultural safety, trauma-informed practice, boundaries and online safety.
9	Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising opportunities for harm.	6. Safe Environments	Requires risk assessments, supervision, professional boundaries, restrictions on private online communication and controls for photography, recording and personal devices.
10	Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved.	9. Record Keeping, Review and Continuous Improvement	Requires secure records and uses incidents, complaints, feedback, risk assessments, audits and legal changes to review and improve Child Safety systems.

11	Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people.	Purpose; Policies / Information; Procedures; Forms; 10. Documented Child Safety Policies and Procedures	Confirms the Policy is supported by related policies, procedures and forms that explain how Child Safety risks, concerns and incidents are prevented, identified, reported, recorded and reviewed.