

# Our Commitment to Child Safety

## Statement to complement our Centre Philosophy

As stated in our Centre Philosophy we would like to reiterate we provide a safe and welcoming environment for the children which reflects our wider community.

All children who come to Merri CCK Inc have a right to feel and be safe. The welfare of the children in our care will always be our priority and we have a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse and harm. We aim to create a child-safe and child-friendly environment where children feel safe, cared for and valued.

### **Role of the Management Committee**

The Management Committee has the role of making sure Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc prioritises children's safety and that action is taken when anyone raises concerns about children's safety.

The Management Committee will champion and model a child safe culture at Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc. We encourage anyone involved with the organisation to report a child safety concern. The Management Committee will work to create a positive culture around reporting so that people feel comfortable raising concerns.

Everyone at Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc has a role in identifying and managing risks of child abuse and harm. The Management Committee will make sure that staff and volunteers are conducting risk assessments and taking action to manage risks in accordance centre Child Safe Policy. They will also ensure that appropriate child safety training for staff and volunteers is identified and completed.

The Management Committee will conduct an annual review of how effectively Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc is delivering child safety and wellbeing. The input of people involved with Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc will be sought as part of this review.

### **Children's empowerment and participation**

Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc is a child-centred organisation. The children's safety and well-being is at that heart of all the we provide and do. As an Education and Care service we actively seek to include children's voices, needs and ideas. We also value and facilitate respectful relationships and interactions with their families.

Our higher educator to child ratio provides opportunities that support better outcomes and quality interactions with children, their families, and the community. As educators we hear and value the voice and autonomy of the child. We see children as capable and competent learners and value our relationships with them.

We trust and respect the children and collaborate with them and their families to intentionally create a curriculum that reflects their interests, abilities, and well-being. This approach challenges children to extend their thinking and supports the development of their

knowledge and skills towards a defined set of goals. We believe in and value the importance of play as the medium by which children learn, explore, and experience their environment.

We draw on our professional experience and knowledge of child development, and theory to guide our reflective practices, in order to provide a high-quality education and care environment.

Underpinning this is our fundamental value of respecting the rights and views of the child.

In Early Childhood we encourage and support children to seek and form friendships with each other. We do not tolerate bullying or abusive behaviour between children and act if this occurs.

We respect the rights of children and provide them with information about their rights including the right to be safe at Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc. We actively seek to understand what makes children feel safe in our organisation. We regularly communicate with children about what they can do if they feel unsafe.

Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc values the voices of children and will act on safety concerns raised by children or their families.

As a service we value the continuity of care and education of all children. We prioritise and ensure that children have access to at least one known Educator on any given day. Educators benefit immensely from the continuity of care as it enables them to develop a better understanding of each individual child and family, facilitating individualised goals & care.

### **Families and communities**

Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc recognises the important role of families and involves parents and carers when making significant decisions about their child. Parents, families and communities are welcome to provide feedback at any time through our contact email address and are encouraged to raise any concerns they have with us.

We recognise the uniqueness of all families and acknowledge them as the child's first teachers. As a community-managed centre, we value relationships and collaborations with all families.

We pride ourselves in being a centre of choice where we build a safe and trusting environment for children to learn.

Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc provides information to families and community about our child safe policies and practices our noticeboards, website, handbook and information talks.

### **Creating culturally safe environments for all Aboriginal children and their families**

Merri sits on Wurundjeri land and is dedicated to providing a welcoming, inclusive community, that values and respects childhood and encourages the development of identity. At Merri, we acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander as the First Peoples of Australia. We promote care for country and work towards developing our children's, educators and families understanding of our shared history.

Merri CCK Inc is committed to creating environments where Aboriginal culture is celebrated and Aboriginal children, families and community members are welcomed and included. Strategies to embed cultural safety for Aboriginal children include:

- an Acknowledgement of Country at all events, being a visibly safe place whereby members of the Aboriginal Community feel welcomed and safe
- consulting with families and members of the Aboriginal community to identify opportunities to promote Aboriginal culture and practices in the Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc studio and programs
- providing opportunities for children to share their cultural identity and express their culture, including through performance and during Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc community activities
- supporting children 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
- celebrating NAIDOC Week and acknowledging significant events including National Sorry Day and National Reconciliation Week
- seeking feedback from Aboriginal children, families, and communities on their experience at Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc, particularly how safe they feel expressing their identity including their culture.

### **Valuing diversity**

We value diversity and equity for all children. To achieve this, we:

- provide training for all Management Committee members, staff, and volunteers on understanding diversity and how to support inclusion and cultural safety
- welcome and support participation of all children, including children with disability, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those who are unable to live at home, LGBTIQ children and Aboriginal children and their families
- offer students and families through our enrolment forms the opportunity to provide information about themselves, including any specific needs to participate fully in our programs
- have zero tolerance of racism and other forms of discrimination and act when discrimination or exclusion is identified
- deliver programming that reflects the diversity of our students, their interests and cultures
- strive to reflect the diversity of our community through representation in our staff and Management Committee members – we are committed to having representatives of South Sudanese background on our Management Committee
- acknowledge and celebrate important cultural dates in our classes
- have a physical and online environment that actively celebrates diversity
- commit to ensuring our facilities and online activities promote inclusion of children of all abilities.

### **Code of Conduct**

Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc has a Code of Conduct. Staff, volunteers, and the Management Committee must always comply with the Code of Conduct. Breaches of the Code of

Conduct may result in disciplinary action including termination of a person's involvement with the organisation. In addition to this as an active member of Early Childhood Australia, Merri abides by the ECA code of Ethics.

### **Recruiting staff and volunteers**

Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc puts child 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 Management Committee must also be screened.

We require a Working with Children Check, Police Checks and referee checks for all staff and volunteers who have a role with children or have access to children's personal information. We require staff to have appropriate qualifications for their roles and check to make sure these qualifications are valid. Members of the Management Committee must hold a valid Working with Children Check and a national Police Check.

### **Supporting staff and volunteers**

Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc is committed to ensuring that all Educators and students understand their responsibilities in relation to child safety and to support their engagement with children.

Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc assists its leaders, staff, and volunteers to incorporate child safety considerations into decisions and to promote a safe environment where children are empowered to speak up about issues that affect them.

All Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc Management educators are required to complete annual Child Protection training. All training is recorded on their Staff Record.

Staff and volunteers will receive supervision to support their engagement with children and for compliance with our Code of Conduct and Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

Issues or concerns about behaviour with children will be raised immediately and addressed in line with our Code of Conduct, complaint handling policy and disciplinary policy.

### **Complaints and reporting**

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

Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc has a complaint handling policy that includes information for staff and volunteers about how a complaint or child safety concern will be responded to.

If a complaint includes an allegation or incident of child abuse or harm, then staff and volunteers at Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc must report it in accordance with the complaint handling policy. Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc staff and volunteers are required to prioritise children's safety in any response and to report all potentially criminal conduct to Victoria Police.

*If there is concern for the immediate safety of a child, immediately call 000 or please call or make a time to speak with the centre Director.*

## **Record keeping**

Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc is committed to making and keeping full and accurate records about all child-related complaints or safety concerns.

All child safety complaints, concerns, incidents and near misses will be recorded in the incident reporting system.

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 and kept by Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc for at least 45 years.

## **Information sharing**

Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc may share relevant information to promote the safety and wellbeing of children, where it is appropriate and in their best interests. Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc will keep 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.

## **Risk management**

We recognise the importance of identifying and managing risks of child harm and abuse in the physical and online environments operated by Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc.

We conduct regular risk assessments and have a risk management plan to address the risk of child abuse and harm at Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc. The risk management plan will be developed in consultation with our staff, volunteers, parent representatives and children. We will ensure that any risk controls put in place balance the need to manage harm with the benefits of participating at Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc.

Any contractors or other providers of services will always be supervised by a member of staff while working with us to ensure child safety.

## **Non-compliance with this policy and the Code of Conduct**

Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc will enforce this policy, the Code of Conduct and any other child safety and wellbeing policies. Potential breaches by anyone will be investigated and may result in restriction of duties, suspension or termination of employment or engagement or other corrective action.

## **Review**

Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc will review all child safe practices and policies at least every three years or as new information and or changes come to hand. We also review relevant practices and policies in response to a child safety incident or 'near miss'. Findings from reviews will be

reported to the people involved in our organisation and also inform our approach to continuous improvement of our child safety practices. Reviews are overseen by the Management Committee and will be informed by consultation with children, families and staff.

### **Supporting documents – Merri Community Child Care & Kindergarten Inc child safety and wellbeing system**

- The following policies and procedures work together to support child safety and wellbeing across all centre operations:
- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Code of Conduct
- complaint handling policy
- recruitment and screening policy
- disciplinary policy
- risk management plan
- child safe training plan.

### **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)
- *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)* (including Failure to Protect and Failure to Disclose offences)
- *Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic)* (including Part XIII – Organisational liability for child abuse)