

# 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 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 on 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 and Torres Strait Islander community feel welcomed and safe.
- Consulting with families and members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to identify opportunities to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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 and Torres Strait Islander organisations.
- Providing training for staff and volunteers on the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Celebrating NAIDOC Week and acknowledging significant events including National Sorry Day and National Reconciliation Week.
- Seeking feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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
- 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 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 and acted on.

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)



CHILDCARE CENTRE  
& KINDERGARTEN

## Code of Conduct Agreement

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This Code of Conduct Agreement (the Agreement) is between Merri Community Child Care/Kinder Centre Inc. (the Centre) and the undersigned individual (the Participant), who may be an **educator, contractor, volunteer or parent involved in Centre activities**.

The Participant and the Centre share responsibility for promoting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, in line with the Centre's Child Safety Commitment Statement, the Child Safe Standards and all relevant legislation and policies.

The Agreement applies to all Centre-related activities, including physical and online environments.

### **I Will – Behaviours to Keep Children Safe**

To support the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, the Participant will:

- Treat all children and young people with respect and dignity.
- Listen to and consider children and young people's ideas and opinions.
- Actively promote cultural safety, inclusion and diversity for all children and families.
- Welcome families and carers to participate in decisions about their child's education, care and safety.
- Report any actual or potential conflicts of interest (such as an outside relationship with a child or parent).
- Comply with all relevant Australian and Victorian legislation, Child Safe Standards and Centre policies and procedures.
- Work collaboratively with colleagues and families to ensure the needs and best interests of the child remain the primary focus.
- Participate in all compulsory child safety and related training as required by the Centre and my professional affiliations.
- Raise concerns with my supervisor, Centre Director or Committee of Management when cultural, environmental, operational or other risks to child safety are identified.
- Take all reasonable steps to protect children from abuse, harm and neglect.
- Respect the privacy of children and families by keeping information about child protection matters confidential, except where disclosure is required by law or policy.

- Take all disclosures or indications of harm, abuse or neglect seriously and respond in line with Centre procedures and legal requirements.
- Report and act on any concerns or observed breaches of this Agreement or the Child Safe Code of Conduct without delay.
- Uphold the rights of children and prioritise their safety and wellbeing in decision-making.
- Complete incident, injury, illness and trauma reports within 24 hours (or as soon as practicable) and report matters to my supervisor, Centre Director or Committee of Management as required.
- Administer first aid to children as required, within the scope of training and Centre procedures, following any incident.

### **Unacceptable Behaviours (I Will Not)**

The Participant will not engage in any behaviour that is illegal, unsafe, abusive or unprofessional, including but not limited to:

#### **Physical abuse**

- Hitting, striking, punching, kicking or slapping a child.
- Engaging in rough physical games that may cause harm.
- Throwing items or using objects to frighten or hurt a child.
- Dragging, pushing or otherwise handling a child in an aggressive or unsafe manner.
- Threatening to hurt a child through words or gestures.
- Using hostile force or a pattern of hostile, unreasonable or seriously inappropriate physical conduct.

#### **Sexual abuse**

- Any form of sexual contact or sexualised behaviour with a child.
- Exposing genitals, masturbating in front of a child, or any similar conduct.
- Possessing, creating or sharing child abuse material.
- Showing pornography or other indecent material to a child.
- Providing gifts, food, money, attention or affection in exchange for sexual activity, images or favours.
- Failing to respect a child's privacy when dressing, bathing, using the toilet or in other private situations, except as required for care and supervision in line with policy.
- Communicating (including online) with a child about romantic, intimate or sexual feelings.
- Recording a child in private situations (e.g. dressing, bathing, using the bathroom) without a legitimate and documented purpose.



- Making sexualised comments, jokes or gestures in the presence of children.
- Engaging in sexualised conversations or communications with a child.

### **Emotional abuse**

- Teasing, belittling or humiliating a child.
- Yelling at, intimidating or bullying a child.
- Persistent criticism or undermining of a child.
- Persistent rejection of or hostility towards a child.
- Refusing to acknowledge a child's worth, needs or views.
- Deliberately preventing a child from forming friendships.
- Deliberately depriving a child of essential stimulation and appropriate interactions.
- Encouraging a child to engage in destructive or antisocial behaviour.
- Exposing a child to family, community or other forms of violence.
- Making a child feel unloved, unsafe, isolated or at fault.

### **Neglect**

- Failing to provide or arrange access to appropriate food, drink, clothing, shelter or hygiene when responsible for a child's care.
- Failing to seek or facilitate first aid treatment, medical care or treatment where required.
- Failing to protect a child from abuse when aware of a risk or disclosure.
- Exposing a child to harmful environments (for example, environments where illicit drugs are used or manufactured).
- Inadequately supervising a child in a way that may lead to injury, harm or exposure to risk.

### **Ill-treatment**

- Making excessive, unreasonable or degrading demands of a child.
- Applying discipline in a way that is unreasonable, intimidating or seriously inappropriate.
- Engaging in degrading or demeaning comments or behaviour towards a child.
- Displaying repeated hostility towards a child.
- Using seclusion or other restrictive practices that are not authorised, reasonable or lawful.
- Confining or locking a child in a room or isolated space.
- Pressuring a child to train, perform or participate when injured or unwell.

### **Grooming**

- Having unauthorised or secretive contact with a child (including online or by phone) for the purpose of forming an inappropriate or sexual relationship.
- Using technology (such as phones, cameras, computers or social media) to exploit, harass or inappropriately communicate with a child.
- Engaging in personal communications that explore sexual or intimate personal feelings with a child.
- Sharing details of one's own sexual experiences with a child.
- Extending the relationship with a child outside of Centre activities without appropriate approval and transparency.
- Providing a child with special attention, privileges or gifts with the effect or apparent purpose of creating a secretive or exclusive relationship.
- Offering gifts, food, cigarettes, money, attention or affection with the effect or apparent purpose of facilitating sexual activity.
- Making close physical contact, such as inappropriate tickling , kissing or play wrestling.

#### **Failure to prevent or report abuse**

- Failing to respond in a timely and reasonable way to information indicating that an adult associated with the Centre may pose a risk of abusing a child.
- Knowing or believing that a child has been abused, or reasonably should know, and not reporting this to the appropriate authorities in line with legal obligations and policy.

#### **Concerning Behaviours (I Understand These May Be of Concern)**

The Participant understands that the following behaviours may be of concern and must be reported or discussed with management, as they may increase risk or lead to breaches if not addressed:

- Being alone with a child when there is no professional, documented or approved reason for doing so.
- Showing favouritism towards a particular child, such as giving them special attention, privileges or gifts (including cards, stickers) without a clear professional reason.
- Babysitting, or mentoring a child outside work hours without prior written approval from Centre management and clear boundaries.

The Participant agrees to self-report, seek guidance or adjust practices where such situations arise to ensure compliance with child safety requirements.

#### **Reporting Obligations**

##### **Internal reporting**

- All concerns, suspicions, disclosures of child abuse or harm, and any breaches or suspected breaches of this Agreement or the Child Safe Code of Conduct, must be reported as soon as

possible to the Centre Director, direct supervisor or Management Committee, in accordance with the Centre's complaint handling and child safety reporting procedures.

### **External reporting**

- Allegations, disclosures or reasonable suspicions of child abuse must be reported to Victoria Police and/or Child Protection, in line with Victorian legislation and Centre procedures.
- Where conduct may fall under the Reportable Conduct Scheme, the Centre will report to the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) in accordance with legal requirements. The Participant may also make a report themselves directly with CCYP.

### **Mandatory reporting and criminal offences**

- The Participant acknowledges that failure to report certain forms of child abuse may be a criminal offence under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic) and the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) (including Failure to Disclose and Failure to Protect offences).
- The Participant agrees to comply with all mandatory reporting and other legal obligations relating to child safety.

### **Whistleblower protection**

- Individuals who raise concerns or make reports in good faith are to be protected from victimisation or retaliation under Centre policies and Victorian law.
- The Centre will respond to such reports in a fair, timely and confidential manner, in line with relevant whistleblower or public interest disclosure frameworks.

### **Penalties and Consequences for Breach**

- Breaches or suspected breaches of this Agreement or the Child Safe Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action. This may include additional supervision, changes to duties, formal warnings, restriction of duties, suspension, termination of employment or engagement, and/or exclusion from involvement with the Centre.
- Where required, matters will be referred to external bodies, including Victoria Police, Child Protection, the CCYP and professional registration authorities.
- Criminal offences for failing to act to protect children or to report abuse may result in prosecution, fines and/or imprisonment, in accordance with Victorian legislation.

### **Acknowledgment and Agreement**

By signing below, the Participant confirms that they have read and understood this Code of Conduct Agreement, including expectations, reporting obligations and potential consequences for breaches.

The Participant agrees to comply with this Agreement at all times while involved with the Centre.

**Participant Name:**

**Signature:**

**Date:**

**Centre Representative Name:**

**Signature:**

**Date:**