

Safer Organisations Safer Children

A guide to making
your organisation
child-safe and
friendly



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Why the Working with Children Screening Unit developed this booklet

The Working with Children (WWC) Screening Unit has developed this booklet to help organisations create safer environments for children. The WWC Check is like a swimming pool fence.... a great safety measure but no substitute for supervision or teaching a child to swim. This is why organisations should implement a variety of child safeguarding strategies.

This booklet provides information about a range of safeguarding strategies that can be implemented, including thorough staff recruitment, risk management and how to involve children so they feel safe, valued and respected.

About the WWC Check

The WWC Check is a screening strategy that aims to safeguard children by deterring people with the kinds of criminal histories that pose a risk of harm to children. The Check identifies and prohibits these kinds of people from engaging in certain types of work that involve children. In Australia, most states and territories have a WWC Check scheme, however the laws and structure of each are different.

The West Australian WWC Check is compulsory in this state and the Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands. It applies to people who engage in certain paid and unpaid work with children, described as 'child-related work' under the *Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004*.



Key elements of the Check include a National Criminal Record Check and the ongoing collection and assessment of information that is relevant to whether a child may be exposed to a risk of harm should the person engage in child-related work.

What is a child-safe and child-friendly organisation?

A child-safe and child-friendly organisation:

- includes, involves and values children;
- has child-safe and friendly policies and procedures in place;
- has vigilant recruitment, selection and screening of staff and volunteers to ensure their suitability to care for children; and
- supports and respects staff and volunteers by providing training and clear guidelines.



Why create a child-safe and child-friendly organisation?

By creating a child-safe and friendly environment, an organisation:

- minimises the risk of harm to children in their care;
- gives confidence to employees and volunteers so that they know what is expected from them and what to do;
- assures parents that the organisation is responsible and takes pride in its work; and
- shows a commitment to protecting children.

Child Safeguarding Strategies

There are many safeguarding strategies that form part of normal governance practices. These strategies help reduce risks and create safer environments for everyone in the organisation. Each child-safe and friendly strategy is discussed more fully in this booklet:

Give children a voice

Children who are encouraged to express their own views are less vulnerable to harm and better able to contribute towards their own protection. By involving children and young people, they can offer valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses, risks and dangers that might otherwise go undetected in organisations.



How to include children:

- Teach children **protective behaviours** and personal safety skills.
- Make sure **children know who they can speak to** if they feel uncomfortable.
- **Peer education** enables children and young people to be educated within the organisation. They then teach their peers.
- **Train staff** to effectively listen and communicate.
- **Feedback forms** or surveys to establish if children feel safe or unsafe, happy or unhappy and included or not included.
- **Consult with children.** Develop interest groups.
- Appoint a young person as a **Youth Safety Officer** for children's issues in the organisation.
- Develop a **reporting process.** Use different methods to raise concerns e.g. message box or emails.
- Ask children to draft their own **Code of Conduct** that includes their expectations of interactions with others, including children, staff and visitors.
- Include a **young person on the interview panel** and ask them to assist in forming interview questions.
- **Educate children in their rights** and what that means. Go to www.unicef.org for a copy of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

Develop a child protection policy

A Child Protection Policy demonstrates an organisation's commitment to the safety and development of children and how it will meet this commitment.

The purpose of the policy is to :

- protect children and young people from harm and abuse;
- provide principles to guide decisions and identify procedures to ensure child safety and development; and
- enable staff and volunteers know what to do in most circumstances.

Ideally a Child Protection Policy should be clear and easy to read, follow, understand and implement. It should include:

- a title and statement of commitment to child safety;
- legislative requirements (e.g. WWC Checks and Mandatory Reporting);
- recruitment, selection and screening procedures;
- a code of conduct;
- how the participation of children is encouraged and supported;
- risk management strategies including internet safety and visitors or others on the premises;
- a process to implement, monitor and review the policy and procedures;
- how communication occurs and how information is managed and utilised;
- how concerns and complaints are handled, managed and reported; and
- a responsible position such as a Child Safety Officer.

Develop child-safe and child-friendly procedures

It is important to have procedures or guidelines which support the Child Protection Policy; this includes a Code of Conduct.

A **Code of Conduct** describes the standards of expected behaviour for management, staff, volunteers, students, visitors and children. It should outline the “do’s” and “don’ts” of behaviour and relationships with children and their families. Below are suggestions of information to include:

- appropriate boundaries e.g. no out of hours contact, rules on physical contact and touching;
- expected behaviour e.g. safe and respectful interactions with children; and
- acceptable discipline and behaviour management practices e.g. no threats of violence.

Everyone in the organisation must be familiar with all policies and procedures including the Code of Conduct. Integrate the practices in the organisation’s culture by continually promoting the strategies.

This could be through:

- a launch;
- information and training sessions;
- staff induction; and/or
- promotion on the website or intranet site.

Don’t forget to monitor and review strategies and procedures and their application. Aim to formally review these at least every two years.



Choose the right staff

People who wish to harm children will target organisations that are unaware of the risks and negative impacts of child abuse and who conduct little or no screening.

Vigilant recruitment processes ensure the best applicants are employed. From advertising through to conducting interviews and the background checking of applicants, it is important that each step is done consistently, thoroughly and methodically.

Tips for advertising

- When advertising a position write a clear job description and include a child safe message in the advertisement.
- Include a statement about the organisation's commitment to safeguarding children, making reference to the Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct.
- Include a statement informing that appropriate rigorous reference checking will be undertaken, including a WWC Check if the person is in child-related work.

Tips for selection criteria

- Develop appropriate selection criteria: clearly state the experience, qualifications, qualities and attributes expected from the successful applicant. Also outline the specific skills and knowledge required and the supervision and accountability processes in place.
- Send information packages that include a standardised application form. You may also include a copy of your Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct.
- Refer the applicant to the WWC Check website so they are clear of their responsibilities if engaging in child-related work.

Tips for interviewing

- Form a skilled interview panel that has time to plan and prepare.
- Ensure panel members are clear on what the position requires.
- Use open-ended questions that will indicate how a person would behave in certain situations. This style of questioning gains insight into the applicant's values, attitudes and understanding of professional boundaries and accountability. Some useful questions may include: "Tell us about why you want to work with children?" "Describe a time when you had to manage a child whose behaviour you found challenging?" "Tell us about a time when you had to comfort a distressed child or were particularly fond of a child?"
- Include a question about whether the applicant has any criminal convictions, cautions, other legal or pending cases that may affect their suitability to work with children.
- Watch for red flags or warning signs which may include: erratic employment history, the applicant seems 'too good to be true', does not value or 'need' supervision and is evasive or inconsistent in his or her answers.
- Remain aware of how the applicant responds to questions with regard to his or her words and body language.
- Take notice of your own thoughts and feelings when interacting with the applicant.
- Ask for more information if the applicant does not provide sufficient information in his or her responses.



Tips for background checking

- Criminal record checks are a 'must'. WWC Checks are required for people engaged in 'child-related work'. If the person is not in child-related work ask for a National Police Certificate. In some cases applicants may require both checks.
- Reference checks - it is best to always talk to referees as this can provide insight into the applicant's character and capabilities.
- Ensure referees include line managers or other people who can be objective, rather than colleagues or friends.
- Conduct a minimum of two referee checks on all applicants.
- Referee contact should be direct by phone, even if overseas.
- Establish the referee's relationship with the applicant, including how long the applicant and referee worked together, the specifics of the position, the applicant's perceived strengths and weaknesses, and take note of any pauses or gaps in the referee's responses.
- Include behaviour-based questions like: "What did the applicant do when...?" "Given the specific tasks and responsibilities of the position (being specific about the direct contact with children) do you have any concerns about the applicant working with children?" "Would you employ this person again?"
- Check at least two forms of personal identification from the applicant.
- Verify the applicant's qualifications and ask for a certified copy.



Develop risk management strategies

Risk management is a conscious series of steps used to identify potential risks to a child's safety and wellbeing, or in determining an employee or volunteer's capacity to perform a task effectively. Once a risk has been identified and assessed, strategies can be developed and implemented to reduce the risk of harm to children, employees and volunteers.

When developing new programs and activities always evaluate all areas of risk. It's also important to annually evaluate all programs and activities.

The table on page 11 shows examples of risks to children and how they can be minimised.



Activity List each activity you provide for children	Risks What could go wrong?	Ranking Use a scale of High/ Medium/ Low to describe risk level	How to Reduce Risk Changes to reduce modify or avoid risk	Priority Use a numerical scale (1 = highest) to decide what you will do first
Sports Training	Intimate physical contact with children.	Medium	Code of conduct explains what touching and coaching is acceptable.	2
	Toilets are isolated/out of sight.	High	Planned toilet breaks where children go in groups.	1
	Children wander away from training area.	Medium	Code of conduct explains what area children can use at training. Children are told these rules.	2
	Children not collected as planned.	High	Code of conduct explains collection requirements and who will look after children collected late.	2
Overnight camping trip	Inappropriate person volunteers for supervision duty.	High	Care in recruitment selection.	2
	Adult and child alone together in sleeping quarters.	High	Ensure adequate adult/child sleeping ratios for camp supervision. At least two adults should attend any child contact activity.	1

Train and support staff and volunteers

Training and ongoing supervision are essential child-safe practices. Regular supervision creates an open and accountable environment, where employees and volunteers can raise their concerns and interaction with children can be monitored and supported.

Relevant topics for staff training include:

- the application of the Child Protection Policy;
- clear supervision and accountability mechanisms;
- reporting procedures – what to report, who to report to and how it will be responded to;
- risk management awareness;
- responding to children;
- child development; and
- understanding indicators of child abuse.

Understand child abuse

To minimise the risk of child abuse, staff and volunteers should know what child abuse is, what the possible indicators are, the damaging effects it may have on a child and how to respond. Child abuse rarely stops without intervention.

Effects of child abuse

Child abuse affects all aspects of a child's development. With early identification and an appropriate response, a child can recover from abuse.

Continued abuse can result in low self esteem, withdrawn behaviour, depression and/or suicidal thoughts, learning disorders, behavioural problems, developmental delay, eating ailments or delinquency including violent or aggressive behaviour.

What is child abuse and what are some indicators?

There are five categories of abuse which are covered below. The possible indicators should be seen as a sign that something is worrying the child. One sign on its own however, may not suggest abuse. It is also important not to assume abuse is occurring, as there could be other explanations. Staff and volunteers should be aware and comfortable to raise concerns with the appropriate person identified in the Child Protection Policy. Early intervention and the appropriate action can make a big difference.



1. **Physical abuse** occurs when a child is severely and/or persistently hurt or injured by an adult or caregiver. Examples include beating, shaking, burning, excessive physical discipline

and attempted suffocation. Possible indicators: unexplained bruises, broken bones or the child keeping their arms or legs covered by clothing in hot weather.

2. **Sexual abuse** occurs when a child is exposed or subjected to sexual behaviours that are exploitative or inappropriate to his/her age and development. Examples include sexual penetration, inappropriate touching and exposure to sex acts or pornographic materials. Sexual abuse also includes sexual behaviour where the child is bribed or coerced into participating, where the child has less power than another person involved, or where there is significant difference in the development levels of the child and the other person involved in the behaviour. Possible indicators: inappropriate sexual behaviour for a child's age, pain or bleeding in the anal or genital area or secret relationships with adults.
3. **Emotional abuse** occurs when an adult harms a child's development by repeatedly treating and speaking to a child in ways that damage the child's ability to feel and express their feelings. Examples include constantly putting a child down, humiliating, threatening, belittling, bullying and ignoring a child. Possible indicators: high levels of anxiety, child reverting to younger behaviour or compulsive lying and stealing.
4. **Psychological abuse** is repeatedly treating and speaking to a child in ways that damage the child's self-esteem, perceptions, memory, moral development and intelligence. Some examples are calling the child names, isolating the child and encouraging inappropriate behaviour. Possible indicators: lack of trust, feeling worthless or self harming behaviour.
5. **Neglect** is the failure to provide for a child's basic needs, such as food, medical care, education and supervision. Neglect can be acute, chronic or episodic. Examples include leaving a child alone without supervision, infection due to poor hygiene and lack of medical attention. Possible indicators: signs of malnutrition, poor hygiene or clothing not appropriate to the weather.

How to respond to a disclosure of abuse

If a child tells a staff member or volunteer that they have been abused the person should:

- listen carefully;
- let the child use their own words;
- not ask leading questions;
- tell the child that they believe them, that it is not their fault and that telling is the right thing to do;
- explain that the information will need to be shared;
- not make promises they cannot keep such as promising not to tell anyone;
- try not to leave the child in a distressed state;
- seek professional input; and
- as soon as possible after the conversation, record exactly what the child said, using their own words.



One of the challenges all organisations who work with children face is recognising potential grooming behaviour and responding to disclosures of child sexual abuse. Teaching children protective behaviours and about 'good and bad touch' and that they should tell a trusted adult becomes more useful when these adults are able to hear such disclosures and are willing to consider that well-liked, respected people can be guilty of sexually molesting children. (*The Socially Skilled Child Molester*, Carla van Dam, 2006)

Useful contacts and organisations

Australian Childhood Foundation

The foundation offers an online training program which provides comprehensive standards and accreditation.

Ph: 1800 176 453 **Website:** www.safeguardingchildren.com.au

Child Wise

Child Wise works to prevent child sexual abuse in Australia and overseas. Child Wise provides resources and training about child abuse.

Ph: 1800 990 099 **Website:** www.childwise.net

Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia

The Commissioner is the independent person who works closely with children and young people, their families, community and government to make WA a better place for kids.

Ph: (08) 6213 2297 **Website:** www.ccyp.wa.gov.au

Constable Care Child Safety Foundation

The foundation is a registered harm prevention charity that delivers safety education programs to school students throughout Western Australia and also presents the WA Child Safety Awards.

Ph: (08) 9272 0000 **Website:** www.constablecare.org.au

Department for Child Protection and Family Support

The Department has information about child abuse, how to report suspected cases and other information about protecting children.

Ph: (08) 9222 2555 **Ph:** 1800 622 258

Website: www.dcp.wa.gov.au

Crisis Care

Crisis Care is a telephone information and counselling service for people in crisis needing urgent help.

Ph: (08) 9223 1111

Kids Helpline

A free and confidential telephone counselling service for 5 to 18 years old children in Australia.

Ph: 1800 55 1800

Play by the Rules

Play by the Rules provides information, resources, tools and free online training to sporting groups to deal with discrimination, harassment and child safety issues.

Website: www.playbytherules.net.au

Princess Margaret Hospital – Child Protection Unit

The Unit is a fee, specialist, hospital based service for children and their families where abuse or neglect is a concern.

Ph: (08) 9340 8646

Protective Behaviours WA

Protective Behaviours is a leading education organisation working in Western Australia to prevent child abuse.

Ph: 0409 071 068 **Website:** www.protectivebehaviourswa.org.au

Safe Clubs 4 Kids

This initiative provides information and resources to the sport and recreation industry about creating child safe environments.

Ph: (08) 9387 8100 **Website:** www.dsr.wa.gov.au

Relationships Australia Domestic Violence Unit

Relationships Australia provides services which support people affected by violence.

Ph: (08) 9489 6363

WA Police Child Abuse Unit

This Unit operates as part of the specialist crime portfolio and deals with child abuse.

Ph: (08) 9428 1545 **Website:** www.police.wa.gov.au



Government of Western Australia
Department for Child Protection
and Family Support



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Disclaimer

The Working with Children Screening Unit is committed to providing clear information. Every reasonable effort has been made to ensure information is accurate and up to date. However, errors can occur and changes after the time of publication may impact on the accuracy of the information.

For more information visit our website www.checkwwc.wa.gov.au. If you require additional assistance you may also contact us on (08) 6217 8100, for country callers 1800 883 979 (toll free). The information in this booklet is provided on the understanding that it is not to be relied on for legal or professional advice.

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