



CHILD SAFE POLICY AND STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

Applies to: All Djirra staff and volunteers in the course of their work in all offices, events and functions of Djirra.	Version: 1.0
Responsibility: General Manager	Date approved: 20/11/2018
	Next review date: Two years after approval

1. Statement of commitment to child safety

Djirra¹ is committed to child safety. We implement child safe standards to protect children from abuse. Child safety informs our service design, policies and procedures, staff recruitment, training and organisational culture.

We want all children to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children.

As an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation working primarily with Aboriginal women, cultural safety of Aboriginal women and their children is at the heart of everything we do. We are also committed to the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability.

We do not tolerate child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated seriously and consistently with our policies and procedures. We follow our legal obligations to contact authorities about a child's safety.

Our organisation is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks.

Our organisation has human resources and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers. Our organisation is committed to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child safety.

We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our management, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.

All staff and volunteers agree to abide by our Code of Conduct for Appropriate Behaviour with Children.

Child safety is a key part of our public and internal messaging.

¹ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria operates as Djirra

2. Child safe policy

2.1. Children

Children are vital and active participants in our organisation, and we listen to their views and respect what they have to say.

Many women who access our services, programs or events, including those attending legal appointments and workshops, are accompanied by their children and we recognise our responsibility to these children.

In some circumstances, Djirra staff and volunteers also work directly with children as clients or participants in programs (e.g. Young Luv workshops involve girls aged from 13).

We promote diversity and tolerance in our organisation, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome. In particular we:

- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children
- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate equally.

Djirra is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation and all staff attend both Cultural Relations training and Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid training. Staff also have access to Djirra's Cultural Advisor.

Our organisational culture aims for all staff and volunteers (in addition to parents/carers and children) to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns.

2.2. Djirra staff and volunteers

This policy guides our staff and volunteers on how to behave with children in our organisation. All of our staff and volunteers must agree to abide by our Code of Conduct for Appropriate Behaviour with Children.

2.3. Training and support

Training is important to ensure that everyone in our organisation understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility. Djirra staff and volunteers receive induction and refresher training annually to ensure they are aware of the actions they should take in the event of an incident or allegation, including the type of contact that should be reported, who is responsible for reporting, and to whom the report should be made.

We support our staff and volunteers to

- ensure they understand our organisation's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children
- ensure their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate
- develop their skills to protect children from abuse, and
- promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds, and the safety of children with a disability.

Inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

Appropriate safe behaviour with children is achieved through the following

- induction for all new staff to ensure they are aware of Djirra's commitment to child safety and their duty of care requirements
- refresher training on child safety for all staff and volunteers annually
- distribution of Djirra's Code of Conduct for Appropriate Behaviour with Children, which is included in this Child Safety Policy and made available to Djirra staff and volunteers, as well as to families and children through Djirra's website.

Any breaches of the Code of Conduct for Appropriate Behaviour with Children will be addressed within Djirra's disciplinary and performance management processes, as detailed in our Human Resources Policy.

Staff and volunteers working in Djirra's Legal Services operate in a distinct context with legal professional privilege. Djirra's Legal Practice Guide covers working with children and reporting child safety concerns, and we ensure all personnel in Djirra's Legal Services understand their distinct responsibilities in this regard. Tailored training is provided to legal services staff at induction and then annually.

2.4. Recruitment

We take all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children. We develop selection criteria that demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities.

Implementation of Djirra's Recruitment Selection and Appointment Policy ensures that we actively encourage applications from Aboriginal peoples, people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability.

All Djirra staff and volunteers are required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this Check.

As detailed in Djirra's Recruitment Selection and Appointment Policy, we carry out reference checks and police record checks to ensure that we are recruiting suitably skilled people. If during the recruitment process a person's records indicate a criminal history, then the person will be given the opportunity to provide further information and context. On the basis of this additional material, Djirra reserves the right to terminate the selection process.

2.5. Fair procedures for personnel

While the safety and wellbeing of children is of primary concern, we also act fairly and justly with personnel. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be transparent, and based on evidence.

We record all allegations of abuse or safety concerns using our incident reporting form, including investigation updates. All records are securely stored.

If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to children and families on progress and any actions Djirra takes.

Employees and volunteers under investigation in relation to a matter involving child abuse, or any other matter that has the potential to jeopardise their Working with Children Check status, may be prohibited from participating in Djirra activities until the matter is resolved.

2.6. Privacy

All personal information considered or recorded will maintain the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be staff, volunteers, parents or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. We have safeguards and practices in place to ensure personal information is protected, and everyone is entitled to know how their information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will have access to it. For further information, see Djirra's Privacy Policy on our website or contact Djirra to obtain a copy.

2.7. Legislative responsibilities²

Our organisation takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- **Failure to protect:** People in authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.
- Any personnel who are **mandatory reporters** must comply with their duties.³
- **Failure to disclose:** Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults in Victoria who have a *reasonable belief* that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to the police.⁴ We all have a responsibility to report if we have a *reasonable belief* that an incident took place. Factors contributing to *reasonable belief* may be:
 - a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves)
 - behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed
 - someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
 - observing suspicious behaviour.

2.8. Risk management

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified (see information about failure to protect in 2.7 above). In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to children.

Djirra has a comprehensive risk management policy and framework, and maintains an organisation-wide Risk Register. We have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks, and to ensure regular monitoring of child safety risks.

2.9. Regular review

This policy will be reviewed every two years, and following significant incidents if they occur. We will endeavour to provide opportunities for families and children to contribute, and to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

² For further information on legal responsibilities, see the [Department of Health and Human Services website](#).

³ Mandatory reporters - doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers (including early childhood teachers, principals and police) - must report to child protection if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse. See the DHHS website for information about [how to make a report to child protection](#).

⁴ A person will not commit this offence if they have a reasonable excuse for not disclosing the information, including a fear for their safety or where the information has already been disclosed.

2.10. Allegations, concerns and complaints

Djirra takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our staff and volunteers are trained to deal appropriately with allegations.

Djirra's management team and Board of Directors strive always to foster child safety, and welcome and encourage feedback from community members, clients, staff and volunteers, promoting a culture of openness and support when talking about safety concerns.

We work to ensure all children, families, staff and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour.

All Djirra legal clients are provided with a Client Service Charter which covers how to raise concerns or make a complaint. This is also publicly available at the reception of all Djirra offices. Resources are also available on Djirra's website that detail how and where children can seek assistance for matters relating to their safety.

Allegations, concerns and complaints are managed in line with Djirra's Managing Complaints Policy and Incident Reporting & Investigation Procedures.

3. Code of Conduct for Appropriate Behaviour with Children

3.1. Roles and responsibilities

Djirra's Directors, management, staff and volunteers have responsibilities in relation to protection of children, and are expected to:

- understand the rights of children, as appropriate to their role
- respect the cultural and religious practices of families who access Djirra's services, programs or events
- understand and appropriately respond to the needs of children with developmental delays or disabilities
- appropriately act on any concerns raised by children
- understand the definitions, indicators and impact of child abuse
- co-operate with police and/or other formal investigations to the best of their ability; and
- not harm or exploit children who access Djirra's services.

3.2. Child Safe and Child Friendly Guidelines to Prevent and Manage Risks of Child Abuse

Children who access Djirra's services, programs or events

Staff and volunteers, regardless of gender, should not be alone in an appointment room or other unobserved space without the presence of another adult. Should it be necessary in exceptional circumstances for a staff member or volunteer to be alone with a child, any other Manager or the General Manager must be informed.

On rare occasions, support workers may be asked by a parent or carer to help look after accompanying children where the parent/carer is engaged in a legal or other appointment. On such occasions, the guidelines set out above apply.

Duty of care

All staff and volunteers over 18 years of age retain an overriding responsibility for the welfare of all children who access Djirra's programs, services and events. They have a 'duty of care' for children and they must meet that duty and must avoid unaccompanied and unobserved activities with persons less than 18 years of age wherever possible.

Conduct of a sexual nature

During all Djirra activities, programs and events, staff and volunteers must not under any circumstances engage in conduct of a sexual nature with any adult or child, including any form of child sexual abuse as well as, but not limited to, the following

- inappropriate conversations of a sexual nature
- obscene language of a sexual nature
- suggestive remarks or actions
- jokes of a sexual nature
- obscene gestures
- unwarranted and inappropriate touching
- sexual exhibitionism
- use of any device to show/watch offensive material, and
- any other action that could lead to an adult or child being physically, emotionally or psychologically harmed.

REVIEWING AND APPROVING THIS POLICY

Frequency	Person responsible	Approval
Every two years	General Manager	Board

POLICY REVIEW AND VERSION TRACKING

Review	Date Approved	Approved by	Next Review Due
1	20/11/2018	Board	2020