

Child and Vulnerable People's Safety Policy

Statement

Different Journeys (Different Journeys) wrote this policy to demonstrate our strong commitment to the safety and wellbeing of all children and vulnerable people and in establishing and maintaining child safe and child-friendly environments. Therefore, we have a zero-tolerance approach towards child and vulnerable people abuse, and all allegations and significant safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently in line with our extensive policies and procedures.

Scope of this policy

This policy is intended to empower children and vulnerable people who are involved with Different Journeys (staff, participants, siblings, volunteers, etc). We are also aware that individuals with a disability may be more vulnerable to physical, intellectual or communication challenges than many other members of the community. We are committed to the safety and well-being of all children and vulnerable people accessing our services and the welfare of the children in our care will always be our priority. Therefore, everyone involved within Different Journeys has a responsibility to ensure the protection and safety of people with a disability is upheld regardless of their age.

This policy applies to all staff, participants, volunteers, visitors, and families either in a paid or unpaid capacity and when they are engaged with Different Journeys. This policy will also apply to any events occurring in all Different Journeys locations and when Different Journeys staff, participants and volunteers are accessing the community.

Children and Vulnerable People's rights to safety and participation

Children have every right to give their views and opinions, especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say. Different Journeys strive to create and foster an environment where children and vulnerable people feel safe and confident to speak up.

Different Journeys values diversity by promoting a safe environment for everyone and accepting individuals from diverse backgrounds. We will not tolerate discrimination against any person or group. We welcome people from various walks of life and cultural backgrounds and will strive to continuously work to:

- Ensure the safety (including culture, participation, and empowerment) of children/young people with disabilities and can participate equally.
- Welcome, support and reduce entry barriers for LGBTIQ+ and gender diverse children/young people and their families.
- Promote the cultural safety, participation, and empowerment of Indigenous children/young people.
- Manage the risk of child abuse in online environments.
- Promote the cultural safety, participation, and empowerment of children/young people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Our Workforce

All of our staff and volunteers must agree to abide by our specific standards of conduct, screening, and recruitment process prior to working with children. See [Child Safety and Wellbeing Code of Conduct](#) for more information. Recruits, committee members and volunteers are required to obtain a National Police Check, provide two referees or hold and maintain a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this check. For more information, please refer to [Working With Children Check](#) website. In addition, Different Journeys carries out reference and police checks to ensure that we are recruiting the right 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.

We train our committee members, staff, and volunteers to identify, assess and minimise risks of child abuse. As well as offer ongoing supervision to develop their skills to protect children from abuse and promote the cultural safety of Indigenous Australian children, children from diverse backgrounds and children with disabilities. See [Risk Assessment and Management Process](#) for more information. Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

Definition of Child Abuse

Child abuse is the mistreatment of a child that causes any detrimental effect of a significant nature to that child's physical, psychological, or emotional wellbeing or endangers the child's physical or emotional health, development, or wellbeing.

Child abuse includes, but is not limited to:

- **Psychological/Emotional Abuse** - This can include severe or sustained verbal abuse, coercive or manipulative behaviour, hostility, rejection, humiliation, belittling and scapegoating children/young people. There must be a clear link between adult behaviour and the child/ young person's harm. This harm must be significant and more than trivial or temporary. **This can also include inflicting abuse in the presence of another child.**
- **Significant Neglect** - This occurs when there is persistent failure or denial to meet a child's or young person basic needs. This includes failure to provide adequate food, housing, hygiene, health care, adequate supervision, medical attention, and warm clothing to the extent that their health and development is harmed.
- **Physical Abuse** - Physical abuse occurs when a child or a vulnerable person suffers significant harm from an injury intentionally inflicted or results from an inadvertent consequence of physical punishment or aggression by another person. This includes hitting, shaking, throwing, biting, burning, or giving children/young people harmful substances such as drugs, alcohol, or poison. Certain types of punishment, whilst not causing injury can also be considered physical abuse if they place a child at risk of being hurt, for example, locking a child outside in cold weather. **This can also include inflicting physical abuse in the presence of another child.**

- **Sexual Abuse** - Sexual abuse refers to a situation in which a person uses power or authority over a child or vulnerable person to involve them in sexual activity. Physical force is sometimes involved but seldom necessary. It can include making sexual comments to a child, kissing, fondling of the genitals or breasts, masturbation, exposure to pornography, oral sex, vagina, or anal penetration. **This can also include performing sexual abuse in the presence of another child.**
- **Grooming** - Grooming describes the process when an individual builds a relationship with a child with a view to abusing them in the future. It is often carefully planned, and it can take place over weeks, months or even years. This includes giving the child or vulnerable person special attention that starts as a normal display of affection such as cuddling but can develop into sexual touching or masturbation. In Victoria, grooming is criminal offence and must be reported. This offence applies to any form of communication between the adult and child, including communication that occurs in person. This is not limited to exposing the child to indecent material or providing them with an intoxicating substance and may include such acts as inappropriately giving them gifts or favours with the intention of engaging in later sexual activity.
- **Family Violence** - *Family and domestic violence is any violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behaviour that occurs in current or past family, domestic or intimate relationships.* This includes not only physical injury but direct or indirect threats, sexual assault, emotional and psychological torment, economic control, damage to property, social isolation and any behaviour which causes a person to live in fear. When children/young people are living in homes where they are exposed to family violence, this is also considered abuse.
- **Financial Abuse** - Family Law in Victoria defines financial abuse as a form of domestic and family violence if a person is using coercive powers to control the economic circumstances of another person. Many people that are experiencing financial abuse are also experiencing a form of psychological abuse and intimidation. You may be asked to sign documents against your will and threaten physical harm if you don't comply with the other person's demands. Threats and intimidation can be in the form of:
 - Questions or punishes you for your spending;
 - Threatens you with restrictions on family or friends if you don't give them money;
 - Threatens you with physical violence if you don't give them money;
 - Tells you they don't trust you with your own money and how you spend it.

Signs of Abuse

Some signs may alert you to the possibility that a child is being abused. These include but are not limited to:

- A child or young person tells you that they are being or have been abused or hurt.
- You notice sudden or unexplained changes in the mood or behaviour of a child or young person.
- You notice frequent or unexplained bruises or injuries on a child or young person or bruising or injury to unusual areas of the body.
- You see a child or young person with low self-esteem.
- You see a child or young person with poor hygiene.
- You see a child or young person who is always angry or aggressive.
- You notice that a child or young person becomes withdrawn or unresponsive.
- You notice that a child or young person with increased exaggerated fears.

- You notice that a child or young person has serious difficulties relating to peers and/or adults.
- You find out that a child or young person is always angry or aggressive.
- You find out that a child or young person has difficulty sleeping, and experiences nightmares.

Responding to a disclosure of abuse

If you believe the child or young person is in immediate danger or a life-threatening situation, contact the Police immediately by calling 000.

If a child comes to you to disclose abuse:

- Let them know you are there for them and they can trust you.
- Reassure them that they have done the right thing by telling you.
- Listen carefully and tell them you believe them.
- Do not express anger or question them for details beyond what they freely want to say.
- Do not make promises that you cannot keep e.g., promising you will not tell anyone. Your job is to listen and support the adult/adult as best as you can and ensure their safety.

Reporting abuse or suspected abuse

Different Journeys is legally required to report any allegations of abuse and neglect if their committee members, employees, or volunteers have a reasonable belief. Refer to [Reportable Conduct Scheme](#), for more information. We work to ensure all children and vulnerable young people, families, committee members, 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. **You do not need hard proof or evidence to make a report just, trust your judgement.** A verbal report needs to be made to the Different Journeys staff. If the allegation involves the Child Safety Officer or another senior staff member, you can contact any Board member, the Executive Officer, or contact the police directly and immediately by calling 000, within 24 hours, if you feel the child is at serious risk or if an incident involves injury or trauma.

Based on the [Victorian Mandatory Reporting Summary](#), it is by law that any adult (aged 18 and over) who reasonably believes that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria against a child (under the age of 16) must be reported to the police. Failure to disclose this information to police is a criminal offence (*Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*). If you are uncomfortable or unsure about a situation where abuse may have occurred/ is occurring, you can seek advice from the police.

What is a Reasonable Belief?

A reasonable belief is formed if a reasonable person, doing the same work, would form the same belief on those grounds, based on the same information. Grounds for forming a belief are matters of which the person has become aware of and any opinions in relation to those matters. For example, a 'reasonable belief' might be formed when:

- a child states that they have been physically or sexually abused
- a child states that they know someone who has been physically or sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves)
- someone who knows a child states that the child has been physically or sexually abused

- professional observations of the child's physical condition and/or behaviour or development leads a professional to form a belief that the child has been physically or sexually abused
- signs of physical or sexual abuse leads to a belief that the child has been physically or sexually abused
- signs that an adult has engaged or engaging in any form of communication with the intention of facilitating sexual conduct for grooming purposes
- Other circumstances lead you to suspect that a child has been abused.

Risk Management

We are fair and reasonable to all staff and volunteers. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence. See *Different Journeys' Recruitment, Selection and Screening Policy*.

Different Journeys adheres to [Child Safe Standards](#), therefore we have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks which include risks posed by physical environments and online environments.

Ongoing Prevention

This Policy and Child Safe Practices will be reviewed every 12 months to ensure the recommendations outlined in the Review of the Victorian Child Standards have been met. Thereafter, this policy will be reviewed every year or following significant incidents if they occur or if there are any legislative/standard/standard/principal changes. We will ensure that families and children/young people have the opportunity to contribute including those identified in the Child Safe Principles.

- Merrin Ayton has been appointed to the role of Different Journeys' Head of the organisation for Child Safety and Report Conduct Scheme purposes.
- Annette White has been appointed to the role of Different Journeys' Child Safety Officer.

Both individuals will be responsible for any complaints or concerns raised by children/young people, families, volunteers, and staff.

Disclosures need to be made to staff present, Annette White (Child Safety Officer), or to the Board if about the Child Safety Officer.

Other Relevant Policies

- *Reportable Conduct Scheme*
- *Different Journeys Child Safety Code of Conduct*
- *Different Journeys Charter of Commitment to Children and Vulnerable People (Appendix 1)*

Relevant Legislation

The following legislation, regulations and standards on child safety related to Different Journeys and the services it provides with children and young people. It includes but is not limited to:

- *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*
- *The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*
- *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*
- *National Principles for Child Safe Organisations*
- *Victorian Child Safe Standards*
- *Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Commonwealth)*
- *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Commonwealth)*
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Commonwealth)*
- *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Commonwealth)*
- *Privacy Act 1988 (Commonwealth)*
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)*
- *Health Records Act 2001 (Vic)*
- *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)*
- *Child, Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)*
- *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)*
- *Disability Act 2006 (Vic)*
- *Victim's Charter Act 2006*
- *Crimes Amendment (Grooming) Act 2014*

Appendix 1

