



1.0 PURPOSE

As an organisation working with children, St John Ambulance Australia (VIC) Inc. (St John):

- Recognises that children, as individuals, have the right to feel safe, and to be treated with dignity and respect, free from emotional and physical danger, abuse and neglect.
- Places the highest priority on its duty of care to ensure that the children for whom it has a responsibility are protected against people and events which may cause them harm.
- Is committed to preventing, detecting and responding effectively to all forms of abuse.
- Promotes a culture where our people feel confident to raise issues of concern without fear of reprisal.

2.0 SCOPE

This policy applies to all activities of St John involving work with children, and all persons representing or engaging with St John or where children are involved in our activities.

3.0 RESPONSIBILITY

All St John employees and volunteers are responsible for complying with this policy.

This policy requires all employees and volunteer members of St John to follow guidelines, procedures, policies and training, and undertake criminal record and working with children checks. The guidelines assist St John employees and volunteers to implement the policy. The policy and guidelines were developed after taking into account best practice in child safety policy from across Australia.

4.0 DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this policy 'child' or 'children' refers to a person(s) under the age of 18 involved in the activities of St John or receiving services from St John.

5.0 POLICY

5.1 POLICY PRINCIPLES

St John policies and procedures are underpinned by the following principles:

- The interest, protection and safety of the child is paramount.

- Commitment to supporting all staff to work in accordance with this policy, to work with partner agencies and organisations to ensure child safety policies are consistent and high quality.
- Complying with relevant legislative responsibilities.
- Practicing a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse.

5.2 VULNERABLE GROUPS

St John is committed to Victoria's compulsory Child Safe Standards which includes the following principles in relation to vulnerable groups:

- Promoting the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- Promoting the cultural safety of children from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds
- Promoting the safety of children with a disability
- In addition to the Victorian Child Safety Standards principles, St John is also committed to promoting the safety of same-sex attracted, intersex, non-binary and gender diverse children.

The protection and safety of particularly vulnerable children, such as those with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and children from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds will be recognised by St John through:

- Improving our links between legislation, policy and practice
- Recognising and enhancing leadership, participation and decision-making among particularly vulnerable children.
- Enhancing the recruitment and assessment of people working with particularly vulnerable children.

5.3 RISK MANAGEMENT

St John recognises that creating a child safe organisation begins with a clear, evidence-informed understanding of the potential risks to children in any setting.

The strategies to identify, assess, and reduce or remove risks associated with all forms of child abuse are considered through the St John organisational risk register, which includes:

- Taking a preventative approach means identifying the potential risks in the St John environment. These range from the impact of the physical environment, psychological and emotional factors, and how it affects the continual supervision of management and children.
- By adopting a risk management approach, St John is acting in a preventative manner and can reduce the likelihood of risks becoming realised.

- Risk management maximises the ability for St John to deliver on organisational objectives, to promote sound decision making and works to safeguard child, volunteer and employee wellbeing.
- A risk based approach will be taken with regards to employees, volunteers and resourcing, to determine supervision opportunities to further promote and strengthen a child safety culture at St John, such as performance reviews, meetings, counselling sessions etc.

St John intends to robustly prevent, detect, respond to and mitigate risk, through a risk management process.

5.4 CHILD SAFETY TRAINING

All employees and volunteers are required to complete child safety awareness training.

All employees and volunteers who work with youth divisions or have a management role in a youth division must complete a higher level of training.

Children within St John are provided training on personal safety annually to recognise and report child safety issues.

All adult volunteers must complete Child Safety Training upon joining. This includes youth members turning 18 years of age.

Education of both adults and children is the primary means of promoting child safety. The aim of an education program which is included in personal safety training should be for the child:

- to recognise situations that may result in abuse;
- to be able to assert the right to resist the abuser;
- to set up a network of trusted adults; and
- to feel confident that an adult will take action to prevent further abuse.

5.5 CHILD SAFETY OFFICERS

St John will select and train suitable employees and volunteers to be appointed as Child Safety Officers (CSO). These people will receive a higher level of child safety training, will know the correct procedure for reporting internally and to authorities in Victoria, and be able to provide support and assistance to employees and volunteers dealing with child abuse issues. Child Safety Officers will also have the capacity to train and develop staff and volunteers in child safety awareness.

CSOs must hold appropriate child safety qualifications, and as such will receive additional specialised training with respect to child protection and safety issues (such as train the trainer, online training, etc.). CSOs are the first point of contact for raising child safety concerns within St John, and are also responsible for championing child safety within the organisation and assisting in coordinating responses to child safety matters and incidents.

5.6 GUIDELINES AND PRACTICES

These Guidelines aim to enable adults within St John to carry out their responsibilities for child safety as set out in this Child Safety Policy and to establish a safe environment for children in St John's care.

All St John employees and volunteers must ensure that they:

- Assess the risk of child abuse within their area of control and eradicate/minimise any risk to the extent possible
- Take all reasonable measures to avoid potentially risky situations opportunities for allegations or misunderstandings
- Educate fellow employees and volunteers about the prevention and detection of child abuse
- Facilitate the reporting of any concerning behaviour related to the nature of child abuse or suspected abusive activities

For acceptable and unacceptable practices, refer to the Child Safety Procedure.

5.7 THE NATURE OF CHILD ABUSE

Child abusers will often manoeuvre themselves into positions of trust in order to gain access to children. In a large majority of reported incidents, the abuser is someone known to the child, often someone the child trusts.

Child abuse can also be perpetrated by other children, by family members, or someone highly trusted within families, communities, schools and/or other institutions. Children are vulnerable regardless of gender, culture, class, religion, race or disability.

At St John, we understand that abuse may occur within our organisation, or may occur in external contexts (e.g. families, school).

Strategies implemented to identify, assess and reduce or remove risks associated with child abuse will take into consideration the following types of abuse and associated behaviour.

5.7.1 Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is commonly characterised by physical injury resulting from practices such as punching, beating, shaking, biting, burning or otherwise harming a child.

5.7.2 Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse tends to be a chronic behavioural pattern directed at the child where the child's self-esteem and social competence are undermined or eroded over time. A child can also experience emotional abuse by witnessing or being exposed to a dysfunctional environment which includes domestic violence.

Persistent insults, ridiculing, absence or withholding of affection and excessive discipline by the parent or caregiver can constitute emotional abuse. Bullying by peers is another form of emotional abuse.

5.7.3 Neglect

Neglect is characterised by the failure to provide for the child's basic needs. This can occur through direct and deliberate action or by omission.

Persistent neglect can result in serious impairment of the child's health or development. Under-nourishment, untreated illness or injuries, persistent tiredness and lack of hygiene and appropriate clothing can be signs of neglect.

5.7.4 Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when someone in a position of power over a child uses that power to involve the child in sexual activity over a range of behaviours from sexual suggestion to intercourse.

All children are at risk, but sexual abuse frequently involves dependant, developmentally immature children and adolescents in sexual activities they do not truly comprehend, to which they are unable to give informed consent or that violate the social taboos of family rules.

Children are also at risk from behaviours associated with sexting and child pornography offences which may result from the distribution of (or threat to distribute) digital content and images.

5.7.5 Grooming

Legislation provides that the offence of grooming concerns:

- Predatory conduct undertaken to prepare a child for sexual activity at a later time.
- An adult communicating, in person or electronically, by word or conduct, with a child under the age of 16 years or with a person who has care, supervision or authority for the child with the intention of facilitating the child's involvement in sexual conduct, either with the groomer or another adult.
- Grooming does not necessarily involve any sexual activity or even discussion of sexual activity – for example, it may only involve establishing a relationship with the child, parent or carer for the purpose of facilitating sexual activity at a later time.
- Sexual conduct which constitutes an indictable offence.

5.7.6 Domestic and Family Violence

Domestic and family violence can occur between members of a family or extended family or those fulfilling the role of family in a child or young person's life. It can be described as:

- Controlling behaviours including threats, humiliation ('put downs'), emotional abuse, physical assault, sexual abuse, financial exploitation and social isolations, such as not allowing contact with family or friends.
- Conduct, whether actual or threatened, by a person towards, or towards the property of, a member of the person's family that causes that or any other member of the person's family to fear for, or to be apprehensive about, their personal wellbeing or safety.

Witnessing family violence is a specific form of emotional and psychological abuse, and can occur when children or young people live with violence between adults or other members in their home. It can include witnessing violence or the consequences of violence. Exposure to family violence places children and young people at increased risk of physical injury and harm and has a significant impact on their wellbeing and development.

5.7.7 Abuse perpetrated by other children

Most people are aware of the risk of abuse that some adults present to children. There is growing understanding that children can also present a risk to other children. In fact, children can be known to harm, abuse and/or distress other children by perpetrating any behaviour relating to the nature of child abuse. In general, the most significant child safety risk posed by children is sexually harmful behaviour and, according to research and the work of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, a significant proportion of sexual abuse which occurs in the context of organisations is perpetrated by children¹.

Victorian law specifies consent and the age of consent for sexual activity for children under 12 years old, children aged 12 to 15 years old and children aged 16 to 17 years old². Sexually harmful behaviour involves children engaging another child in sexual activity that is either unwanted or where, due to the nature of the situation, the other party is not capable of giving consent (e.g. children who are younger or who have a cognitive impairment)³. When a person engages in sexual behaviour with someone below the age of consent, they are committing a criminal offence (child sexual abuse). Training and education for adults and youth (employees or volunteers) will inform them of their responsibilities under this legislation.

If a child at St John has displayed sexually harmful behaviour towards another child, then St John will take steps to fulfil its duty of care to all children involved, including the child displaying harmful behaviour, any victims and/or witnesses. St John recognises that sexually harmful behaviour in children could be an indicator that a child has themselves been a victim of sexual abuse.

¹ Adapted from the work of the Therapeutic Treatment Board

² Adapted from the Age of Consent webpage from the Victoria Legal Aid

³ Adapted from the work of the Therapeutic Treatment Board

5.8 COMMUNICATION AND ACCESS

This policy, along with the Child Safety Procedure and the Code of Practice will be communicated in the following ways:

- Provided to all new youth and adult members and employees upon joining.
- Posted on the member and employee Intranets.
- Published on the public website
- Provided during annual training

6.0 RELATED DOCUMENTS

Investigation Procedure (PRO/PAC/008)

Child Protection and Safety Procedure (PRO/PAC/025)

Code of Conduct Policy (POL/PAC/002)

St John Ambulance Australia National Child Protection Standards

A Guide for Creating A Child Safe Organisation (Commission for Children and Young People) – Victoria's compulsory child safe standards

Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)

Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)

Crimes Amendment (Grooming) Act 2014

Child Safety and Wellbeing Act 2005

Safe in St John - Child Safety for Youth Members

7.0 REVIEW

The General Manager People and Culture will be responsible for reviewing and updating this policy biennially, or whenever relevant state legislation or Government guidelines are changed. This review schedule also applies to the policies and procedures covering:

- Protocols for the screening of new employees and volunteer members for criminal convictions or other concerned behaviours relating to minors;
- Protocols for managing incidents, allegations; and
- Reporting.