

## 5.1 Child Safe Policy

### WHO

Child Safety is a shared responsibility by everyone working together. All employees, board members, volunteers, contractors, and members of Norlane Community Centres extended community.

Norlane Community Centre has policy and procedure embedded within the centre, ensuring all members understand and acknowledge the value and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, and the importance of this culture to the safety of Indigenous children and young people.

Norlane Community Centre recognises the specific needs of children and young people from vulnerable backgrounds, particularly those unable to live at home, LGBTQIA+ children and young people and those children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and has a zero-tolerance approach to racism, sexism, and other prejudice.

### Board of Management

The Norlane Community Centre Board has a Duty of care to children who visit the centre to take all reasonable measures to prevent harm and abuse from occurring, and are legally responsible for the review of the Child Safety Policies and Practices every two years, ensuring that all necessary steps are taken to minimise the risk of child abuse and appropriately respond to suspected allegations.

### Coordinator

The Norlane Community Centre Coordinator is accountable to the Board for ensuring that appropriate policies and practices are implemented, monitored, reported, and evaluated in a timely and diligent manner, that all staff and volunteers are aware of the relevant laws, organisational policies, procedures and codes of conduct, and that appropriate training and emotional support is provided to employees and volunteers.

The Coordinator will also

- Ensure that the Policies and Code of Conduct are easily accessible

- The Child Safety Reporting Process Flowchart is laminated and affixed to walls in the office and staff room

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### Staff and Volunteers

Our staff and volunteers code of conduct states that they will read and agree to the following policies:

2.1 Norlane Community Centre Code of Conduct

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5.2 Child Safe Code of Conduct

These will be signed and dated and stored in personnel files onboarding, with annual refreshers, and staff and volunteers will be familiar with relevant laws.

Staff and volunteers also agree to:

Promote Child Safety at all times.

Undertake cultural competencies training

Adhere to our culture of speaking up against racism and prejudice.

Facilitate the reporting of any inappropriate behaviour or suspected abuse.

Report any reasonable belief that a child's safety is at risk to the relevant people and authorities.

Contribute in a positive way to create an environment that is supportive of all children's emotional and physical safety.

### STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

The safety of children is an important part of the workplace culture, leadership, and governance. The issue of child safety is taken seriously, and children and young people participate in decisions that will affect them and are informed and empowered about their rights. Norlane Community Centre has a zero tolerance for child abuse and racism. Local families and communities are kept informed and involved in the promotion of child safety.

Has zero tolerance for child abuse and racism

Actively works to listen to and empower children

Has systems to protect children from abuse, will take all allegations very seriously and will responds to them consistently in line with the organisation's policies and procedures

Is committed to promoting cultural safety of Aboriginal children, cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and to providing a safe environment for LGBTQIA+ children, children unable to live at home and children with a disability.

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### PURPOSE

Norlane Community Centre is committed to child safety.

We want children to be safe, happy, and empowered. We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers.

We are committed to the safety, participation, and empowerment of all children.

We have a culture of speaking up; Community, volunteers and staff are supported to speak up against acts of racism and prejudice.

We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures.

We have zero tolerance of racism and prejudice, with incidents escalated appropriately.

We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously.

Norlane Community Centre is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early and removing and reducing these risks.

Norlane Community Centre has robust recruitment and workplace practices for all staff and volunteers, and provide support to adhere to these practices, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children and minimising the possibility of allegations of child abuse and neglect being made against them.

Norlane Community Centre is committed to training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks, as well as recognising the indicators of abuse, reporting of child abuse and the cultural wellbeing and safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, those unable to live at home. children with a disability and LGBTQIA+ children.

We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers. We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for LGBTQIA+ children, children living out of home and children with a disability.

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

**If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse, phone 000.**

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### **POLICY**

#### Our children

This policy is intended to empower children who are vital and active participants in our organisation. We involve them when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say.

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 with the required support can participate equally.

#### Our 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 which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. All staff and volunteers, as well as children and their families, are given the opportunity to contribute to the development of the code of conduct. Norlane Community Centre has a zero-tolerance approach to racism and prejudice.

Our staff and volunteers wear an identifying lanyard, including preferred pronouns at all times, unless it is unsafe to do so, this allows for children and young people to easily identify staff and volunteers.

Norlane Community Centre will appoint “Child safety champions”, with photos displayed in a common area and the title added to their lanyard, allowing easy identification by children and young people

Our staff and volunteers will not engage with children in an online environment

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### Training and supervision

Training and education are important to ensure that everyone in our organisation understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility.

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. We train our staff and volunteers to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

We also support our staff and volunteers through ongoing supervision to 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 LGBTQIA+ children, and children with a disability.

New employees and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand our organisation's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse, as well as checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate (please refer to this organisation's code of conduct to understand appropriate behaviour further). Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

### Recruitment

We take all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children. We develop selection criteria and advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities. Our organisation understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

We actively encourage applications from Aboriginal peoples, people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability.

All people engaged in child-related work, including volunteers, are required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this Check. Please see the [Working with Children Check](http://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au) website <[www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au](http://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au)> for further information

We carry out reference checks and police record checks to ensure that we are recruiting the right people. Police record checks are used only for the purposes of recruitment and are discarded after the recruitment process is complete. We do retain our own records (but not the actual criminal record) if an applicant's criminal history affected our decision-making process.

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.

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### Fair procedures for personnel

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and just to personnel. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.

We have zero tolerance towards racism and prejudice, and appropriate procedures to address incidents, per Policy 37. Racism and prejudice, and the associated procedure 37.1 Addressing Racism and prejudice.

We have zero tolerance towards child abuse and record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form<sup>1</sup>, 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 we as an organisation take.

### Privacy

All personal information considered or recorded will respect 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 any personal information is protected. Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will have access to it, per policy 31. Confidentiality.

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<sup>1</sup>5.4 Child Safe Policy Incident Report Form

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### Legislative responsibilities

Our organisation takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- **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.<sup>2</sup>
- **Failure to protect:** People of 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.<sup>3</sup>
- Any personnel who are **mandatory reporters** must comply with their duties.<sup>4</sup>

### Risk management

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

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 (for example, any doors that can lock), and online environments (for example, no staff or volunteer is to have contact with a child in organisations on social media).

### Regular review

This policy will be reviewed every two years and following significant incidents if they occur. We will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute. Where possible we do our best to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities, those from the LGBTQIA+ community and people with a disability.

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

Further information about the failure to disclose offence is available on the [Betrayal of trust: Fact sheet](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence) <[www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence)>.

<sup>3</sup> Further information about the failure to protect offence is available on the [Betrayal of trust: Fact sheet](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence) <[www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence)>.

<sup>4</sup> 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 Department of Families, Fairness and Housing website for information about [how to make a report to child protection](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/making-report-child-protection) <<https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/making-report-child-protection>>.

### Allegations concerns and complaints

Our organisation 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.

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.

We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place (see information about failure to disclose above).

If an adult has a **reasonable belief** that an incident has occurred, then they must report the incident. 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<sup>8</sup>
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- observing suspicious behaviour.

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5 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.

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6 Further information about the failure to protect offence is available on the Department of Justice and Regulation website <[www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence)>.

7 Mandatory reporters (doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers (including early childhood teachers and workers), school principals, school counsellor, youth justice workers, registered psychologists, people in religious ministries 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.

8 See the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing website for information about [how to make a report to child protection](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/making-report-child-protection) <<https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/making-report-child-protection>>



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### DEFINITIONS

**Aboriginal:** In this document refers to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander People

**Child:** In this policy, the term child refers to children and young people under the age of 18.

**Child Safety Concern:**

A child safety concern is any concern relating to the physical, emotional, or cultural safety of a child with whom Norlane Community Centre has contact, either directly or indirectly. It includes but is not limited to allegations or suspicions of child abuse.

A child safety concern may include for example:

- Exposure to a child of inappropriate content within the work environment
- Inappropriate or special relationships developing between an adult and a child (that may indicate grooming behaviour)
- Inadequate staff-child supervision
- Feelings of discomfort about interactions between adult and a child
- Concerns about a physical environment that poses a risk for children (including health and hygiene)
- Concerns about a child being denied their right to culture and identity or other discriminating practice
- Any action or inaction that demonstrates non-adherence to Norlane Community Centres Child Safe Policy or Code of Conduct.

Child safe concerns, including suspected child abuse, may be identified through:

- A suspicion or belief that abuse or harm has occurred or is likely to occur
- A disclosure made by a child, their parent, an external agency, or any other person
- Observations of concerning changes in a child's behaviour or presentation
- Observations of a concerning behaviour about a person's conduct towards or in the presence of a child

### Content Warning

**The following definitions on pages 9 through 11 contain matter that is sometimes confronting and disturbing. This section may cause sadness or distress, or trigger traumatic memories for people, particularly survivors of past abuse, violence, or childhood trauma. If you feel you need support after reading this document, please see the coordinator about our Employee Assistance Program**

**(See policy 8.1 Employee Assistance Program Policy/Procedure)**

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### **Child Abuse:**

What Is Abuse?

There are many forms of Child Abuse that results in actual or potential harm to a child or young person. According to the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 mandated reporters, staff, management, and volunteers must make reports if they suspect on reasonable grounds a child is at risk of harm because of:

- The child's basic physical or psychological needs are at risk of, or not being met
- The child has been or is at risk of being physically or sexually abused or ill-treated.
- The child is living in a household where there have been incidents of domestic violence and they are at risk of serious physical or psychological harm.
- The parent's or other caregiver's behaviour means the child has suffered or is at risk of suffering serious psychological harm.

### **Indicators and Types of Abuse**

There are common physical and behavioural signs that may indicate abuse or neglect. A child's behaviour is likely to be affected or there are visual signs. Abuse and neglect can be single incidents or ongoing and may be intentional or unintentional.

**Neglect:** is the continuous failure by a parent or caregiver to provide a child with the basic things needed for their growth and development, such as: food, clothing, shelter, medical and dental care, and adequate supervision.

Indicators of Neglect:

- Poor standard of hygiene leading to social isolation
- Scavenging or stealing food
- Extreme longing for adult affection
- Lacking a sense of genuine interaction with others
- Self-comforting behaviours, e.g., rocking, sucking
- Untreated physical problems

**Physical Abuse:** is when a child has suffered, or is at risk of suffering, non-accidental trauma, or injury, caused by another person. Physical violence can be inflicted in many ways including beating, shaking, burning or use of items as a weapon.

Indicators of Physical Abuse:

- Facial, head and neck bruising
- Lacerations and welts
- Explanations that are not consistent with injury
- Bruising or marks that may show the shape of an object
- Bite marks or scratches
- Multiple injuries or bruises
- Burns and scalds

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**Emotional and Psychological Abuse:** occurs when a person harms a child's development by repetitively treating and speaking to a child in ways that damage the child's ability to feel and express their feelings. Through repeated rejection, isolation and threats or acts of violence. This may include constant criticism, condescending, teasing of a child, ignoring, withholding admiration/affection, encouraging inappropriate or risky behaviours and exposure to family/domestic violence.

Indicators of emotional abuse:

- Feeling of worthlessness about them
- Inability to value others
- Lack of trust in people and expectations
- Extreme attention seeking behaviours
- Other behavioural disorders (disruptiveness, aggressiveness, bullying)

**Sexual Abuse:** is when someone involves a child or young person in a sexual activity or deliberately puts the child/young person in the presence of sexual behaviours that are exploitative or inappropriate to their age and development by using their authority over them or taking advantage of their trust. Children are often bribed or threatened physically and psychologically to make them partake in the activity. This includes the act of grooming of a child or young person.

Sexual abuse may include Exposing the child to sexual behaviours of others, coercing the child to engage in sexual behaviour with other children, verbal threats of sexual abuse and/or exposing the child to pornography.

Indicators of Sexual Abuse:

- They describe sexual acts
- Age-inappropriate behaviour and/or persistent sexual behaviour
- Self-destructive behaviour
- Bleeding from the vagina or anus
- Injuries such as tears to the genitalia

**Family Violence:** is a violation of human rights. It involves violent, abusive, or intimidating behaviour carried out by an adult against a family member to control and dominate that person. Domestic violence causes fear, physical and/or psychological harm. Living with family/domestic violence has a profound effect upon children and young people and may constitute a form of child abuse.

Indicators of Family/Domestic Violence:

- Show aggressive behaviour
- Develop phobias & insomnia
- Show symptoms of depression
- Have diminished self-esteem
- Demonstrate poor academic performance and problem-solving skills
- Have reduced social competence skills including low levels of empathy
- Show emotional distress
- Have physical complaints

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**Racial, Cultural, Religious, Linguistic Abuse:** is a conduct which demonstrates contempt, ridicule, hatred, or negativity towards a child because of their race, culture, or religion. It may be obvious with direct racial vilification or discrimination, or it may be discreet by demonstrating a lack of cultural respect or awareness of their values. Failing to provide positive images or communication about another culture.

**LGBTQIA+ Abuse** is when they experience homophobic or transphobic bullying. They feel pressure to suppress or change their sexuality. Our centre supports children and young people's right to their sexuality and gender identity and the use of pronouns.

**Online Abuse:** Cyberbullying or cyber harassment is a form of bullying or harassment using electronic means. Cyberbullying and cyber harassment are also known as online bullying. It has become increasingly common, especially among teenagers, as the digital sphere has expanded, and technology has advanced.

Indicators of online abuse or online bullying:

- They become upset or anxious when using their devices.
- They suddenly stop using their devices.
- They lose interest in things they used to enjoy, or struggle with mood changes.
- Unexpected changes in friendship groups. ...
- A decline in schoolwork.
- Avoidance of school or clubs.

**Empowerment:** The process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights.

**Oppressive behaviour and language:** Oppressive behaviour is considered actions or language used that is unjustly harsh or tyrannical

### Children's rights

Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have a number of rights including the right to:

- Be treated fairly
- Have a say about decisions affecting them
- Live and grow up healthy
- Have people around them who do what is best for them
- Know who they are and where they come from
- Believe what they want to believe
- Privacy
- Find out information to express themselves
- Be safe no matter where they are
- Be cared for and have a home
- Education play and cultural activities
- Help and protection when they need it