

Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Purpose

At ECMS, we are committed to the safety, inclusion, participation, and empowerment of all children. We understand that abuse and harm can occur in any environment, particularly if children are not yet verbal, silenced, excluded or not believed.

This policy outlines our organisation-wide approach to preventing harm, listening to children and educators, responding to concerns with care and urgency, and creating environments where all children feel safe, seen, heard and valued.

We recognise that feeling connected and respected supports a strong sense of identity, belonging and safety. Our trauma-informed, anti-bias and respectful caregiving practices prioritise relationships and uphold children's rights. These practices ensure that every child and every adult supporting them can speak up and be heard without fear.

This policy is aligned to the *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011* [Reg 168 (2)], the Victorian Child Safe Standards and supports compliance with National Quality Framework – Standard 2.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- The Approved Provider, persons with management or control, Centre Director, Nominated Supervisor, and persons in day-to-day charge.
- Early Childhood teachers, educators, staff, contractors, students, volunteers, parents/guardians, children, and others enrolled and participating in ECMS programs and services, including during offsite excursions and activities.
- All ECMS-operated Early Learning Centres and Kindergarten programs.

Our Commitment to Children

ECMS:

- Has zero tolerance for child abuse, harm, or neglect

- Actively creates culturally safe teaching environments for all children, especially Aboriginal children
- Listens to and empowers children to have a say in decisions that affect them
- Embeds child safety and child safeguarding practices into every level of leadership, practice, and governance
- Responds to all concerns and complaints seriously and without delay.

Guiding Principles

Our approach to child safety is:

- **Rights-based and child-centred:** We place the rights and voice of the child at the heart of our practice.
- **Culturally Safe:** We celebrate, respect and actively promote diverse cultural identities.
- **Inclusive:** We remove barriers to access and participation and provide safe spaces for children of all backgrounds and abilities.
- **Transparent:** We are open and clear about our policies, processes, and decisions and implement a practice framework that drives all we do to protect children, notice harmful behaviour, and actively report and embed child safe practice.
- **Preventative and Proactive:** We continuously assess risks and improve systems. We understand the role our organisational purpose and culture play in keeping children safe.
- We actively generate transformative practice by supporting and measuring the teaching capabilities needed for child safeguarding, particularly in relation to:
 - Teachers' regard for children's perspectives
 - Evidence of positive teaching and learning
 - Teacher sensitivity (appropriate supervision and behaviour guidance)
 - Respectful caregiving – infant and toddler practice.

Child Safeguarding Practice Framework

At ECMS, safeguarding is a daily practice, not a reactive task. Our framework supports every educator, leader and team member to:

- **PROTECT** – Create environments where all children are safe, seen and respected. We uphold rights, promote inclusion, and proactively reduce risk through strong systems and secure relationships.
- **NOTICE** – Be present, observant and attuned. We pay close attention to children's words, behaviours, body language and interactions, as well as systemic indicators of potential harm.
- **ACT** – Respond with urgency and care. No care is too small. We escalate, report and intervene as needed to ensure a child's immediate and ongoing safety.

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- **EMBED** – Weave child safety into everyday practice, environments and decision making. From curriculum design to team meetings, child safety is not an add-on; it is foundational.

This framework is not a checklist, it is a continuous cycle, lived out in everything we do to make ECMS a place where children are empowered to thrive.

Empowering Children

We support child participation by:

- Teaching children about body safety and protective behaviours.
- Providing age-appropriate education about rights, safety, fairness and inclusion through an anti-bias approach in early childhood education.
- Ensuring children are supported in their first language.
- Encouraging children's voices in curriculum design (including routines, transitions and through child and adult co-designed learning).
- Using inclusive and creative communication tools, e.g. visuals, social stories, storytelling, dramatic play.
- Implementing a curriculum approach for our most vulnerable using evidence-based methodology (respectful caregiving) for infant and toddler practice.

Culturally Safe Practice

We:

- Actively support Aboriginal children's connection to culture
- Partner with Aboriginal organisations and academic advisors to strengthen access and participation and cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- Train staff in cultural awareness, bias, and inclusive engagement

Recruitment and Training

We:

- Embed child safe recruitment practices by clearly stating our commitment to child safety in job advertisements and role descriptions, using behaviour-based interview questions to assess candidates' protective attitudes and safe practices, and applying rigorous screening processes including background checks, Working with Children Checks, Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) checks and child safety-focused reference checks.
- Provide child safe recruitment training to ensure people making hiring decisions understand their obligations, recognise warning signs, and apply consistent screening practices.
- Use place-based recruitment strategies to attract and retain people who reflect the local community and bring cultural knowledge and connection that enhance child safety, including supporting children in their first language.
- Provide thorough induction and ongoing training, so all team members understand their role in creating a child safe environment and feel confident to speak up about concerns.

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Reporting and Responding

All staff must report:

- Any abuse or harm to a child, whether actual, suspected, or disclosed
- Any breach of the Code of Conduct
- Any behaviour or unsafe environment that places a child's safety or wellbeing at risk.

Reports must be made as soon as practicably possible, and within mandatory reporting timeframes to ensure prompt response and support.

All disclosures made by children will be treated seriously and responded to with sensitivity. All reports are managed confidentially, and team members are protected from any form of recrimination for making a report in good faith.

Reporting Pathways

- All concerns are reported via 1Place or in accordance with the incident and complaint management policies and procedures.
- Risk & Compliance engages external authorities when required, including:
 - Child Protection (Department of Families, Fairness and Housing)
 - Victoria Police
 - Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP)
 - Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) (where relevant)
 - Regulatory Authority (DET Quality Assessment and Regulation Division)
 - Other Information Sharing Entities under CISS or FVISS

Support the following disclosures

We are committed to ensuring individuals are treated with dignity, respect and compassion when raising concerns or making a report. We support complainants by:

- Creating a safe, culturally sensitive and trauma-informed environment where individuals feel heard and protected when disclosing concerns
- Providing clear, accessible information about reporting processes and what to expect
- Offering timely and appropriate support throughout the process, including referral to specialist services where required
- Providing educators with access to support from a social worker or psychologist when needed
- Protecting the privacy and wellbeing of complainants, and taking steps to minimise the risk of further harm
- Ensuring that complaints and reports are taken seriously, responded to promptly, and managed in line with our policies, procedures and relevant legislation

Children can raise concerns through trusted adults using child-friendly feedback mechanisms. Our education teams ensure that children understand these avenues and feel safe using them.

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Information Sharing and Privacy

As a prescribed information Sharing Entity (ISE) under Victoria's Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS), ECMS is legally authorised and obligated to share relevant information with other professionals to promote a child's wellbeing or safety and to respond to family violence risks.

Staff are trained in when and how to share information, and these obligations are embedded in our incident management, complaint, and child protection processes. We always seek to balance child safety with privacy and respectful practice.

Mandatory Reporting

Under Victorian law, all early childhood educators and staff who hold mandatory reporting roles (including teachers, educators and leadership) are legally required to report any reasonable belief that a child is experiencing physical or sexual abuse. These reports must be made to Child Protection or Victoria Police.

At ECMS, we ensure that all mandatory reporters understand their obligations and are supported to act without hesitation. Regular training and scenario-based discussions are embedded into our practice to build staff confidence and accountability.

Responding to Complaints and Incidents

- All complaints are acknowledged, documented, and acted upon
- A child's safety is always our priority
- Families are informed unless it is unsafe to do so
- Reflections and learnings from incidents are used to improve systems and practices

Risk and Continuous Improvement

We:

- Conduct regular risk assessments, including online and physical environments
- Employee practice coaches to support continuous improvement in child safeguarding, teaching practice, and pedagogy
- Analyse incident and complaint data for trends
- Review this policy and our child safe practices at least every two years, and always after significant incidents.

Roles & Responsibilities

All adults in our organisation have a legal and ethical responsibility to act if they are concerned about a child's safety or wellbeing. Role clarity is clear at all levels within the organisation.

Board / Executive Team

- Oversee and model commitment to child safety.
- Set clear expectations for a culture of child safety, inclusion and empowerment.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and approve this policy. • Ensure training, resources and leadership are in place to sustain child-safe practices. • Monitor compliance and drive continuous improvement.
Director of Early Childhood Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed child safeguarding capabilities into pedagogy, curriculum and practice. • Ensure children's voices inform program design.
Director of Risk & Compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead implementation of this policy, review incident and complaint trends and analysis, and resolution of child safety concerns. • Ensure compliance with Child Safe Standards and legislation. • Identify prevention strategies.
Centre Directors / Nominated Supervisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create equitable, inclusive and safe environments and respond to local concerns. • Ensure all team members comply with this policy and procedures. • Model a culture where children feel safe, seen, heard and valued. • Report concerns as required and legislated
Employees, Volunteers, Contractors, Student Placement Workers, as well as Individuals sharing a common Workplace but not a common employer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand, uphold, and act in accordance with this policy. • Engage actively in training and reflective practice. • Respect the rights of children, including privacy and cultural heritage/identity. • Create a culture where children feel safe, seen, heard and valued. • Report concerns as required and legislated

Related Legislation, Regulations and Resources

- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
- Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- Health Records Act 2001 (Vic)
- Information Privacy Act 2000 (Vic)
- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic)
- Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 (Vic)
- Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2019 (Vic)
- National Quality Standard
- Child Safe Standards – Standard 2: Child Health and Safety
- Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme
- National Model Code

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Related Organisational Frameworks

- Assurance Framework
- Child Safeguarding Practice Framework
- Compliance Management Framework
- Incident and Complaints Management Framework
- Risk Management Framework

Related Policies and Procedures

- Acceptable Use of IT and Online Safety Policy
- Child Health and Hygiene Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Complaints and Feedback Policy
- Cultural Safety Policy
- Enrolment Policy
- Incident Reporting & Reportable Conduct Policy
- Interactions with Children Policy
- Nutrition, Food, Beverages and Dietary Requirements Policy
- Orientation Policy
- Participation of Students and Volunteers Policy
- Privacy and Confidential Information Policy
- Supervision of Children Policy
- Mandatory Reporting Procedure

Document Version History			
Version	Reason for Amendment	Approved by	Approval date
1.0	New policy	ECMS Executive	June 2025

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