

Child Safety & Wellbeing Policy

1. Purpose & Scope

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Provide a clear statement to staff on the criminal nature of child abuse and Unison's zero tolerance.
- Facilitate the prevention of child abuse within Unison and its services.
- Clearly demonstrate Unison's commitment to the safety and wellbeing of children through a child safe culture.
- Inform all Unison staff, contractors and volunteers of their obligations to act ethically towards children, and their roles and responsibilities in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children.
- Provide assurance that all cases of suspected abuse and neglect are reported and fully investigated.
- Demonstrate that Unison is ready to advise and support any staff member, contractor or volunteer who forms a reasonable belief that a child is being abused and/or neglected.
- Provide guidance on the processes and procedures that aim to ensure children's safety and wellbeing across Unison.

This policy covers all employees, contractors and volunteers engaged by Unison who may come into contact with children in the course of their work with Unison. For the purposes of this policy any reference to staff is deemed to include all groups mentioned above.

This policy is supported by the *Child Safety & Wellbeing Procedure* which outlines more detailed responsibilities and definitions.

2. Policy Statement

2.1 Unison Child Safe Statement of Commitment

Unison is committed to promoting and protecting the interests and safety of children and young people that come into contact with our services. We want children to be safe, happy and empowered. We have zero tolerance for child abuse. We are further committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and those from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability. All children have equal rights to protection from abuse. We support and respect all children, our staff, and our contractors.

Child protection and reporting information about suspected child abuse is the responsibility of all Unison staff and contractors, particularly if their job includes or is likely to have contact with children. Unison is committed to identifying risks early and removing and reducing these risks through robust human resources and recruitment practices.

All staff must be aware of relevant laws, organisational policies and procedures, the *Unison Code of Conduct*, and their obligation to comply with all requirements.

2.2 Background

Unison considers that the safety of children and young people is an issue of societal importance. We are fully committed, as far as we are able, to the safety of children and young people who come into contact with our services.

Unison does not tolerate the physical, sexual, emotional or psychological abuse of children, or any form of child neglect. Unison is a child safe organisation and complies with the *Child Safe Standards*.

Unison's approach to child safety and well-being is multi-dimensional, based on a matrix of interlocking policies, procedures and practices which together make the risk to and safety of children and young people a major consideration right across the organisation.

2.3 Employment practices

Unison publicly states its zero-tolerance approach to child abuse and commitment to diversity. Our Child Safe Statement of Commitment is on our website and incorporated in employment contracts.

Unison undertakes a comprehensive recruitment and screening process for all staff and volunteers. This aims to identify people who share Unison's values and prevent a person from working at Unison if they pose a risk to children. Refer to the *Recruitment & Selection Policy*.

Staff complete training during their induction. This training includes indicators of child abuse and how to respond to disclosures and report child abuse, and an understanding of the relevant policies and procedures.

2.4 Supporting staff

Unison is committed to ensuring all staff understand their responsibilities in relation to child safety. Unison assists staff to incorporate child safety considerations into decision-making and to promote a culturally safe environment where children are empowered to speak up about issues that affect them.

Unison ensures that all staff members who may have contact with children and young people are aware of Victoria's child protection laws and their obligations under the law and are aware of the signs of child abuse and neglect and know what to do if they have concerns about any child. Staff members must also complete mandatory child protection training and any other protection training deemed necessary by Unison.

Unison must ensure that it, and all staff members and volunteers, meets their legal obligations to report abuse or neglect of any child.

2.5 Family assistance

Unison assists families who need information about community services available to give support to children and young people, including The Orange Door.

2.6 Risk management

Unison ensures that child safety is a part of its overall risk management approach. We work to proactively identify and manage risks via regular individual catch ups and team meetings, OH&S meetings, and organisational risk reviews.

2.7 Allegations, concerns & complaints

Unison takes all allegations of child abuse or misconduct seriously and investigates reports thoroughly and quickly. Under the Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme, Unison is also required to report and investigate all significant allegations of child abuse or misconduct by staff, contractors, volunteers or Board members and report these to the Social Services Regulator (SSR) within three working days. Refer to the *Reportable Conduct Scheme Procedure*.

Unison has procedures in place for investigating allegations or suspicions of child abuse by staff members, contractors and volunteers. These procedures provide for confidentiality and fairness.

Unison is a prescribed Information Sharing Entity (ISE) requiring Unison staff to share information (when requested or voluntarily) under the *Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) Ministerial Guidelines*, made under section 41ZA of the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic). The scheme promotes the wellbeing and safety of children by facilitating the collaboration of approved services to identify needs and risks, promote early and effective intervention, provide integrated services, and improve outcomes for children and families facing and impacted by family violence. Refer to the *Information Sharing Schemes Procedure*.

Our organisational culture aims for all staff to feel confident and comfortable to discuss any concerns. We work to ensure everyone knows what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse, have suspicions or concerns, receive a disclosure, or notice inappropriate behaviour. The People Team is available to act as a resource and provide clarification and advice in relation to Unison policy, rights and obligations.

All staff report suspected allegations of child abuse and/or neglect as per reporting procedures and relevant commonwealth and state legislation. The [Child Safety & Wellbeing Procedure](#) outlines how to respond to an allegation or incident of child abuse.

2.8 Record keeping and incident monitoring

Unison is committed to best practice record keeping. Unison, in maintaining records on reports of child abuse, ensures confidentiality and privacy for children and families according to legislation.

Critical Incident Reviews involving child safety are monitored and reviewed by the relevant Director.

High risk complaints regarding child safety are reported to the CEO and the Board on a monthly basis. Complaints to the SSR are reported to the CEO and relevant Managers to ensure they are appropriately managed and incorporated into the relevant risk management plan.

2.9 Legislative responsibilities

Victoria has mandatory and voluntary reporting obligations under the law. Unison is not a mandatory reporter however we take our responsibilities for child safety seriously and all staff must be aware of the following:

2.9.1 Obligations under the *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)*

Any person over 18 years of age commits an offence if they have information that leads them to form a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed against a child under the age of 16 years by another person of 18 years or older and fails to disclose that information to a police officer as soon as practicable without a reasonable excuse for not doing so.

Reports are made to the Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Teams (SOCITs) at Victoria Police.

- **Failure to disclose:** All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 18 have an obligation to report that information to the police.
- **Failure to protect:** People of authority in Unison 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.

2.9.2 Obligations under the *Children, Youth and Families Act (Vic)*

Any person may make a report if the person has a significant concern for the wellbeing of a child less than 18 years of age.

2.9.3 Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme

Under the Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme, Unison is required to report and investigate all significant allegations of child abuse or misconduct by an employee, contractor, volunteer or Board member and report these to the SSR within three working days. Within 30 days detailed information must be provided to the Commission about the reportable allegation and any action taken. Refer to the [Reportable Conduct Scheme Procedure](#).

2.10 Failure to follow this Policy and the *Unison Code of Conduct*

Breaches of, or failure to comply with this Policy or the *Unison [Code of Conduct](#)* are investigated and may result in limited duties, suspension, termination of employment or other action including reporting to statutory authorities as required by law.

3. Definitions

CISS: Child Information Sharing Scheme

ISE: Information Sharing Entity

OH&S: Occupational Health & Safety

SOCITs: Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Teams

SSR: Social Services Regulator

4. Related Information

- [Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment \(Child Safe Standards\) Act \(2015\) Vic](#)
- [Children, Youth and Families Act \(Victoria\)](#)
- [Crimes Act \(1958\) Vic](#)
- [Child Information Sharing Scheme \(CISS\) Ministerial Guidelines](#)
- [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#)
- [Social Services Regulator Child Safe Standards](#)
- [Social Services Regulator Reportable Conduct Scheme](#)